PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

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Ethnography is an odd science. Fieldworkers spend relatively short amounts of time in familiar or alien communities, and attempt to write about their experiences for an audience much less familiar with the communities than the authors are. In the process of data collection and writing, fieldworkers raise unique epistemological, rhetorical, emotional, and ethical questions. In order to illuminate the ethnographic process through a somewhat unusual set of examples, four ethnographers have written a book together, each telling his or her own story. This book is an account of the intertwined professional research history of three anthropologists—Bamo Ayi, Ma Lunzy, and me—between 1987 and 2000. The research described in the book took place both in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, the home of the Nuosu and other ethnic groups, and in Seattle, Washington. One of the researchers was a complete outsider to the Liangshan Nuosu research context; one is a Nuosu "native" who grew up outside the native cultural context; and one is a Nuosu who grew up within the native cultural context.

The book begins with short accounts by the principal authors of the process by which each became involved in anthropological field research, and then proceeds to accounts of the research itself, beginning with

Bamo's dissertation work and Harrell's initial fieldwork in China, both in 1987–88. In 1991, the stories of the authors begin to connect, as Harrell and Ma, then Harrell and Bamo, and eventually Harrell, Ma, and Bamo's younger sister, Bamo Qubumo, become active collaborators. The scene shifts in the course of the narrative from China to America, and the relationship between the authors shifts from distant, wary, and somewhat hierarchical to close, egalitarian, and reciprocal. The book ends with a brief essay by Harrell that relates the narrative to theoretical concerns about anthropological research. There is no structure, no argument, to the body of this book; the arrangement of material is chronological and not expository. Each author wrote his or her own field research history in several chapters, and then the chapters were interwoven to create a chronologically ordered account.

Our ethnographic histories begin in the late 1980s, but the book as a book began in 1997, when I wrote a draft introduction to the more conventional ethnographic work later published as *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Harrell 2001), pointing out some of the ways that I had encountered and dealt with the perpetual problems of doing ethnography. At the time, Bamo Ayi was living in Seattle as a scholarly exchange fellow of the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China, doing the field research on the Free Methodist Church described in chapter 16, and giving me intermediate-level lessons in the Nuosu language. On a snowy weekend, she had begun translating some of the substantive chapters of my book draft, and I asked both her and my then graduate student Ren Hai to read and comment on the introduction. Ren Hai, who had been very involved in an early episode of the story (see chapter 5), said that he would like to write a parallel story of his own, and soon Ayi had signed on to a three-way project. Since I had collaborated more closely with Ma Lunzy than with anyone else, and since he was also a friend of Ayi's, we quickly enlisted him in the project, each of us intending to write a single narrative, to be combined between the covers of a book. Ren Hai later became busy with other projects, and decided not to contribute, though we salute him as the originator of the concept of the project.

The original idea for the book encompassed only our work in Liangshan (chapters 4 through 14), and included three separate narratives,

overlapping in some but not all of the stories told from the different authorial perspectives. But Ayi expressed an interest in writing about her Seattle fieldwork, and, as the book continued to take shape, it became clear that it would be even more interesting if it were not just about our interactions in China, where Bamo Ayi and Ma Lunzy were natives, and I an outsider, but also about our work in America, where the roles were reversed. This meant that we needed to deal not only with Ma Lunzy's first impressions of America (chapter 15) and with Bamo Ayi's Seattle field research (chapter 16) but also with the exhibit "Mountain Patterns: Survival of Nuosu Culture in China," which Ma Lunzy, Bamo Qubumo (Ayi's younger sister), and I curated at the Burke Museum. This meant bringing in accounts of the exhibit process by Ma Lunzy and me, and including one chapter by Bamo Qubumo, who otherwise hovers outside the authorship but by no means outside the story of the book. Chapters 17 through 19 (originally published as a joint account of the exhibit in *Asian Ethnicity* in 2001) thus present three perspectives on another project that is part of the overall story.

Eventually, it became clear that separating the various authors' contributions into three big chunks and one little chunk was rather awkward, and that we ought to present the material in chronological order, giving rise to the current arrangement of interthreaded chapters. And, since readers were not likely to be familiar with our backgrounds, we added short biographies of our early years (chapters 1 through 3) to give readers an idea of where each of the three principal authors came from.

Finally, the more technical or theoretical treatment of ethnographic problems, originally the introduction to my section, then the preface to the chronologically arranged book, has seemed to us less and less central to the overall project; we are, quite frankly, more interested in telling an interesting story that will help readers think about ethnography than we are in making theoretical hay out of the story's context and contents. We have thus relegated this discussion to an epilogue (chapter 20), which readers should consider distinctly optional.

We also decided to try to publish this book in an English-language edition in the United States, and in a Chinese-language edition in China. I translated all of the chapters by Bamo Ayi and Bamo Qubumo; they commented on the translations, which were revised accordingly. Ma

Lunzy knows no English and has to rely on my goodwill for the accuracy of my renderings of his prose. For the forthcoming Chinese edition, my chapters were translated by Zhang Haiyang; I made comments on his translations.

As far as we know, this book is unique in the literature on anthropological field research. Our stories involve personal history, professional ambition, scholarly pursuit, cultural conflict, cooperation, and friendship. As our stories overlap and connect to each other, the book becomes like a piece of Nuosu needlework. Bright threads of four different colors, combined in unequal proportions, have been twisted together into a series of intricate and symbolically meaningful designs, but no single thread has meaning until it is sewn together with the others. All of us enjoy writing; none is any good at actual needlework; and each of us hopes to tell a story that not only entertains but also concretely addresses the process of ethnography and the dynamics of international and intercultural communication. We have worked together for almost fifteen years now, and the stories in this volume do not even bring us up to the present, let alone predict anything about a collaborative future whose end is nowhere in sight.

PART I ORIGINS

1

GROWING UP HALF YI

BAMO AYI

"Anthropological field research" usually refers to participant observation in a culture different from one's own. But in my mind, Yi culture is not some kind of "other" culture. In terms of identity, I have a lifelong natural identification with it; it is my own culture; but in terms of knowledge, it is somewhat distant from me. Because I have a certain but not completely familiar understanding of it, I am a long way from being able to give a perfect explanation. Maybe it was the contradiction between the strong emotional attachment and the considerable intellectual distance that pulled me onto that path over mountains and across valleys, that road of no return that is fieldwork.

I come from a half-Yi household. My father is a Yi; my mother is from Inner Mongolia, a land distant from the Southwest, where we, along with most Yi, lived. This kind of household, although made up of people from different ethnic groups, didn't eliminate the ethnic consciousness of its members; on the contrary, unlike those "wholly" Yi households, a bell sounding out "Yi" often rang in our ears. In my childhood memories, what rang this bell was when we wore our beautiful Yi clothing on holidays or special days, when we learned from our father to sing Yi children's songs, or when Father taught me to recite the twelve calendrical animals in the Yi language.

When I was about five years old, because my widowed grandaunt (my father's paternal aunt) needed a companion, I went from our house in Zhaojue County Town to the seat of a Yi district in Puge County, called Tumugou. Grandaunt was a worker in the district supply and marketing cooperative, and had always been in charge of selling agricultural tools and chemicals. Half of the salespeople in the cooperative were Yi, and half were Han; the Yi could speak not-too-fluent Chinese, while the Han could use Yi to discuss the worth and the prices of their goods. In the local central primary school, in addition to children of workers in the various offices of the district and the children of nearby farming families, there were quite a few boys who had come down from high mountain villages to board and study at the school. Most of them were older and taller. All of the teachers were Han, and they used Chinese in class; some also explained things in Yi. Outside of class, if I wasn't in the store helping Grandaunt lift hoes, fetch 66 pesticide powder, or greet and send off Yi farmers, I was going up to the mountains with the mountain children to pick wild fruit or bathe and catch fish in the rivers. The days I looked forward to most every year were the night of the Fire Festival, when I played with torches with the village children and prayed for a rich harvest, and the Nuosu[1] New Year, when we went to nearby farmers' houses to ask for meat frozen in sour soup. My most visceral memory is of lying in bed while everyone else was asleep, hearing Grandaunt's loud, drunken Nuosu laments for her deceased elder brothers, or during a fierce storm hearing Grandaunt in a hushed voice and a secretive manner discussing the glorious history of the Bamo clan.

When I think of it now, though I was only a little companion, I was nevertheless the receptor for Grandaunt's unburdenings, and without understanding what I was doing, I helped her rid herself of her feelings of loneliness and pain.

At the beginning of 1972, when I was eleven, because Mother found

1. "Yi" is a Chinese-language term for one of the fifty-six officially designated *minzu*, or "nationalities" into which the population of China is divided. There are about eight million Yi in China. "Nuosu" is a native-language name for the largest ethnic group among the Yi, who live in Liangshan, Sichuan, and number about two million. All the Yi referred to in this book, including the coauthors, are Nuosu. We use the terms almost interchangeably, though we tend to use Yi in official and Nuosu in less official contexts.

several wrong characters in a letter I had sent her, she felt strongly that the level of my country education was just too low, and had me return to Zhaojue. Even though Zhaojue was a Yi county, its county seat was the capital of the prefecture, and the majority of the people in the offices and bureaus were Han from outside. My school, East Is Red Elementary, was a school for prefectural and county cadres' children, and of over forty students in my class, only a few were Yi. In school and out, I lacked a Yi linguistic environment.

The Nuosu language that I had spoken in Tumugou came on the scene only when relatives visited from the country. There were no Yi language classes in school, and at home Mother couldn't speak Yi. Father had written a conversational Nuosu book to teach us children, and sometimes even Mother was hauled in by Father to be a student. But Father was often away in the villages doing his social education work, and it was difficult for him to carry on his household Yi education. My Nuosu language deteriorated, and at the same time my schoolwork improved greatly; from being the worst student in my class when I transferred into the school, a year and a half later when I graduated, I tested fourth. During my junior-high and high-school years, aside from a few songs and dances such as "Song of the Slaves,"[2] which was performed by the prefectural song and dance troupe, and a few other Yi songs, in school and out I rarely heard mention of topics related to the Yi. At that time, there was only a government-sponsored movement encouraging us to sing the praises of the new Chinese Communist society by "recalling bitterness and thinking about sweetness," for the purpose of which we went to the sanitarium to interview ill and crippled former slaves who had suffered the abuse of the horribly evil slave lords. We also went to villages to debate or even throw rocks at the Bbaqie clan slave lords who, we were taught, wanted to reverse the tide of history. Only these experiences gave me any new knowledge about the past of the Nuosu.

I contrasted my impression of the Bamo clan that I had learned when

2. The events referred to here happened during the period known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when "class struggle" was the basis of social and political mobilization everywhere in China. Since the Nuosu society in Liangshan was classified as a slaveholding society rather than a feudal society like that of Han China, the targets of class struggle were not landlords but slave lords.

I was with Grandaunt with what I had heard about the slave lords, and doubtfully asked Father, "Was his dad also . . . ?" Father told me that, before the Democratic Reforms in 1955, because of fights with enemy clans, Grandfather's opium smoking, and Grandmother's early death, our family's wealth was exhausted and its people scattered, and so our class had been designated as "semi-slave." But because Grandfather had once been local village head for the Kuomintang regime, he was attacked as a historical counterrevolutionary, and died in a prison at Leibo. During the Cultural Revolution, when class origin was emphasized, from the Democratic Reforms until about 1980, because of Grandfather's counterrevolutionary status, Father had also been implicated. Even in my own dossier there was a note about my grandfather being a historical counterrevolutionary. During my second year of college, the organization department of the prefectural Chinese Communist Party Committee notified my academic department that they had corrected a mistake in my dossier, and had thereby "taken off the hat" of my grandfather's historical counterrevolutionary status, removing a blot from my record.

When I was in school in Zhaojue, there were often country relatives who came to visit, and Father encouraged us to go to the country to see relatives and visit friends. Many times, as soon as vacation began, I took my younger brother and sisters, either on the bus or hitching a ride on a Liberation-brand truck, to our old family home in Yuexi County or to Grandaunt's place in Tumugou. At the old home, our second uncle took us to see the stone mill or the watchtowers from the time of the flourishing of the Bamo clan, or our youngest uncle organized all of us cousins to go to the cemetery to worship the ancestors, or our grandmothers would tell us stories of when our fathers and uncles were little. We went to pay respects at the battlefield where the Bamo clan had fought its enemies. We went together with village children to herd pigs or to climb around the valleys and haystacks. But as soon as I returned to Zhaojue, even though the majority of the people coming to market were Yi men in their *vala*[3] or Yi women in their flowery clothing, these people didn't seem to have much connection with the little world of us children.

3. Fringed capes.

In 1977 the national educational reform meant that students would be admitted to universities according to their scores on university examinations. At that time, I had just entered the second year of high school, and our school recommended six students from the class of 1978 to take the college exam a year early. I was fortunately selected to take the exam, and was admitted to the philosophy major in the politics department of the Central Nationalities Institute. When the list of admitted students was posted, my name, Bamo Ayi Shybbumo, was the longest—seven syllables—and listed on the last line. This quickly became news in all the prefectural offices and throughout the county. To this day, people still joke with me that I not only switched from a Han name to a Yi name but switched to the longest name in Liangshan Prefecture.

The name I had previously used at school was a Han name, An Lan, but when I registered for the exam, Father said that we Yi ought to use Yi names, and that I should use my formal Nuosu name from our old home, Bamo Ayi Shybbumo. Bamo is a surname; Ayi is the sibling-order name for the oldest among a group of sisters; Shybbu is a personal name; and "-mo" is a suffix indicating a female. I happily accepted the idea of changing to a Yi name, but to go from using my original two-syllable name to the formal seven-syllable name that Father suggested was a little unfamiliar at first. But I thought Father's suggestion had merit, so I bravely registered my seven-syllable Yi name. Most of the Nuosu children born in the 1960s and '70s used Han names, but in the '80s and '90s, the number of people using Yi names increased steadily, including those of us in the younger generations. In addition, using seven-syllable formal names became a kind of fashion, to the point that Nuosu children born in places like Beijing or Chengdu, far removed from the Nuosu homeland, to my knowledge still mostly use Yi names. After this, my younger brother and sisters changed over to using Yi names (fig. 1.1).

During four years of college, Marxist philosophical theory, the history of Chinese and foreign philosophy, and original philosophical works were part of my basic course of study. At the same time, I learned about another topic that wasn't on the official class schedule: ethnic identity and ethnic feelings. The Central Nationalities Institute was a great mul-

tiethnic family; there people of different ethnic groups interacted, and also made comparisons to each other. Every ethnic group celebrated its own holidays, had its own gatherings, and people of the same ethnic group helped and supported each other. People of the same ethnic group from different areas increased their knowledge of each other, and deepened their fellow feelings. Because there were more sources of information, we learned that although the government stressed ethnic equality, instances of inequality in fact still existed. Before college my ethnic consciousness was a seeking after my own clan-mates and ancestors, a physical identification with close relatives in our own villages, and an enthusiasm for beautiful clothes and interesting customs. But what began in college was a concern for the survival and develop-

1.1 Bamo Lurhxa with his daugthers, Ayi (left) and Qubumo (right), Tian'anmen, Beijing, 1978.

ment of our own ethnic group, a concern for the position of our ethnic group within the politics, economy, culture, and life of the multicultural nation.

At the beginning of 1982, I returned to Liangshan, to the new prefectural capital, Xichang, as a member of the first university graduating class after the revival of the university examinations, with a job assignment as a propaganda worker at the propaganda department of the Xichang City Communist Party Committee. Father, who was then mayor and later City Party Secretary, was actively pursuing his agenda of reviving and developing Yi culture. He made a decision to have two of his daughters—my sister Bamo Aga Qubumo and me—take the examinations for graduate school in order to put us on the road toward becoming researchers in Yi studies. In his words, if we wanted to inherit and cultivate our ethnic culture, we first had to understand it. For a Yi who had devoted himself wholeheartedly to the career path of a government official since the time of the Democratic Reforms,[4] this was no ordinary move; children of officials usually do not move into academic careers. In addition, people who cared about me thought at that time that I had a great prospect to develop along the official path myself because I was one of the first minority university students. Thinking about it now, Father was making a choice for us between fish and bear paws—we couldn't have it both ways.

In Autumn 1983, I again went to the Central Nationalities Institute—in the daytime auditing classes on Yi historiographic sources and Yi writing systems in the program on Yi-language documents, and in the evening inviting the elder Leng Guangdian to teach me the famous Nuosu classic *Hnewo Abu* and a work that he had compiled and recorded, "A Collection of Yi Women's Proverbs." The old man often complimented my quick progress, and my confidence increased. In the spring of 1984, I took the test for admission to the master's program in the Tibeto-Burman languages major, with a concentration in collation and research of Yi-language documents, and I was accepted. I was

4. The revolutionary reforms carried out in Liangshan and other minority areas beginning in 1956, roughly corresponding to the land reform carried out in Han areas between 1947 and 1951.

the first Yi from Liangshan to pass the test for graduate study, and to focus on Yi historical documents.

I spent seven years as a graduate student, going all the way through the master's and doctorate programs. My advisor, Professor Ma Xueliang, designed a class for me: documentary and field research in Yi studies. Document research and field research may at first sound like apples and oranges. The former consists of sitting in front of a pile of papers and interacting with books; the latter is investigation on the spot, interacting with people. But Professor Ma was always bringing the two together. In his opinion, "If you want to understand Yi-language classics, you have to first understand Yi rituals and customs. You need to understand the meaning of the texts through rituals and customs; and, conversely, if you understand the basis of rituals through the texts, you can better understand the origins of the rituals." As early as the late '30s and the early '40s, Professor Ma had lived in Yi villages around Wuding and Luquan in Yunnan, observing the local people's lives, participating in their rituals, investigating and recording Yi spoken and written language, and collecting, collating, translating, and annotating Yi-language scriptures. At that time, Ma had already combined mastery of scriptures with field research; he later enriched his work on documents by incorporating anthropological theory and field research. He introduced me to a book by Chen Guojun from Taiwan, *A Summary of Anthropology*, as well as other anthropological works, and recommended that I read Ling Shun-sheng's *The Hezhe of the Lower Sungari River* and other anthropological field studies. He lectured on the importance of field research for understanding texts, as well as teaching the field techniques, processes, and sequences used to approach Yi-language texts. It was the first time I had had any contact with field research or known about the field of anthropology. Later on, many more translated anthropology books, such as Roger Keesing's *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*, William Haviland's *Cultural Anthropology*, and others, found their way to my bookshelves. Of course, my advisor's motive in teaching me field research was not to train me as an anthropologist but rather to give me one more weapon to master Yi-language scriptures. And my own purpose in studying anthropology was to become better able to understand and describe my own people and culture.

2

IN THE SHADOW OF THE HAN

MA LUNZY

My Nuosu name is Mgebbu Vurryr Lunzy, and I was born in 1957. Nuosu people ordinarily don't celebrate birthdays, and often ignore what month and day they were born. My month and day of birth were similarly ignored, but Father and Mother both said that it was the third day after the Nuosu New Year in the fall of 1957. In 1957, the Nuosu New Year was in December, but nobody can say anymore just what day it was.[1] So when I went to study at Baiwu Elementary School in 1963, the uncle who took me to register said I was born on September 1, 1958, and from then on that has been my official birthday, even though I was actually born at the end of 1957.

I was born and raised in Yangjuan, an exclusively Nuosu village, so when I was little I lived far from people of other ethnic groups, and had no opportunity to understand them. But I have a lasting impression that when we were naughty or wouldn't stop crying, adults used the threat of tigers or Han people to scare us. They had but to say "A tiger has come" or "A Han has come," and children would stop cry-

1. To this day, *bimo* priests in each local area divine the particular day each year when the Nuosu New Year (*kurshyr*) should be celebrated. This explains why no one could recall the particular date in 1957.

ing and cling motionlessly to some adult. In the evening, adults would tell children stories about tigers eating people or Han cutting off people's ears. There were a lot of us the same age in the village, and we would get together and play happily every day. But if anyone said loudly "Hxiemga la o" (A Han has come), everybody would startle immediately. My grandmother was the eldest daughter of a prominent local leader, Hxiesse Bata Syly, and, under the benevolent influence of her father and husband, she was less prejudiced toward the Han than many. But, like other Nuosu people, if someone behaved in an ill-mannered or clumsy fashion, she described them as "Hxiemga su"—like a Han person. In this kind of environment, one who had never had any contact with the Han would feel that Han were as fierce as tigers and as dumb as oxen.

In 1963, when I was sent to school, I saw Han teachers and Han classmates with my own eyes. I also got to know Ozzu,[2] who spoke to us in broken Nuosu. In the first grade, I always had a kind of inarticulable fear of Han teachers and classmates; because of the language barrier, I could not talk with the teachers directly, so I tried to understand Han teachers and classmates from their behavior and attitudes. Perhaps for both linguistic and psychological reasons, as soon as we were let out of class, each group immediately went to play separately—Nuosu with Nuosu, and Han with Han—and we had little to do with each other. Our Han teacher was very friendly—in class she took our hands in hers to show us how to write; on the playground she took our hands and showed us how to play fun games; on rainy days she carried an umbrella and put on her raincoat in order to help us cross the river. We thus gradually extinguished many of our prejudices.

In the first grade, we Nuosu pupils understood virtually nothing of what the teacher was saying, but mumblingly imitated the sounds of her speech. Our test scores were naturally very poor—mine were almost negative—so I, along with many other classmates, had to repeat the first grade. By the second grade, most of us could guess at or understand the gist of most of what the teacher said in class, and by the third grade,

2. Ozzu is the Nuosu name for Tibetans, Prmi, Na, and other Buddhist Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups living in the western parts of Liangshan.

the scores of the Nuosu pupils gradually began to improve, and a few students advanced toward the head of the class. The Han students, especially the children of the cadres in state units, began to lose their natural linguistic advantage, and a few lazy or unintelligent Han students asked us for help with their homework.

At this time, actual contact between Nuosu and Han classmates began. Two completely different streams flowed into one, and there developed collective feelings of the school as a unit that cut across classes and grade levels. But, from another angle, feelings of ethnic identity (which are really feelings of difference) became even stronger, and the struggles between Nuosu and Han became even more acute. Conversations opened up space for debates and quarrels, and each side emphasized its own advantages and found it hard to understand many of each other's customs. For example, Han classmates thought that the Nuosu and Prmi customs of cremation were just too cruel, while Nuosu students thought that leaving the body in the ground to slowly rot, stink, and become food for worms was just too improper. Han students said that the skirts of the Nuosu and Prmi women were inconvenient for walking, and Nuosu would retort that it was better than bound feet. In general, the debates were wide-ranging, unceasing, and extreme. When they quarreled, each had a set of sayings. The Han would say:

Luoluo luo ganzi	Lolo naked sticks
Shao huo dian qiaozi	Light a fire and plant buckwheat
Qiaozi bu jie zi	The buckwheat won't bear seeds
E si ni jia er ye zi.	Grandpa and grandson will all starve to death.

The Nuosu would say:

Lubi Shuo ju hlie	The pestle pokes the Han in the waist
Dinie Shuo uo zu	The mortar bops the Han on the head
Liggu Shuo lie hxie	The rattan strip binds the Han in the sinews
Mge li Shuo mge che	Buckwheat is the Han's funeral food
Chy njy Shuo mge hmu	Goatskin is his funeral clothes
Mge bie Shuo sha ka.	The Han corpse we throw into a deep cave.

The meaning of this is that the Han is a slave, and when he disobeys his master, he is prodded, beaten, and bound, and is too poor to have anything fitting for his food, for his clothes, or for his grave after he dies. The students didn't make these verses up; verses of mutual deprecation are common in the folklore of both sides and they would curse each other all over heaven and earth.

Starting in the third grade, my grades gradually got better, but my relations with Han classmates were just ordinary. I was very envious of the Han cadres' children, who often brought colored pencils and comic books. Driven by an intense curiosity, many Nuosu classmates would hang around the cadres' children, in order to be able to use the colored pencils or look at the cartoons. There at school we heard stories of how the guerrillas had fought the Japanese, of how Zhou Bapi, Liu Wencai, and others had lived lives of exploitation in Han areas before the Liberation, and from sources outside the textbooks we understood more about the deeds of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Chiang Kai-shek, and others. Later on, trading favors strengthened our contact: There were a few Han who would lend us books to read if we would do their homework for them, or would lend us their colored pencils if we would catch birds for them.

Before we finished third grade, we suffered the attacks of the Cultural Revolution, and the campaign to criticize and struggle against landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and "bad elements" picked up strength. There were calls for people of all social levels to criticize the factions within the Party that were taking the capitalist road, and the schools turned into clubs for the rebel factions—the tables, benches, and blackboards becoming their improvised beds. In 1967 the situation in many areas escalated to violent struggle, and the schools became places the "soldiers" had to fight over, so that schools didn't begin accepting students again until 1969. But the schools had already fallen into disrepair, and had no tables, benches, or blackboards, so that people just set down some planks for tables and benches. Not enough teachers had been assigned, so two classes were combined into one. Classes were conducted in a very informal way, with students and teachers "fishing for three days and drying the nets for two." We read *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, sang *Quotations* songs, and all learned to recite "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains," "In Memory of Dr. Norman Bethune," and "Serve the People" by heart.[3] Not until I was in the fifth grade, the graduating class, did the school revive any real curriculum. Naturally, the relative weight of *Quotations* was still quite large, but at the same time a simplified examination system was revived, and I worried that I wouldn't be able to test into middle school. But I quietly put a lot of effort into studying, my grades quickly improved, and I easily made it into middle school.

From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the local government had made everything associated with Nuosu traditional culture and customs into targets for reform; they emphasized wearing Han-style clothes, cooking on a stove, making dry land into paddy fields, and propagandized, "There is boundless joy in struggling against heaven, struggling against earth, struggling against people."[4] Though they dared not openly oppose the changes, Nuosu people secretly all said that the Han policy was strange: A people has its own lifestyle; why do we have to do everything the same way the Han do it? What was really difficult to understand was how the Han couldn't get their boundless joy unless they turned us into a gaggle of motherless chicks butting heads and pecking at each other, the daughter pecking at the mother's mouth and the son biting at the father's comb. The adults' way of thinking penetrated deeply into ours, and so we began to hate Han people and Han people's society. Because everybody had these feelings, our relations with our Han classmates were very unstable. When things were going well, we called each other brothers, but when there were disagreements, Nuosu cursed the Han *shuo* (slaves), while the Han cursed the Nuosu *manzi* (barbarians).

A lot of disputes that began as individual grievances could expand to become grounds for group disputes. People who could ordinarily discuss ethnic questions in a rather neutral and sensible way would take the side of their own ethnic group no matter what once conflicts between the two sides heated up. Many of the disputes and quarrels

3. These "old three articles" by Mao Zedong were required reading and memorization for everyone in China during the Cultural Revolution.

4. In Chinese, *Yu tian dou, yu di dou, yu ren dou, qi le wu qiong.*

between ethnic groups on the school grounds happened behind the teachers' backs, and the teachers often didn't know about them. People did things without thinking beforehand that they had anything to do with ethnic factors, but when something unpleasant happened, the side that had suffered couldn't help wondering whether it was because of being part of a particular ethnic group.

When I was in the fourth grade, I was a skinny kid, and I developed some sores on my lips, which was very unpleasant. A local Han classmate named Duan often used to make fun of me, and said that "the barbarian" was eating and drinking all sorts of awful things that gave him sores on his lips. He was three years older than I was, and quite tall, so there was no way I could fight with him. One weekend, all the students gathered on the school grounds to listen to the principal speak, as was the custom. As everybody was happily running over to the schoolyard, Duan started kicking and hitting me, as he had done before, and hit me so hard that my lips bled. I was very hurt, and a felt that I had to confront him in order to stop picking on me because of my bad family background. I knew that I was not his equal in a frontal fight, so I waited until Teacher Zhou called everyone to stand at attention, and when Duan was standing with his feet together and his eyes to the front, right at the front of our row, I snuck up behind him, taking advantage of his not paying attention to me, grabbed him around the legs, and pulled backward. I heard a "Huh!" as he fell to the earth, and his whole face was bloodied. After I kicked him hard, I bolted for the road home. I figured I was done with school. Because I had become the greatest example of someone poisoning ethnic relations among the teachers and students, when I got home I told Father the story from beginning to end, and asked permission to quit school. Father said, "If you act this way, the school won't want you either, and, anyway, we have hoes and plows here for you to shoulder" (fig. 2.1).

After I had skipped two days of classes, the head teacher, a Han teacher, came to visit our house. He pulled me to his side, and after criticizing Duan's behavior, said told me that if something like that happened again, not to hide it from the teacher, and not to use such a crude method to try to solve it, and to be sure to go to school the next day. The next day I went back to school, but it was difficult; I felt very unglorious in front of my classmates, and at the same time was afraid that Duan would take his revenge. Han students said among themselves, "If the Nuosu don't change, they will suffer," and the Nuosu and Prmi said about the Han, "If you don't hit them, they won't respect you." After giving the class a speech full of political slogans about how every ethnic group should strive to strengthen unity, the teacher called on Duan and me to shake hands and make up. After that, Duan was not only friendly toward me, but changed his behavior toward other students as well, and the teacher praised him for it in front of the class. Unfortunately, Duan had to quit school out of poverty before he graduated from elementary school. We became good friends as adults, and now when we bring up the fight in elementary school, we have a good laugh, and jokingly call each other "ethnically prejudiced" and "poisoner of relations."

2.1 Mgebbu Ashy and his son, Mgebbu (Ma) Lunzy, Yangjuan, 1993.

In the spring of 1971, I graduated to Yuanbao Middle School; at that time they were taking students for spring semester. To advance to middle school, all you had to do was to have graduated from elementary school and want to continue studying. At that time the pedagogical level of the teachers at Yuanbao was quite high; most of them were 1960s graduates of teaching colleges. In 1971 the quality of teaching was taken relatively seriously; because of this we made fast progress. But the good situation didn't last long, and in 1973, before we graduated, the wind of campus revolutions blew all over the country. Schools constantly had to organize political activities, and we had to take part in all kinds of struggle meetings. It was emphasized that we were taking the road of "politics first, study second." Yuanbao was a basic-level unit, and when it came under poor and lower-middle peasant man-

agement, the teaching system became noticeably more chaotic. Everything the students read or wrote were essays attacking people. The content did not reach beyond recalling the myriad evils of the old society, singing the praises of the beautiful new society, and lauding the wonderful current situation. When we graduated in 1974, there were very few places for students continuing to high school (in the whole county, there was only one high school, in the county town). Yuanbao Middle School received a quota of only four places, two of which were already reserved for the children of cadres. Judging by grades and behavior, I should have been one of the top choices, but although I was recommended to the township government several times by teachers and students alike, the recommendation bounced back every time. Finally, the poor and lower-middle peasant representatives who were in charge of the school came to the school to choose students, and said that I was a descendant of the exploiting classes, not suitable to be recommended for further study, and after that my name was definitively wiped off of the recommendation lists.

At the graduation dinner, students and teachers were laughing and talking; some even cried for the end of the camaraderie of the schoolground. I had a hard time restraining myself, and occasionally looked at the poor and lower-middle peasant representative with an angry eye; I felt pained and hopeless at the loss of the opportunity to go to high school. After the banquet was over, a very popular language teacher (an ethnic Tibetan) called me to his dormitory, advised me sympathetically not to give up hope, and expressed his desire that I would soon have an opportunity to study further. When I was about to leave, he took two small bundles of tobacco leaves and told me to give them to my father, whom he didn't know, and to the head of the production brigade. When I understood his purpose, I took the unwieldy tobacco leaves and actually did give them to those two. When I woke up the next day, I was an "educated youth returning to his home," a production brigade member who could eat only by relying on work points.

After I returned to the agricultural collective production team, the brigade was organizing a short-term propaganda team and a basketball team. I was chosen; it was just a political make-work job, and we loafed our way through it for two months. After that, the elementary school

needed a teacher for a three-month temporary position. Yi, Han, and Tibetan teachers all recommended me, and I taught three months of language and math classes, for a monthly teaching stipend of twenty-four yuan; I was quite pleased. Through taking on these classes, I discovered, however, that my basic knowledge level was still quite low—well below the level needed to teach elementary school; I had none of the feelings of a gifted middle-school student. I began studying quietly, but there was very, very little to read at that time other than the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong;* all I could do was tediously choose a few vocabulary words from the text to memorize every day. When I returned to the village for farm labor, more of my time was taken up by "specialized team" assignments from the production team leader. "Specialized teams" were teams of peasants chosen from a brigade or commune, mostly to do public-works construction labor such as building roads, dams, or dikes, or converting farmland. Most commune members did not want to take part in "specialized teams"; I couldn't refuse. During that time I had contact with a lot of Yi, Han, and Tibetan villagers and cadres; everyone was working hard and our relations were pretty good; there were no disputes that turned into ethnic conflicts.

In the fall of 1975, through the joint recommendation of friends, relatives, and militia representatives that I had come to know well in the brigade, production team, and village, I received a letter of admission to the Yanyuan Normal School as a worker-peasant-soldier student; I would study there for two years, and when I graduated I would become a people's teacher. When I looked at the admissions notice, I felt like I was in clouds and fog, and I suspected it wasn't genuine. Not until I had finished filling out the paperwork did it feel real, and I was elated.

When I graduated from normal school in 1977, I was assigned to the Meiyu middle school in our own county as a teacher. Meiyu is a Han district. At that time, there were only a few minorities in that area as salaried employees, and among us, only another Nuosu and I were bilingual. While I was there, I discovered how deep the feelings of prejudice between Han and Nuosu were; the mantras that Han people used to scare their children were almost exactly the same as those the Nuosu used: "The *manzi* are capturing people; the *manzi* have descended from the mountains." Old people called everyone but the Han *manzi* (bar-

barians), and middle-school students who had never had anything to do with minorities were full of talk that was hurtful to the Nuosu. In high school, every class in every grade had a few minority students, and since the minority students were bigger and stronger than the local Han, the Han were generally able to hold their tongues in public situations, because if they let their anger rise, the minority students would resort to their fists. Not only were village Han and students at school sometimes careless in this way but even local Han who had received secondary and higher educations would run off at the mouth. Many times I found myself in the situation where Han colleagues who wanted to get along well with me talked nonsense to my face about Nuosu and other minorities, and only felt ashamed when they found out that I was Nuosu. Nuosu students at the high school in Meiyu would also insult the Han as *shuo* (slaves), "water buffaloes,"[5] or "donkeys" in the Nuosu language; the only difference was that the local Han people didn't understand. I myself try to overcome this prejudice and not speak in ethnic slurs, but there are times when I too have unintentionally let them slip. Nobody living in contact with other ethnic groups, whether Nuosu, Ozzu, or Han, has completely conquered this mutual prejudice; some people just have a lesser degree of prejudice.

5. One way to classify local people in the Nuosu language is according to their affinity for various bovine species. Thus Han are *yynyi* or "water buffaloes," Nuosu are *nuonyi* or "oxen," and Ozzu are *bbunyi* or "yaks."

3

A WHITE GUY DISCOVERS ANTHROPOLOGY

STEVAN HARRELL

To begin with, I knew little about the subject of ethnic identity, and never intended to do research on it. I had grown up very, very white, in the segregated San Fernando Valley section of Los Angeles. We had African American servants when I was little, and when I was in high school, our church was heavily involved in the civil rights movement, which meant exchange visits and summer-camp retreats with kids from black churches, but it never occurred to me that identity was a question. We all agreed that Negroes didn't get a fair shake, and we agreed that this was wrong. But the identity question—the idea that group membership was problematical, or that one might not know what group one identified with—never crossed our minds. There were a lot of Jewish kids in my high school, but I always thought of that as a religious difference, not an ethnic one; in fact, I don't think I knew what "ethnic" meant.

Even when I went off to college at Stanford, I was not particularly interested in languages and cultures. Astronomy had been my passion through childhood and adolescence, and I intended to major in the physical sciences. But I got stuck hard on calculus (I could set up the equations just fine, but then I couldn't solve them because my arithmetic was so bad), and began to think that my early ability for foreign languages (I had been at the top of my high school Spanish and German

classes) was more an indication of my career direction than was my fascination with the universe. By the middle of my freshman year, I was a German language and literature major, and had been accepted into the Stanford-in-Germany program for the following winter and spring.

But something happened during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years. Sometime around late winter quarter 1965, a man named Dwight Clark came to the freshman dorms, recruiting. Two years before, he had started a program to take Stanford students to Hong Kong to teach English to refugees from Communist China. I was entranced with the idea, and managed to talk my mother out of the thousand dollars necessary to go on the program. My father had just died, and I think she wanted me to have the opportunity to do something interesting that summer.

First Japan, then Taiwan, then Hong Kong captivated me. Four of us American students taught English in a missionary middle school on a steep hillside crisscrossed with concrete paths in Rennie's Mill, or Tiu-keng-leng, a small settlement in the New Territories of Hong Kong that was populated mostly by die-hard Guomindang partisans who had settled there after 1949 (fig. 3.1). I began to learn a little Cantonese (I can

3.1 Stevan Harrell working on a construction project, Tiu-keng-leng (Rennie's Mill), 1965.

still order food in restaurants and converse with taxi drivers and bank guards when I go to Hong Kong or Guangzhou), but, more importantly, I was hooked on China and on Chinese culture. We went to the border, where we could overlook the Communist mainland—I took a picture (which I can no longer lay my hands on) from the top of a hill showing people working together in a collective field—and I vowed in my journal that someday, somehow, I too would visit the Forbidden City.

That did not happen, however, until 1980. In the meantime, my interest in China had to be deflected to some area or other where Americans could go, since we were uniformly excluded from the People's Republic as imperialists, a prohibition that grew even more stringent with the coming of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. In 1966, after returning from a grand time studying and traveling in Germany, Europe, Russia, and Israel, I changed my major to Chinese language and literature, with only a vague idea that I wanted to pursue some career where I could help the poor people of Hong Kong, and maybe someday be in a position to visit Mainland China.

Up to that time, I had never studied anthropology. I learned of Professor G. William Skinner from a classmate who had taken one of his classes, and talked my way into his Contemporary Chinese Society class for winter 1967. I also signed up for Lyman Van Slyke's two courses in modern and contemporary Chinese history, and a graduate seminar in politics taught by a brand-new assistant professor named Michel Oksenberg. Mr. Skinner, as we always addressed him, had a fearsome reputation with students—his standards were high and his temper notoriously short, but I somehow survived two of his classes that year and the next, and I was very interested in his ideas, even if he did scare me as much as he scared everyone else, including the junior faculty.

During that same year, I met and fell in love with Barbara Blain, and by spring we were engaged to be married, at the very tender ages of nineteen and seventeen, so our plans needed to be coordinated. When I graduated in June 1968, I was still not sure what I wanted to do for a career, and anthropology had still not occurred to me, even though I had taken the introductory course from Professor James Gibbs in my final quarter as a senior, and received a B. So that I could remain at Stanford while Barbara finished her degree, I had gotten myself

admitted to the M.A. program in East Asian Studies to start the following fall. Then Barbara went off to Vienna for overseas study in March 1968, and I took off for a year's language study at the Stanford Center in Taipei beginning in June. When she came to visit me for Christmas vacation, we decided to get married then and there, so I returned ahead of schedule to Stanford in March of 1969, newly married and in need of a summer job.

The only person I could turn to for a job related to my academic interests was the dreaded Mr. Skinner, because I knew that he was hiring many graduate assistants for his massive bibliography project, to catalogue hundreds of sources and enter them into the primitive forerunner of a database. But for some reason, he decided to use another budget for me, and instead gave me a position that determined my future intellectual direction: He put me to work locating market towns in the Ningbo-Shaoxing region of central Zhejiang, finding the names and schedules of the various market gatherings, and plotting them on a clear plastic map with a black Rapidograph pen. And, even more surprisingly, he didn't chew me out once all summer but in fact kept praising my work. About a month into the job, I told Barbara that maybe I would like to go for a Ph.D. in anthropology. Intervention on Mr. Skinner's part got me admitted to the program in early September, even though the class had been officially closed the previous March.

This led me back to Taiwan, where I conducted field research in 1970, 1972–73, and again in 1978. At that time, what I did was much more like traditional fieldwork than what I did later on in Liangshan; this was especially true during 1972–73, when I was collecting material on folk religion and family structure for my doctoral dissertation. Barbara and I, together with our infant daughter, Cynthia, settled into a village in the hills at the southern tip of Taipei County in July, intending to stay a year and a quarter. Our daughter, however, was stricken with repeated respiratory infections, so Barbara took her home in November, and I cut short my stay, returning after a little less than a year.

During that year, however, we lived like real fieldworkers. Barbara bought food at the village market and cooked it in our makeshift kitchen; we hung out in the evening with our village neighbors; Barbara washed the clothes by hand in a local spring. After she left, I took over the marketing and cooking for myself, but paid a neighbor woman to do my laundry. Barbara, a lactating mother at the time, was interviewing village women about their own breastfeeding experiences, and ended up publishing an article about it in *American Anthropologist* (B. Harrell 1981). I originally had a local assistant to help me translate from my Standard Chinese (Mandarin) into the Taiwanese spoken by the villagers, but he left after a month of fieldwork, and from then on I did all my interviewing by myself, more and more of it in Taiwanese as the time went on. One dark and misty evening in February, I had finished writing up my day's notes, and went for my accustomed walk around the village, just to see what was going on and who might be there. I wandered into a neighbor's house (in those days, you didn't knock) and sat down among a crowd of older and middle-aged men, who were gossiping about village affairs. I joined in. And after a few minutes, I realized that I was understanding absolutely everything they said, even though the language was Taiwanese and the subject was local gossip, some of it going back two or three generations. Though I never did improve my language to the extent that I could understand all the puns and classical allusions in the Taiwanese-language puppet shows presented on local holidays, I had arrived as a fieldworker. My Nuosu language has never reached that level, and it almost certainly never will.

That night I became a "real" anthropologist. Like many anthropologists of my generation who were interested in China, I had conducted my dissertation fieldwork in Taiwan not because I was interested in Taiwan (that happened while I was there) but because we couldn't go to China. When it did become possible for Americans to begin field research in China, in the early 1980s, I missed the brief pre-Mosher opening[1] that produced the first wave of field studies (such as Potter

1. Immediately after the announcement of the policy of "Reform and Opening" (Gaige Kaifang) in late 1978, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences agreed to allow a few American researchers to conduct fieldwork in China. This brief "honeymoon" was cut short when Stephen Mosher, a Stanford graduate student, was expelled from China on allegations of unethical conduct in 1981; fieldwork by foreigners was thereafter severely restricted to three weeks in any one place.

and Potter 1990; Siu 1989; Wolf 1985). Barbara was in medical school, and then in residency, and our two daughters were small, and I didn't even think of getting away long-term. Throughout the early '80s, I retained a potential interest in doing fieldwork in China, but certainly not in minority areas, and not on the topic of ethnic identity.

15

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL YI CONFERENCE, 1995

MA LUNZY

At the beginning of 1995, I received Stevan Harrell's invitation to attend the International Yi Studies Conference being held at the University of Washington in March, and I was extremely happy about it. Even though I had never asked Muga to his face if I could attend the conference—to the point that I avoided talking about it altogether—partly because I didn't want to pressure him and partly because I didn't want to be seen as exacting a quid pro quo for my "horse leading," nevertheless, to be able to go to America and see it for myself was something I really wanted to do. I was motivated all along by the attitude "Just hearing about it is empty; being able to see for oneself is real." I really wanted to see the paper tiger that we had cursed when we were little Red soldiers, to see the democratic country that was in the thoughts of today's youth. To be able to fulfill this desire through Muga's Yi studies conference was an exciting prospect. I needed to prepare.

Among my old academic paper drafts I found two to submit as papers for the conference. One was richly challenging: "A superficial discussion of the naming system of the Liangshan Yi, along with a discussion of the mistaken concept of the father-son linked name system." The other I had written with Qubi Shimei: "Homicide and homicide cases within the clan in the old society of the Liangshan Yi." Even though

the points being made and the evidence presented in the two papers were relatively solid, I still felt that the force of the writing was insufficient, like two loaves of insufficiently baked bread—valuable things and regrettable things were mixed together. I really wanted to make some effort to revise them, but because the time was short and the paperwork required to leave the country was voluminous, I couldn't do anything but put the revisions aside and use the drafts as my ticket to the conference room.

I met the other conference participants from China (Yu Hongmo, Wu Gu, Bamo Ayi, Li Yongxiang, and Qubi Shimei) at the Beijing airport, and we boarded China Eastern Airlines flight 583 via Shanghai and Los Angeles, arriving at the Seattle airport around noon on March 15. Muga and Wu Ga met us at the airport. Muga greeted everyone in Yi, and the participants from Yunnan and Guizhou looked at me incredulously and asked, "He understands Yi?" "When did he learn it?" Thinking about this afterwards, after Qubi Shimei and I returned we wrote a short article published in the *Liangshan Daily News:*

> We were fortunate to be able to attend the International Yi Studies Conference held at the University of Washington. When our plane touched down at noon on March 15 at the Seattle International Airport in Washington State, everybody was a bit exhausted from the long trip, mingling with the American crowds walking toward the exit. Then we were met by the chair of the University of Washington Anthropology Department, saying to each one in fluent Yi, "Honored guests, honored guests! Are your families well?"
>
> Hearing this mouthful of standard Yi, we felt very close and very moved; everybody thought that it was no simple feat for him to learn even this little bit of Yi on the other side of the Pacific.
>
> Two days later, he asked all the conference participants to his house to chat, and after everyone had sat down, he cleared his throat, and said simply, in Yi, "Honored friends, you've come here from far away, how can I not be pleased. Let's raise our glasses together, and toast everyone's health and good fortune, and wish that our friendship will be with us forever." Then all the Yi friends seated there stood up, very moved, and without reservation began talking with him in Yi about daily household things.
>
> The next morning scholars from five countries (China, the US, Germany, France, and Australia) were in a lively discussion of an article on "The double cross-cousin marriage of the Yi of Liangshan" when Stevan Harrell took a piece of chalk and smoothly wrote several pertinent Yi words on the blackboard. At this time, not only scholars who came from other countries, but also the several Yi among us really felt respect in our hearts for his ability to command so much Yi speech and Yi writing. One scholar said to him, "Your Yi speech and writing are really not bad." He joked, quite confidently, "That's because I have a Yi name, Hxielie Muga."

When this article came out in the *Liangshan Daily News*, it caused a reaction. Many senior urban Yi told me, "In America, there are people who can speak and write Yi; we have some children who not only can't speak it but look upon speaking their mother tongue as being beneath their dignity; this is a tragedy." Some Yi in post-revolutionary society were influenced by the policies of the extreme left or the extreme right, and those who were most looking out for their own social advantage would enthusiastically speak Han and tell their children not to speak Yi or to speak it less. Reports like ours couldn't help but incite a reaction in them.

In the late 1980s, when I was a newcomer to Yi studies, I took part in quite a few domestic conferences and meetings. At the larger ones, the chair's platform was usually fully occupied by a bunch of powerful personages. Sometimes even ordinary scholars attending the meeting were not given copies of the conference materials. At the meetings, these leaders lined up to recite the same political economic jargon that appeared in every newspaper and magazine, present their opinions, express their support for scholarly activities, summarize the current situation, foretell the direction that scholarship was to take, and distribute responsibility; we would then sightsee for a day and adjourn the meeting.

In the case of more specialized meetings, the head table would also be full, and after some prominent scholars in the field had finished delivering lengthy reports with shaking heads and bobbing brains, the conference organizers would exaggerate the extent to which the first-rate scholarly findings had achieved this and that kind of breakthrough, and that the achievements were this and that kind of enormous, they would cleverly hand over the responsibility for the conference to some other

group, set a date for the next meeting, and then proclaim the conference to be over. The clever, poor *xiucai* would exhaust their mental capabilities, relying on the support of the leaders and their funds; this year they would meet at Mawang Dui, next year at Mogao Jue, the year after next meet at Emei, Huashan or some other mountain, send out soldiers to let Heaven have a look (a Yi proverb, meaning "filling in the ranks with incompetent soldiers"). The units that had a relatively large supply of funds always sent people to big and small meetings; some of them had been to several tens of meetings without having given a single scholarly presentation. We really needed to knock on the door of an American scholarly conference, to see what kind of medicine they had in their gourd.

I wrote in my diary on March 16, 1995:

> There was no chair's table, and no division between leaders and followers; we all sat wherever we wished around a big table. The chair announced the rules of the meeting, the times allowed for presentation, and so on. The twenty-one participants punctually used a minute each to introduce themselves, giving their name, their unit affiliation, their teacher, their specialization, and so on. It was a little bit like a group of Nuosu who were strangers meeting on the road and doing their best to introduce themselves and get to know each other. This beginning gave me the impression that everyone was a host at this conference.

Professor Tong Enzheng's critique of Guizhou Yi historian Yu Hongmo's paper served as the prelude to our exchanges at this conference. In natural and flowing language, Tong Enzheng gave a sincere and biting critique of the theory of the five kinds of social formations prevalent in Mainland China, as well as a critique of Eurocentrism. He advocated a multicentered perspective on historical development, as well as a merging of one's thought into international currents. But his criticism of Mainland Chinese scholarly vocabulary was particularly strong; certainly Western scholarly vocabulary was too democratic. Maybe all of this was obvious, but confirming everything or denying everything was a question that both Chinese and Western scholars ought to pay attention to.

Tong's incisive commentary naturally brought me to thinking about

the first national conference on folkloric artifacts held at the Sichuan University Museum in 1987. At that time, folkloric research in Chinese scholarship was at high tide, and a scholarly elite centered around the national museum system had been gathered together under Tong Enzheng's leadership. I was at the Liangshan Museum of Yi Slave Society, which—perhaps because it was the first museum in China devoted to slave society—attracted scholarly attention; otherwise, neither my unit's nor my own position would have qualified me to attend such a meeting. At the meeting, the definition of a "folkloric artifact" had been the hot topic, and when the discussion touched on minority artifacts, many of the scholars had agreed that all minority artifacts should be classified as folkloric. I had had an opposing opinion, and had presented my position, stating that such a conclusion was the functioning of majority ethnocentrism and asking, "Can we say that religious instruments used historically by Yi *bimo* are folkloric artifacts? What about offensive and defensive weapons used in warfare, including armor, guns, and so forth: can we say that they, too are folkloric artifacts?" Professor Shi Shuqing, who was attending the conference, and Professor Tong both agreed strongly with my criticism, and went on to explain it in an acute theoretical manner. From that time forth, I had deep respect for Professor Tong. In his summary presentation on the last day of the 1987 conference, he repeatedly compared cultural research in China and in the West, and mentioned certain nationalistic sentiments. He emphasized that people should not be blinded by the fog of various Western theories, and talked about how one could use a Marxist conception of history to analyze the history of various ethnic groups in China.

The Tong Enzheng of Seattle eight years later had really changed his attitude toward Western scholarship. As I described him in my diary, using Yi: *Hani wo ddur a nyi* (There are no bones in your tongue; you can say whatever you want). It gave me the feeling of being damned if you do and damned if you don't. Later on, when Professor Tong wrote me a letter, his name was fully Westernized as En Zheng Tong. When I went to Han areas, I transformed Shama Lunzy into Ma Erzi; even today I still wonder, if I went to America, would I have to change it into Erzi Ma? Could this be a topic for anthropological research?

In addition to the scholarly theory, some other things made an impres-

sion on people. When the conference chair was announcing the arrangements for presentations and discussants' remarks, Mr. Hsieh Jiann from Hong Kong raised his hand to warn Mainland China scholars that they should respect the time allotted for their presentations, and not drag into the international conference their custom of one person having the final say. As a result, presenters seldom violated the time specifications of the conference; but Hsieh Jiann, as the Yi proverb says, "chewed buckwheat like a sow," meaning that he didn't bring up anything new but rather went over and over things that had been said before, to the point that the chair had no choice but to firmly cut short his remarks. Hsieh Jiann had mentioned that when he had crossed Liangshan on a train in the 1980s, he had wanted to investigate reports of chaotic social situations in Liangshan that he had read in Guomindang newspapers from the 1940s, but that he hadn't dared even get off the train. I admired him for speaking so candidly in front of so many Yi people, but also had a hard time believing that someone who called himself an anthropologist could unthinkingly believe an irresponsible and uninformed report from half a generation ago.

In sum, the impressions made on me by this meeting were profound. In the first place, there were so many famous scholars from the East and from the West joining hands with Yi people, using Eastern and Western theory as well as cultural phenomena from throughout world, to discuss Yi studies. In addition, the people attending the meeting didn't feel constrained by each other's academic degrees or by distinctions of rank, gender, nationality, or career history. Also, the scholarly content of the meeting was very broad. "Wise people recognize wisdom; compassionate people recognize compassion." The scholarly discussions were very animated and many voices were heard. As Professor Tong Enzheng stated, when the conference was over, the new Yi studies began. I thought that this would resound for a long time in Yi studies. Professor Harrell had put a lot of effort into organizing the conference; he should consider it to be another bright point in his anthropological career. As a participant, I was also proud.

Just looking at Muga as an ordinary "horse leader," apart from his roles as a scholar and conference organizer, I couldn't help but be sincerely moved by his consideration. He used his free time during the conference to arrange for everyone to sightsee around the city, and took us to visit museums, and to taste all the culinary culture, from quick take-out hamburgers to buffet lunches, salmon and crab, a lamb dinner at a Greek restaurant, Korean lunch boxes, Vietnamese noodles, and Chinese food in Chinatown. Even though people were exhausted from jet lag and were still adapting, everyone managed to enter into the excitement of the moment and quickly synchronize their daily schedules with those of the local people. Maybe it was because so many of us were Yi, but when we were walking and chatting on the streets, a lot of people said, "Look at all these foreigners," calling Americans "foreigners" in America. I said to them that here they were the ones who were foreigners, and everybody laughed at the idea.

On the eighteenth of March, Muga took us to a museum at an Indian reservation on the coast. I was quite excited. This name, "Indian," was something we had run into in the works of Marx and Engels, and in the past decade, quite a few scholars had brought it together with the question of the racial affiliations of the Yi. Many textbooks in China had somewhat confusedly made "Indian" into the name of an ethnic group. It wasn't until I went to the conference that I found out this was a mistake. At the museum, I could see the tribulations and bitterness of the Indians in the last 100 years, their development and their fall, and could follow the sound of the rifles of the immigrants. The Indians had lost their homeland, lost their original language, and, in an era of tumultuous development, they had increasingly lost their own culture; even their cultural elites were unable to utter even a few sentences of their own tribal language.

In our conversations with them, it wasn't difficult to discover that their spiritual culture was like a kite whose string had been cut, and was having difficulty finding a place to rest. From this I drew the following warning: The greatness of the Nuosu of Liangshan is due to their stubbornness, and their backwardness is also due to their stubbornness. Maybe our ancestors caused us to lose a lot of our material wealth, but they left us a large amount of spiritual wealth that is more valuable than gold. Maybe in the end the Nuosu will lose their language, their writing, and their ethnic characteristics, but this great transformation will definitely not happen in our lifetime.

That evening when I got back to the hotel, I wrote in my journal:

> History and contemporary affairs are playing with people: when Zhyge Alur[1] killed the giant serpent, he was a hero; when Wu Song[2] beat the tiger to death, he was a hero; when their descendants follow their example, they are criminals, because we have to preserve biodiversity. When the European immigrants used knives and clubs to occupy the lands of the American aborigines, they were heroes, when the Descendants of the Dragon assimilated barbarians to Chinese culture, they were heroes; when their descendants carry on this work, they are thugs, because humanity needs cultural diversity. Can we ask when human thinking about heroes and people of great ability will ever be constant?

When we came back from visiting the Indian reservation, Muga invited all of the conference participants to his house to sit and chat; I was of course delighted with the opportunity to meet the "elder sister-in-law" from my longtime fieldwork collaboration (fig. 15.1). When I walked into the house, without any introduction I recognized the Barbara that I had seen for several years in the little book of pictures that Muga often pulled out. She had the same nice smile I had seen in the pictures. In the room full of guests, she called out my name in an extraordinarily clear voice. The Liangshan Yi all called out in Yi, "*Cy ne sy yi ddap?*" (Does she know you?). I joked to them, "*Jjy yyr mgo shyrmgo da sy su*" (We know each other from having had each other's souls and shadows pulled together), referring to a ritual in which a *bimo* pulls someone's soul into a grass effigy in order to curse the person, but here meaning photographs, tape recordings, and the like. They cracked up. Barbara entertained everyone enthusiastically; When we saw that the hostess was so hospitable, we all felt that visiting there was like returning home, and the atmosphere became very happy. It was like "Go out the door and look at the color of the sky; go inside the door and look at the color of her face [the

1. The Nuosu cultural hero, born of a male eagle and a female dragon, who performed all sorts of heroic deeds at the beginning of the world.

2. A hero of the Ming Dynasty novel *Shui Hu Zhuan* (Water Margin), by Wu Cheng'en.

15.1 Gathering at the Harrells' house, Seattle, 1995. Standing at left: Thomas Heberer, Charles McKhann, and Liu Yu. Middle row, left to right: Li Yongxiang, Bamo Ayi, David Bradley (behind Ayi), Wu Ga, Ma Lunzy, Ann Maxwell Hill, Qubi Shimei, Wu Gu, and Lu Hui. Standing at right: Yu Hongmo and Maya Bradley. Seated in front: Barbara Harrell, Stevan Harrell, and Wu Jingzhong.

hostess]." We all started singing and dancing, with the Harrells leading the songs and dances, and even the taciturn Qubi Shimei said several words of a Meigu *bimo*'s blessing.

On the twentieth of March, Muga arranged for our four elders, Qubi Shimei, Wu Jingzhong, Yu Hongmo, and Wu Gu, to go to some cities on the East Coast, and those of us left behind all slept in. Bamo Ayi and I took some samples of Yi clothing to the Burke Museum to talk about the possibility of an exhibit there, and at 3:00 p.m. we were invited by our Sichuanese compatriot, Peng Wenbin, to go to his house for a marathon evening. We drank beer, talked, and watched four videos, including one in the Yunnanese style of anthropological video from Lijiang. Everybody was curious about some of the content touched on in that video;

there were some scenes that people inside China could not have obtained, which demonstrated that the director had the support of powerful or well-connected people in China.

Wu Ga, Ayi, and I didn't leave Peng Wenbin's house until 2:00 a.m., at which time we had the opportunity to have a good look at Seattle's night scene. Streetlights illuminated all of the main streets, both sides of which were lined with neatly parked cars; all appeared quiet and orderly. At one relatively large intersection, a single small car was coming along the road toward us. When the driver saw the red light, he slowly came to a stop, and didn't start again until the red light had turned green. In China, at an intersection with a signal there would still be cars asserting their right to go through. Wu Ga explained to us that on the whole, American citizens respect laws and regulations, and maintain public order, but that once you break the law, it is merciless. This is the advantage of a society based on law.

On March 21, Muga asked us what our wishes were for the next few days. He asked us to tell him any place that we would like to see; nobody suggested anything. I thought that it would be a big shame to go to America and not look around, so I impolitely asked Muga if he could arrange for us to see an elementary or secondary school, or a basic college class. He agreed, and quickly contacted an elementary school and a middle school, since the university was closed for vacation.

The next day, Harrell took us to an experimental elementary school. A lower-grade class was in the middle of an environmental science lesson. The class was divided into four groups, and acted as if they were four communities. On the tables were pieces of waste paper, empty bottles, and other such trash. The teacher asked the students to talk about what they should do when they ran across such things, then each group designated a representative to report on the group's findings; other members of the group could help answer questions or give the representative reminders. The small group discussions were interesting; some of the students were eating, some lying down on their backs or on their sides, some standing, and some sitting, but they all answered actively; everybody was chattering and yammering about the topic. When the students reported their recommendations for taking care of the trash, one could see the liveliness of their thought pattern: Put the trash into

a machine and grind it up, and then use it for something else; send it to the moon; burn it into ashes; bury it deep in a forest to increase soil fertility and nourish the earth; send it to another planet; reprocess it into something that's not harmful.

In another class, the teacher asked each student to take five Post-its and stick them onto five things, without duplicating any, and to indicate what these things had been in the past, what they were in the present, and what they would be in the future. Some of the students stuck the notes on paper, on books, or on pens. Others put them on tables, on their eyeglasses, on their hair, or on their teeth. Some even put them on the teacher's face, nose, or ears. I stared curiously at the notes stuck to the teacher's face and ears, and asked Wu Ga what answers were written there. The answers were: "It used to be skin; now it's skin; in the future it will be dirt." "It used to be a nose; now it's a nose; in the future it will be dead." Many of the answers were related to the children's families' religious backgrounds. This formed the extreme opposite of China's educational style, in which the teachers had a stern manner and an unquestioned high position, and the students acted as little memorization machines, with their heads held straight, never looking to the side, concentrating on the blackboard, reciting stiffly and memorizing precisely, swallowing whole everything the teacher said. No wonder so many people who have lived in America say America is a child's paradise.

After that, we visited a fourth-grade class about the history of the American Civil War. The teacher and the students played the roles of different military men of the time, wearing different uniforms and carrying weapons according to their specialties. They had done some of the needlework with their own hands, and had written battle diaries. The classroom was practically transformed into a stage, and the teacher and students into actors. These studies were extraordinarily lively and involved (fig. 15.2).

In the afternoon, we visited a first-year high-school biology class. Every student was the size of a horse or cow, and dressed very casually. Some of the girls were wearing garlands of flowers on their heads. We were told that the high school had been started by seven teachers who had raised some ideas about educational reform and had been dissatisfied with the lack of response from the government, upon which they had

15.2 With students in the Alternative Elementary II program at Decatur Elementary School, Seattle, 1995. Top left: Wu Ga, Bamo Ayi, Liu Yu, and Stevan Harrell. Second from right, Ma Lunzy. Photo by Li Yongxiang.

banded together and started a private school. The education given there was considered quite good, and the school had become rather fashionable locally, so that it had taken on the character of an elite school. When we walked in, the students didn't react, and asked and answered questions naturally. They didn't have that exhaustion born of day-and-night striving to get into the best school at the next level, but rather were full of a healthy life-energy.

After that, we went to a seventh-grade class. When the students heard our footsteps, many of them ran out to take us by the hand and pull us over to sit by them; in China this would be called "liberalism," and would be dealt with sternly. They were in the middle of a Chinese class. There were some Han characters written on the blackboard, and when Wu Ga explained in fluent English why we had come, a the students immediately asked us a lot of questions. When they found out we were Yi people from China, one of them immediately asked, "Do Yi people have their own writing?" Wu Ga said they did, and right away they asked us to write some for them to see. The group nominated me to take care of this matter, so I wrote in Yi, *"Zzymu li va ma nge"* and *"Nowo tida Nuosu qubo mo"* (The world is beautiful; Here you can see Yi friends). At that point, one of the students asked what sort of writing system that was. For first-year middle-school students to have that kind of broad knowledge was no easy thing; it depended on the lively nature of the teaching methods. The advantage of this kind of progressive teaching method—what the Chinese call "quality education"—lies in the fact that, although students don't understand many things on the surface, in fact they understand a lot. Education based on testing, on the other hand, produces students who appear to understand a lot, but in reality don't understand much. It would be very rare for a middle-school student in China to inquire about the nature of a writing system.

After we had visited the two American schools, some questions came up. American classrooms appeared to allow broad freedom, with the teachers and the students mixing like milk and water, and the students acquiring knowledge in a happy, or low-pressure environment. But in regard to behavior in the school grounds the schools are very strict, and use detailed legislation to ensure the preservation of order. For example, we were not allowed to give the schools any implements used for drinking alcohol, such as our Nuosu lacquer cups, or any tapes or publications that involved drinking songs.

In Chinese classrooms, students must follow teachers' instructions, and are not allowed to express any opinions or thoughts of their own. Relations between teachers and students in elementary and secondary schools appear to be well integrated, but in fact they are more like cats and mice. But regulation of order within school grounds is in fact very loose. For example, teachers collect illegal private fees. In school you can teach students to sing "Come drink some barley beer; come drink some *kumiss*; come drink some of our Yi liquor," and to dance drinking dances at times of celebration, or even ask students to bring glasses of liquor to welcome officials and other important people. Whether either system is right or wrong shouldn't be discussed without first removing the hats of "capitalism" or "socialism," because in striving

15.3 Ayi and Lunzy on the beach at the Harrells' vacation home near Shelton, Washington, 1995.

toward an excellent education system, an excellent society, or an excellent tomorrow, we move beyond the difference between "capitalism" and "socialism."

On the twenty-third of March, we went to the Harrells' seaside vacation home, which was built on a quiet bay, facing a long narrow marine inlet, with dense forest on both sides, and eagles soaring in the sky, sometimes mingling with a distant airplane. We saw dogs sniffing wild deer, and every color of wild duck and seagull floating on the green saltwater; every once in a while, the surface of the water would be disturbed by one of them taking off to fly off somewhere far away. Following the tides, we, who came from southwest China, where, in Wang Ningsheng's words, *Wanli gaoshan zhi shi po, Yi piao sishui bian shi hai* (A thousand miles of high mountains are nothing but slopes; a dipper of stagnant water is an ocean) gleefully rolled up our pant legs and experienced the marine flats; this was life as if in a poem or a painting (fig. 15.3).

I finally experienced the degree to which the life of my field companion, dressed in his sturdy leather boots, denim jeans, and casual shirt, was different from mine. I didn't envy his salary, nor did his wealth make me feel small in front of him. But I suddenly realized his respect for his anthropological profession. Wherever his spirit of pursuit through hardship came from, when he left his comfortable life to float around in the poor, dirty Nuosu areas, when he warmed himself by the fire with

his objects of study, not thinking about the fine life he had left behind, I was absolutely right to have helped him out with his fieldwork.

In their comfortable vacation home, Barbara took out a picture album and used nonlinguistic methods to explain the pictures to me, even imitating the animals shown. I can't say whether it was true of Muga and I that *Hai nei cun zhi ji, tian yai ruo bi lin* (Wherever within the seas there exist people that know one, then the farthest reaches of heaven are like one's own neighborhood), but I did experience something like this in his family's enthusiastic warmth. And I felt that Muga's firm anthropological footprints had Barbara's strong support.

After an afternoon meal, we left the Harrells' vacation home and arrived at the Tacoma Dome around twilight to watch an NBA basketball game, between the Seattle SuperSonics and the Washington Bullets. The game was fiercely played, each team gaining points alternately. The whole arena didn't have an empty seat, and all the spectators were in a state of excitement, with cheering for the home team coming from all around us. I excitedly yelled for the Seattle team, too, and explained the game to some of my companions who didn't know much about basketball. Harrell was even more restless than I was, cheering loudly for Seattle. When the final whistle blew, Seattle had eked out a victory by three points.

Ever since I was little, I have liked basketball; in the monotony of a school, I had but to hear the sounds of basketball and I would feel an unusual affinity for the school; amid the bitterness of village life, I had but to see a court and I would feel that life was satisfyingly happy. Later on, when I was alone trying to make a living in a Han area, it was the companionship of basketball that took away my homesickness. I'm not a particularly talented player, but my love for the game has lasted a long time, and when I got the opportunity to see a professional game in America, I felt it was no small harvest; in a way, it even surpassed taking part in the academic conference. It's not an exaggeration to say that it will be a one of the moments I'll remember all my life.

Muga's days of "leading the horse" for us were over, and on the twenty-fourth of March he put us on a plane to San Francisco, where he had arranged for us to look around with Professor Peggy Swain. She took us to the California Museum, the Center for Chinese Studies at Berkeley, the anthropology library, and, in the afternoon, to a nature park.

The next day, we went to the Golden Gate Bridge, a forest park, a seaside park, and other places, plucking the string of tourism really hard. Perhaps spending a little over ten days looking at the flowers from horseback didn't give us a basis for evaluating America from head to toe, but still, from our direct observation we could comprehend the profundity of the Yi saying *Zze li kur zze, bburma li hie jjox ddur* (Digestion goes on in the intestines; the health results are visible in the muscles and skin). One can't help saying that America's good social ethics, habits of cleanliness, urban construction, and environmental preservation all stem from the deeper levels of her culture.

After the conclusion of the International Yi Studies Conference in Seattle, Muga's and my relationship continued to strengthen, and our interest in cooperation continued to increase. At the end of 1994, we made a preliminary decision on two plans for cooperation. One was to conduct comprehensive research on the ethnic groups in the southern part of the Yalong River watershed; the second was to prepare to mount an exhibit in Seattle of Liangshan Yi clothing, lacquerware, and other materials. The first project never got funded; the second, through Muga's efforts, came to realization.

16

SEATTLE FIRST FREE METHODIST CHURCH, 1996–97

BAMO AYI

"Now we're going to Queen Anne, to see a landlady called Amber. Amber is a single woman, a member of a Protestant church." It was the third day after my arrival in Seattle. Professor Harrell was explaining things to me while driving the van he had purchased especially to take his Chinese friends around. We were looking at rooms for rent.

In September 1996, through Professor Harrell's nomination, I had been fortunate to receive support from the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China and the China Studies Program of the University of Washington to come to the anthropology department at the University, then chaired by Professor Harrell, as a visiting scholar for one year. Even though my primary motive for coming to America was to conduct research with Professor Harrell on bilingual education and Nuosu-language textbooks used in Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan and to audit Chinese culture and comparative religion classes at the UW, part of my goal was to better understand American churches and their members. Of course, the best way to understand religion would be to live in a church member's home. So two months before I came to America, I asked Steve to help me find a landlord who was a church member.

A few days later I moved to Queen Anne and became Amber's tenant. My American home was the attic room of a gray house, a spacious bedroom with an entryway. On the windowsill, a flowering plant whose name I couldn't recall gave off a sweet fragrance. On the wall next to the window hung an old Chinese landscape painting. There was a finely worked paperweight on the desk, whose design resembled an old Chinese "hundred child picture," showing children in Chinese-style silk clothing playing. I felt a ripple of warmth, and also a bit of puzzlement: Where had Amber gotten ahold of these Chinese things? It looked like the landlady had put some real thought toward welcoming her tenant from China.

"Ayi, dinner!" came Amber's voice from the corridor.

"Let's say a prayer," Amber said, after her son Jason and I sat down at the table. Watching Amber beside me out of the corner of my eye, I could see her sitting up straight, both eyes closed, saying grace before the meal. I sat as if fixed in place by the somber atmosphere, and didn't dare move, didn't even dare exhale, but inside I was completely satisfied, inwardly celebrating my choice of landlady and my choice not only to live in one of her rooms and eat the food she cooked but also to become her companion. Even eating had its religious aspect. I perked up my ears and listened to Amber's soft but clear recitation. She was thanking God, thanking God for bringing Ayi into her life, thanking God for the abundant food.

I peeked at Jason across the table; he appeared wooden, unmoving. I guessed that he might be saying a silent prayer. There are many kinds of prayers, some spoken and some silent. On my first day in Amber's house, I had already begun my American fieldwork.

Amber was fifty-three years old, and had been divorced from her husband for five years. She had a pair of children. Her son Jason was thirty-three, unmarried, and worked in an old car restoration shop; he paid monthly rent just like me. Her daughter Gwendolyn, not yet thirty, was a construction worker and a single mother; she lived with her twelve-year-old daughter Katrina in a rented house. Amber worked two jobs: She cooked and found shelter for the homeless at Operation Nightwatch, and cooked lunch in a public elementary school cafeteria. Her earnings from the two jobs were still not sufficient for her, and rent was

undoubtedly an important part of her monthly income. I hadn't been living at Amber's very long when her old friend Cheryl also moved in and became another paying tenant.

Before I had moved into Amber's house, Steve had spoken to her about his hope that she would help me to learn about religion, but wouldn't try to get me to join her church; he had told her that my interest was strictly in research. Steve had shown considerable foresight in announcing this publicly and bringing everyone into agreement at the beginning. Amber had already consulted with her pastor, Mark, about letting a non-believing Chinese scholar participate in church activities and do research, but I didn't learn that until later. I had never imagined that Amber would be so earnest about my research, and that a church member could have such self-discipline as to ask for such permission.

On the first Sunday, I impatiently asked if I could go to church with Amber. Her church was called the Seattle First Free Methodist Church (FFMC). The church was at the foot of Queen Anne Hill, one street away from and facing Seattle Pacific University (SPU), a church-supported college, and many of the FFMC members came from the faculty, students, and staff of the University, so that the relationship between the University and the church was particularly close.

From where we lived, it was only five minutes by car, along steep streets, to the church. First we attended Sunday school in the SPU music department auditorium. We went to the old folks' class, called the Homebuilder Class. As we entered, the chair of the meeting was leading everyone in a prayer. After that, he asked if there were any announcements. Amber pulled me to my feet and introduced her new tenant, making sure to announce that I was interested in religion and was conducting fieldwork, and wittily pointing out to group, "We are her field."

The speaker that day was Eugene Lemicio, a professor of religious studies at SPU, who gave a lecture entitled "The nature and characteristics of the early church," one of a series of lectures on church history. What was surprising to me was that he had to say a prayer before the talk. He asked God to help everyone to understand the content of the talk, to help everyone to grow in their spiritual life. How could God help people understand a lecture? I, who had spent half a lifetime as a teacher and student, couldn't make any sense of it at all.

Coming out of the auditorium, I went with the flow of people into the church. The worship program began with beautiful music. There is a proverb that says "Those who know observe how something is done; those who don't know observe the fun." In the beginning, because of the language and cultural barriers, I was honestly just observing the fun. After the hour-long worship service, I was most interested in two things: the music and the offering. At least half of the service was conducted against the background of beautiful music and the singing of hymns. If someone like me with poor English rushed in and didn't think for a minute, she would certainly think she was in a concert. With music played that well, I thought, people might come to the church service just to hear the music. Later on, I learned that the First Free Methodist Church of Seattle was known up and down the West Coast for its music—because they were seriously interested in the musical education of their members, and because of the help of the excellent music department at SPU. Amber was extremely proud of her church choir.

The other thing that had attracted my attention during the service had been the passing of the bamboo offering basket. Because it was my first time attending church, I kept my eyes wide open and my ears alert, fearing that I might miss something or do something wrong. When I discovered that people were passing a little bamboo basket and putting envelopes or cash into it, I suddenly realized that it was the offering, and nervously reached for my purse. At that point Amber had softly said to me, "No, you're not a church member; you don't have to give money." I had known that a church's existence depended on its members' contributions, but I hadn't known that they were collected in that way. In Chinese Buddhist or Daoist temples, the contribution box is fixed in one place, and people decide for themselves whether or not to contribute. But at Amber's church, the collection is conducted in public, the basket passes through everybody's hands, and it seems as if it would be very hard to pass it on without adding a little bit.

The first few times I went to church, the offering basket troubled me. Making an offering wouldn't do, because I wasn't a church member, and not making an offering wouldn't do either, because I came to church almost every Sunday, and I benefited from the service of the church, in both senses of the word. Every time the basket came around,

I felt nervous. After about two months, however, I decided that I would put in a few dollars every time the basket came by, since I had come to like the church, the service, the music, and the sermons, as well as the new friends I had made there. I not only thought that I ought to make offerings, I wanted to make offerings. When Amber saw me putting bills into the offering basket, I could tell from her pleased expression that she was thinking that I was beginning to accept her God. Amber never tried to persuade me to join the church, even though I had the feeling that she was trying to covertly. I never dared to ask Amber about the offerings or the way they were used; I didn't want her to think that I was investigating church secrets.

On Sunday, January 19, 1997, the topic of the sermon was "money." Pastor Mark and two other members conducted a dialogue that was almost a skit on the Protestant Church's ideas about money. The Order of Worship announced the financial figures for the church for the preceding year, and the projected budget for the following year. Every member was advised to go home and make his or her own budget and to plan the use of income wisely, and was urged to make offerings to God and the church.

When we got back from church, Amber curled up on the couch and figured her budget according to the church's teachings. In a half year of contact, Amber had seldom avoided any subject with me. Her earnings from Operation Nightwatch, the school cafeteria, and the three rented rooms added up to $28,000. Amber planned to give $280 per month ($70 per week) to Methodist missionary activities in South Africa and to Operation Nightwatch, and $20 per month to a girl in South Africa whose education she was sponsoring. Amber explained that when one wrote a check to the church, one had only to indicate a program, and the church would put the money into the budget for that program, according to the member's wishes. Out of curiosity, I asked Amber if the church leaders might use the money for private purposes or waste it. Amber said, "On this point, you can rest assured." She used Pastor Mark as an example. Pastor Mark kept only a portion of the salary the church paid him to live on, and returned the rest to the church. He lived in a small house and drove a small car. He was trustworthy, and intelligent and wise, and capable of spending money where it ought to be

16.1 Ayi with Bible teachers Hugh and Frid Nutley (left), English teachers Ken and Bonnie Peterson (right), and international students, Seattle First Free Methodist Church, 1996.

spent. I always thought of tithes as taxes, but Amber held to the idea that offerings were completely voluntary. Later, her son Jason said that, on the contrary, a tithe of 10 percent was the unwritten rule of every church; that was one reason he did not believe or to go to church.

In addition to attending Sunday school and church services, I also went to an English class and a Bible class for international students held by the church. We had classes every Friday evening from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.; we studied English the first hour, and the Bible the second hour. Ken and Bonnie, the English teachers, taught English at several colleges in Tianjin and Beijing, and could speak a little Chinese (fig. 16.1). (When they later took positions teaching English at a college in Xuzhou in 1998–99, I entertained them in Beijing.) The teachers of the Bible class were called Hugh and Frid. Hugh was very conscientious in his teaching. In order to get us to understand the relationship between God and humans, he used the analogy of a father and his children, which I thought was very interesting. If the children were obedient, it was a reward for the father; if they were rebellious, it was a reprimand and a punishment

for the father. When I told Amber that I thought that Hugh's Christianity had an obvious tendency toward paterfamilias, she said that Hugh would certainly talk about God's forgiveness and mercy. One time, Hugh asked everybody in the class, "If you unexpectedly received a million dollars, how would you spend it?" The students' answers were all over the place: some would buy a big house, some would travel around the world, some would contribute it all to the church. At the time, I thought that Hugh would certainly have a lofty, inspiring answer to his question; when I heard him say that he would give the money to his grandson to go to the best university, I was at first disappointed, and then I felt that he was honest and lovable. Through this experience, I discovered that I myself had unknowingly begun to conform to the Christian mold—in fact, church members lived in the real world, and there were all different kinds of them.

In China, when I had gone to observe a Buddhist or Daoist temple, I had imitated others and clasped my hands and closed my eyes to pray for something I wanted, but I had never believed it, and didn't count it as real prayer. I had never imagined that a preacher in an American church would pray for me, with the entire congregation as witnesses, all helping with the prayer. It happened on Sunday, February 2, 1997. A few days earlier, I had gotten a phone call saying that my daughter had gone into the hospital and was about to have surgery; since then, I had been constantly disturbed and uneasy. During the service that Sunday, Amber passed me a note: "Would you mind putting Asa's hospital stay into the program for prayers today?" According to the order of worship, at a time near the final benediction, the minister would lead the congregation in praying for a few people who had special needs. Perhaps because I didn't want to refuse Amber's good intentions, or because I wanted to have the experience myself, or because I really hoped the prayer would have an effect, I nodded to Amber. At prayer time, Amber and I walked to the front of the church and knelt together with seven or eight others who had requested prayers on a bench for that purpose next to the altar. When it was my turn, I told the assistant pastor, Bonnie, simply, "My daughter's name is Asa; she is six years old; she has already gone into the hospital, and is about to be operated on." "Ayi's daughter and husband are in Beijing," Amber added. The newly

hired assistant minister, David, put his hands on my shoulders, and Bonnie put her hands on my head and led everyone in a prayer for Asa, asking God to protect Asa's safety during the surgery and to give her a quick recovery. From behind me came a chorus of believers' prayers. I was deeply moved, and my eyes filled with tears. The prayers expressed good wishes, and I so hoped that those good wishes would become reality. After the service was over, believers whom I knew and some whom I didn't know surrounded me and comforted me, one after another, saying that they would continue to pray for Asa. Hugh and Frid, and Bonnie and Ken telephoned to ask how Asa was doing, and Bonnie put Asa's name on her list of people to pray for.

Of all of the activities I took part in at the First Free Methodist Church, the most casual, the most unstructured, the most fun was the women's group. The group's meetings took place every Thursday evening at the house of the organizer, Soph. There were eight or nine women at the most, and sometimes only four or five. The main topics in the discussions were children, husbands, and friends; books, movies, clothes and cooking were also discussed. The activities ranged from telling stories or jokes to doing handicrafts to exchanging presents to having birthday parties. When we got together, we shared joys and happiness and also troubles and sadness. I remember one woman, Gene, talking about her eldest son's return from the Vietnam War; he was mired in self-deprecation, self-accusation, and self-hate. Relatives didn't dare mention the war in his presence, but recently her son had told her that during the war, he had killed unarmed peasants while they were working in the fields. Gene was very worried and sad about her son's mental state. Upon hearing Gene's story, Becky, a nurse who worked in a hospital, said that she wanted to take Gene's son to a specialized psychiatric clinic at the University of Washington hospital to have him looked at. Soph suggested that Gene should encourage her son to take part in church activities, and thus help him to solve his problems through faith.

One thing that surprised me about the group was that these American women were extremely interested in cultures that they knew nothing about; as soon as I joined the group, China and the Yi became frequent topics of conversation. One time, when I was talking about the traditional Yi ways of dealing with those who broke clan rules, one

woman, Cindy, simply couldn't understand why Yi society didn't have forgiveness or tolerance. I told her that if Yi society was forgiving and tolerant, the society would be shaken, it would fall apart. Cindy's culture shock was a result of using Christian ideas to look at the rest of the world.

At the farewell party that the group organized for me before I went back to China, Soph spoke, saying that my stay had been a new experience for the group, not only because I had shared the joy of stories about China and about the Yi, thereby ridding the group of many misconceptions and adding to their knowledge, but also because of the time I led the group on an adventure to a black church. "Adventure" was her word. It happened like this: I once suggested to Soph and Amber that they should organize a trip to a prayer meeting for the recovery of drug addicts at a black church. Even though Soph and Amber were enlightened believers, organizing group members to go to another church, particularly a black church, was something they had never done before. I thought I would just try, and didn't really expect we would do it, but I soon received a notice that they had decided to do it as a group activity.

On March 20, 1997, group leader Soph took Amber, Cindy, Cheryl, and me—five of us in all—to the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. As soon as I walked into the black church, I felt a new and unfamiliar feeling. I felt quite excited, and leapt to the front of the group, all the way to the second row (the first row being occupied by seven or eight young black people, the recovering addicts who were being prayed for) because I wanted to get the best seat so I could observe better. I pulled Soph over to the front without saying anything. The prayer meeting began; that day's preacher was a famous black author and missionary, the Reverend Dr. Arlene Churn. Her preaching was very lively; in contrast to Pastor Mark, with his set delivery and relatively calm voice, she waved her arms and strode about the podium, sometimes with her eyes closed, beseeching the Lord, sometimes looking heavenward, thanking Jesus. The believers in the audience responded excitedly, calling out "Yes!" "Right!" and "Amen!" A large number of people sang the hymns (there were probably seventy or eighty people in the choir), accompanied only by a few simple percussion and electronic instruments. In addition to having a strong rock-and-roll flavor, the hymn singing there also had an African

rhythm to it. The black congregation all seemed to be unself-consciously joining in the music, clapping, adding extra parts, joining in with the choir. In the choir loft, in the pulpit, and in the audience, the entire church was rocking and soaring with the music, and the music and the singing were extraordinarily contagious. When the prayer meeting was over, the tearful youngsters in the first row came back and greeted and shook hands with those of us sitting in the second.

In the car on the way home, I discovered that everyone was deep in thought. Cindy, quite moved, said "That prayer meeting was great; I wish I were a black person—if I were, I would definitely belong to that church." I pursued her thought. "Why do you have to be black to go there; we went, didn't we?" Cindy said, "But I still felt unnatural." Soph complained about my dragging everyone to the front, saying, "You just about took us to the front row." They had been meaning to sit at the very back. Soph said that the thing that had scared her the most was when the young black people in the front row had turned around and faced us four white ladies (leaving me out) and made us particularly uncomfortable with ourselves. "But I didn't think about color," I said. "It would be great if we could get that black Ph.D. preacher to come to 'our' church sometime." Amber immediately replied, "Even though Dr. Churn's preaching really moved people, and her sermon was rich in emotion, it lacked depth. Faith is the head plus the heart. Otherwise, once the emotion is gone, the faith would just wither. Today the recovering addicts were overcome with tears, but if they don't have rational belief to hold on to, just wait and see, their recovery will be temporary." Cheryl didn't agree; she said that she really liked that kind of preaching, and the lively and warm atmosphere of the black people's prayer meeting. Some sermons needed to be simple, others incisive; some needed to be lively, others profound; it depended on the audience; Mark's sermons were suited to the believers of the First Free Methodist Church, because most of them were intellectuals; if he took his sermons to that black church, they wouldn't necessarily be welcomed.

I remember the first time I called the church "our church." When I spoke to Steve and to friends at the university, I would call it "my landlady Amber's church." After half a year, at the time of our "adventure" to the black church, I blurted out "our church," indicating my change in identity; it had been an unconscious process. From that time on, I began to use "our church" with Amber and friends from the church, but as a matter of participating in the church's activities, having friends in the church, and liking the preaching and the music. It had nothing to do with believing in Jesus or God. "If the speaker doesn't mean it, then it's nonsense to the listener." On the twenty-third of March, Cheryl and I were chatting. "I was really happy when I heard you say 'our church,'" she told me. "Are you planning to become a church member before you go back to China?" I curtly replied, "No, I don't plan on joining the church." She said, "This is a hope of mine, that you will be able to join the church before you leave America." I was quiet for a minute, pondering how I could explain myself to Cheryl, but I quickly gave up the effort. I knew that she wanted to "save" me, and I had already answered her. Cheryl was sad, and went to the living room to speak with Amber.

Upstairs by myself, I guessed that they were discussing whether or not I would become a believer. This made me somewhat confused. Cheryl knew my attitude toward joining the church. Even though she had never discussed it with me directly, she had frequently broached the subject indirectly. One time, during a deep discussion about salvation, the hereafter, and eternal life, she talked about faith being the core question, and asked me, "Do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe in God?" I changed the direction of the conversation, and said instead, "In our homeland, Yi people worship ancestors, and believe in ghosts and spirits; they have never heard that there's a God, or of Jesus, so they can't even talk about believing or not believing—will they ever be able to be saved? Will they ever be able to go to Heaven?" Without pausing at all, Cheryl answered, "If you don't believe in God and don't believe in Jesus, then of course you can't be saved." "Your God is unfair," I replied. "Not knowing is not a sin." This seemed to stump her. Several days later, Cheryl came upstairs specifically to tell me, "If God's gospel has never been transmitted to your homeland, God couldn't, just because of that, not care about your Yi people; even though they worship idols and believe in many gods, they can still get God's forgiveness and salvation, and after they die, they can go to heaven and be together with God and have eternal life. But those who heard God's gospel and refused his message would forever be unable to enter heaven

and have eternal life." Right then, I understood the cleverness and sharpness of Cheryl's discourse.

Shortly after Cheryl had moved to Queen Anne, she took the church's membership class. I wanted to go with her, but she said that it was impossible; the membership class was for those who were already believers and had decided to become church members. But I never gave up. The membership class did not run on a regular schedule; whenever there were people who wanted to join, a class could be organized. On the third of March, 1997, the Order of Worship gave notice that the church was about to run another membership class. The theme of the training was "How to be a member of the Free Methodist Church and a Christian." I immediately told Amber that the membership training class was very important for understanding the church, and that I would really like to audit it. When the service was over, Amber said that she would ask Mark whether he would allow me to join in. She was probably afraid that if I had gone directly to ask Mark publicly, it would have put him in a difficult position. Not five minutes later, Amber came back all sunny and told me that Mark had agreed. I jumped up happily, thanking Amber and sighing to her that Mark really was an open-minded pastor.

Amber said that she was thinking of reviewing her religious knowledge, so we went to the class together. It began with self-introductions. From these, I learned that Mark's parents had both been missionaries, and that in 1940 they had been ready to go to China to proselytize, but that it had not happened, and they had ended up going to India. Mark had been born in India, and was baptized into the Baptist Church at the age of twelve. In India he had attended a boarding school run by British people, but had returned to America for higher education. He had joined the Methodist Church in 1982. Mark's class was divided into two time periods, in which he discussed four main subjects: the conditions for being a Christian, the history of the Methodist Church, the basic beliefs of the Methodist Church, and the structure and function of the church. To accompany his explanations, Mark passed out materials. The one I liked best was "Our Family Tree," a historical record of the Methodist Church, which used an anthropological genealogy chart to trace the important people and events of that church, from its founding by John Wesley (1703–1791) up through 1977.

A lot of the things that Mark explained were things that I would not have been able to learn in my year of observation and experience. For example, in his talks, Mark compared the Protestant Church (of which the Methodists are a denomination) with the Catholic Church, arguing with the Catholic doctrine of placing the pope's authority on par with that of the Bible, and disapproving of the Catholic Church's determination of the special powers and roles of priests. I'm afraid that the detail and strength of his impressions of the factional struggles within Christianity were difficult for an outsider to understand. I asked Mark about a few of these questions, such as the difference between Baptists and Methodists. His answer was that the Baptists place more emphasis on emotion and faith, while the Methodists place more emphasis on rationality and wisdom. I regret that Mark was so busy with his church affairs, and that I didn't have more time to discuss religion with him. But, in all honesty, no matter how much Amber and Soph said he was fair-minded and egalitarian, not stern and distant like some ministers, and however much he encouraged me to speak with him, deep down I was always a little bit afraid of him.

I'm sure that Amber joined the membership class to review her knowledge of the church, and not just to accompany me. Amber is a believer who never gives up her religious quest. Her grandfather was a missionary, and her father was a professor of economics at Seattle Pacific University and a devout believer. According to Amber, they were "God's men." But Amber had been a religious rebel in her youth; she had investigated Buddhism from Asia and the Mormon Church from her native America. After flitting about for over ten years, in 1985 she returned to her original church, the First Free Methodist Church. Amber told me that even though she had come full circle, and had established her belief in Jesus and in God, she still had questions, and she was still looking for answers; spiritual growth was a lifelong project. Daily morning prayer was something that she would not be budged from. Reading the Bible, praying, reading religious books, keeping personal notes—Amber was diligent and determined. I once kidded her, "Amber, if you were writing a doctoral dissertation, it would have come out a long time ago." Actually, when talking with her, I felt that she was not a blind believer; she had done rigorous research.

I remember attending a dinner at the Seventh-day Adventist Church one Saturday. I was a little bit bothered by the fact that the Adventists paid so much attention to the diet and were so picky about nutrition, and when I returned, I discussed it with Amber. This began one of Amber's "comparative religion" sessions. According to Amber the Seventh-day Adventist Church placed its focus on bodily nourishment and thus lost sight of something more important: the growth and elevation of the spirit. The Baptist Church placed its focus on the rite of baptism, but in reality baptism is only a form, and to place too much emphasis on form was not the same as having firm belief in and sincere loyalty to God. Catholics were always going to worship the Blessed Mother, and how could there be any good in approaching God and Jesus through the Blessed Mother? God had a calling for everybody. It was impossible that Mary was different from everyone else just because she had given birth to Jesus. Amber felt that her own church could understand God from all angles, and didn't "select the sesame seed and lose the watermelon." This made her feel very fortunate.

After I had lived with Amber for two or three months, I gradually realized that, except when she invited guests to a formal dinner on Sunday, she didn't pray to thank God for food. During the first few months of my stay she had prayed—perhaps to proclaim that she was a believer or to let the woman who had come to research religion feel what it was like—but after we began to understand each other, saying grace had become unimportant. She didn't need to keep up appearances. After I realized that, I gradually left off basing my research on such external manifestations as saying grace before meals.

In comparison to Amber, Cheryl was much more open to other religions. She accompanied me to Greek and Finnish churches, a mosque, and a Tibetan Buddhist temple. I remember that Greek Orthodox church, whose interior was filled with icons of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. Cheryl commented that Christians are always criticizing other religions' worship of idols, but that Christians also have idols. I could see that she was speaking critically, but her loyalty was still clear. Unlike Amber, Cheryl identified with Christianity in general, but was also curious about other religions.

Our visit to the mosque was not terribly happy for Cheryl. At breakfast on Saturday, July 19, I told Cheryl that I would like to see a mosque. Cheryl suggested that we call first. She said that Islamic mosques didn't welcome visitors as Christian churches did, which allowed you to just go in. So I called the Islamic mosque. I got an answering machine. Luckily, I called a second number, the Evergreen Islamic Institute. They told me that I was welcome to visit at 2:00 p.m. I looked up the address, and it was far away. Cheryl volunteered to drive me, and told me to put on something long-sleeved, since women were not allowed to go into the mosque uncovered.

At 1:50 p.m., Cheryl and I drove up in front of a simple little mosque, a gray building with a basketball court outside the front door. We were received by a middle-aged man named Khalid Ridha, who spoke with us on a bench outside the mosque. Khalid Ridha was very articulate; he introduced himself as a Kurd who had emigrated from Kurdistan to America seventeen years earlier. I asked him if he was used to America, and if he felt that there was religious freedom here. He said that America was a good place to live, and that although the people were prejudiced against Islam as a religion (for example, it was difficult for a woman wearing a headscarf to find a job), compared to where he had come from, it was much freer. He drew the analogy that American religious freedom was sweet water, but that the water still had a bitter taste. He said that there are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, 6 million of them in America. But he felt the figure was not accurate, because American society was prejudiced against Muslims, so that many believers did not publicly admit their religion. Because Muslims had a high fertility rate and a lot of children, the number of believers was rising rapidly; he guessed that there were probably 10 million Muslims in the United States. In the Seattle area, there were seven mosques and 27,000 believers, including not only Middle Easterners but also quite a few blacks and a few American whites. What he was saying was that Muslims are a diverse community.

I asked about seeing the mosque. As we were walking toward the mosque, I took out my camera, thinking to ask Cheryl to take a picture of me and Khalid Ridha with the mosque as background. He cleverly deflected my interest, pointing to a one-story building next to the basketball court and saying that that was their daycare. Khalid Ridha led a group of cute four- and five-year-old children from the building; most

16.2 Bamo Ayi and preschool girls, Evergreen Islamic Institute, Seattle, 1997.

of the girls were wearing headscarves (fig. 16.2). As they were lining up for a picture, a little girl turned around and asked innocently, "Why do you want to have your picture taken with us?" I said, "Because you are so pretty and so cute."

Cheryl and I did as Khalid Ridha did, and took off our shoes when we entered the mosque. He said that a mosque is a sacred place, and one cannot bring in the dirt from outside; it appeared that taking off one's shoes was more than good hygiene. The inside of the mosque was divided by a wooden door, separating the men's and women's worshipping places. Khalid Ridha told us that that was a tradition, a custom, and not, as people thought, a prejudice against women. He said that the mosque had formerly been a church; it had been bought by the Islamic congregation because it faced precisely toward Mecca. I picked up a Qur'an from a rack next to me, and noticed that it had Arabic and English on facing pages. I asked Khalid Ridha what language they used in their prayer services. He said that they used only Arabic for prayers, but that the sermons were in English. I'm pretty sure that Khalid Ridha

did not know that Cheryl was a Christian; if he had, he may not have made the following comparison between Islam and Christianity:

> The Bible was not put together until 300 years after Jesus died. How many of the apostles' recollections and memories were accurate? How much of it really came from Jesus' sayings? How much of it really accords with God's will? It is difficult to say. Also, with so many editions of the Bible, which ones are real? But our Qur'an only has one edition, the word of God as recorded by Muhammad, so it is the most reliable. All Muslims in the world read out of one Qur'an.

I looked at Cheryl, who was standing there silently. I thought, luckily it's Cheryl who came with me today, and not Amber, or else there would definitely be a shouting match. Khalid Ridha continued, comparing Jesus and Muhammad. I wanted to hear it. He said:

> We recognize Jesus, but not as the Son of God, like the Christians do; he was the son of people, the son of Mary; he was nothing but a prophet. Islam believes in only one God, one true spirit, and even though Muhammad was the greatest of the prophets, he was only a prophet. Christians, who believe in Jesus in addition to God, are actually polytheists.

After listening this far, I felt that what he was saying must have been trying Cheryl's patience, so I quickly told Khalid Ridha that we had to leave, and thanked him for his hospitality and his explanations.

But Khalid Ridha was deep in his discourse, and as we walked out of the mosque, he accompanied us to our car, continuing, "The contributions of Muslims to American society are greater than Americans can conceive—particularly in the area of social ethics, in the area of rescuing people from lives of crime, we have done a lot of work." I immediately saw a point that I could make, and said that Cheryl and I were also helping the homeless; in fact, we needed to leave right then to go downtown to Operation Nightwatch, since it was already time to cook soup. "But you need to be careful.... there are drugs and alcohol there; it's very dangerous," he said with concern, closing the conversation. Cheryl started the car, I said "good-bye" and "thank you" one more time,

16.3 Cheryl Lee, Bamo Ayi, and Amber Joy at Operation Nightwatch, Seattle, 1997.

and we drove off (fig. 16.3). Cheryl drove without saying anything. I felt a little sorry to have put her through a difficult hour and a half. I decided not to have her go with me to any more mosques.

The next afternoon, Jamil from the Islamic mosque returned my call, and arranged to meet me on Tuesday. I noticed that Islamic believers really weren't as difficult to approach as Cheryl had thought; as soon as we made contact, we had an appointment. On Tuesday afternoon I took the bus to the mosque and waited by the front door for a half hour without seeing anyone. Then an Arabic-looking man walked by, and I approached him for help. He said there was someone named Jamil, and asked me to come to his house to wait; his house was right next door. His wife, Monica, enthusiastically poured tea, and we easily struck up a conversation. Monica had eight children, the oldest was twenty-one, and the youngest, four; they had come to Seattle five years earlier because of her husband's business. In heavily South-Asian-accented English she told me that because there were so many children in the family, she needed to do housework and watch the children, so she had not learned English well. But in order to get American citizenship, she had to study English so that she could take the naturalization test. Her brother was married recently, but she hadn't been able to attend; without U.S. citizenship, she might have had trouble coming back. She brought out the book that she was studying for me to look at: *Voices of Freedom: English and Civics for the U.S. Citizenship Exam.* There was a picture of the Statue

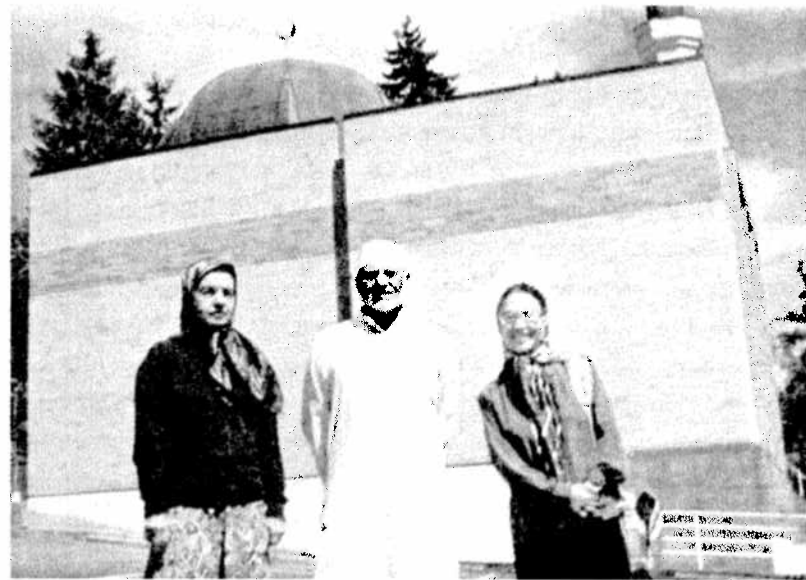
of Liberty on the cover, and the contents included U.S. maps, U.S. geography, states and capitals, religion, the flag, government organizations, Congress, the president, the Supreme Court, and so on. She said that she went to citizenship class twice every week; the students in the class came from all over the world, including some from China.

After a little while, three of her daughters and two of her sons came home; the daughters were all wearing scarves. The beautiful, twenty-one-year-old oldest daughter was a first-year student at a community college; she was studying computers. She said that she had begun to like America, because, in comparison with women in Pakistan, the women there had a much easier life, without such strict restrictions. With regard to fertility, she told us that her mother was one of eight children, and her father one of eleven; her mother had given birth to ten, of whom two had died and eight were left. She explained that abortion was strictly forbidden in Pakistan, so women gave birth to children until they couldn't give birth anymore; their burden was very heavy. The reasons were, first, that Allah did not allow the murder of living things, and a fetus was a living thing, and, second, that Pakistan had been fighting wars since the 1940s, and had lost a lot of people, so they needed to increase their population. Her eight-year-old little brother told me that he didn't like America, and when I asked him why, he said he just didn't like it. This little boy had come to America when he was only three, and should not have had any memory of Pakistan, I thought. I told Monica that I couldn't wait for Jamil to arrive, but that I would be back for prayers on Friday. She warned me that I couldn't go in by the main door, but needed to use the side door to go upstairs to the women's worship hall.

On Friday afternoon, I put on a scarf that I had borrowed from Amber and went to the mosque; using the side door, I went upstairs to the women's worship hall, which was full of women and children. They were mostly Arabs, with a few blacks and whites. I had arrived half an hour late, and the prayers had already started. I sat in the front row, hoping to be able to see what was going on in the big room below. Through the square-patterned grate, I noticed that I could see only the clergy who were leading the service; the other men were not in my field of view, but I could hear the resonant voices of the worshippers. The mullah lead-

ing the service was wearing a turban, and looked a little bit like Yasir Arafat. I performed the complicated bodily motions of praying according to what the women beside me were doing; when I first started, I didn't have the order right, and was a bit clumsy of hand and foot. There was a cacophony upstairs, a mixture of prayers, crying, and the admonitions of mothers. But I could distinguish that the language being used for prayers below was Arabic, and that the English translation was given section by section, unlike the sentence-by-sentence translation given at the Sakya Tibetan Monastery in Seattle. The translator was an Arab with a heavy accent. I could not hear clearly or understand. The service at the Islamic mosque, like that at the Tibetan monastery, was very simple—nothing more than prostrations, prayers, and a sermon.

When the service was over, I met Jamil, wearing a white cap and robe, and his American wife, wearing a scarf. Jamil was about sixty, and very enthusiastic. As soon as he saw me, he told me that he had been to China, and that the white cap he was wearing had been given to him by a Chinese Muslim. I asked him if he were the imam, and he said that I could call him that. Anyone who was knowledgeable and could lead prayers could be an imam. He explained that a mosque of that size had only one full-time caretaker; everyone else was a volunteer. Jamil proudly told me that the mosque was Seattle's largest, built in 1981. He said that Seattle had eight mosques (which didn't agree with Khalid Ridha), of which two were converted churches and six had been built as mosques. There were believers of every race, not just Arab, because Allah was the God of all races, all over the world. With regard to the language used for the prayers, Jamil said that it was required to use Arabic to read the Qur'an, because it was originally written in Arabic, and so one could not use any other language in its place. But in exegesis, one could use an English translation. The mosque was a Sunni mosque. Jamil said that the Qur'an was one book, and that Muslims were one family. I asked him how many people had been at prayers that day, and he said that it was difficult to count, but that he guessed there had been more than 600. Jamil had come to the United States in 1947, and before retiring had been an engineer at Boeing; he had six children. He had prepared for me two books that he had written: one was on the Hajj, or Pilgrimage to Mecca. It was a guide to the route of the pilgrimage, the



16.4 Bamo Ayi with Imam Jamil and his wife, Islamic Mosque, Seattle, 1997.

process, the clothing, the restrictions, the places, and so on. The other book was entitled *Islam: The Perfect Way of Life*. Before saying good-bye, I had my picture taken next to the mosque with Jamil and his wife. In the heat of summer, his wife and I were both wearing scarves (fig. 16.4).

At the end of 1996, Amber and Gwendolyn had hatched a plan to buy a house together, and, after many prayer sessions and a half-year of busyness, on May 1, 1997, everybody finally moved to Shoreline, a suburb of Seattle. The new home was a long way from the university, and I had to change buses twice; it took three hours for a round-trip. But I had become fond of Amber, and I didn't want to look for another landlady. I also still needed to go to church and understand religion. Cheryl and Jason also moved with us, but this time Jason became a tenant of his sister Gwendolyn downstairs. Catty-corner from the house was a little gray church, with a sign saying that it was the Seattle Christian Assembly. When I went past, I saw a lot of Chinese-speaking people going in and out, which tempted me to do something I had long wanted to do—visit a Chinese people's church. Because I was away on two trips, it wasn't until Sunday, July 7, that I got Amber to go to church there with me.

The church was small, but it was packed with people. A tall, middle-aged woman, seeing that we were new faces, helped us find two places in the crowd. I thought that we had been lucky to come during communion, but after I had gone a few times, I discovered that the church emphasized communion, which was the first event in the service each Sunday. The entire service was focused on Jesus—thanking Jesus for washing away the sins of humanity with his own blood, thanking Jesus for interceding between people and God. The service was conducted in Standard Chinese, with the sermon being translated into English. There was no choir, only a piano accompanist and someone at the side leading the singing.

Because it was just after Independence Day, the title of the sermon was "Freedom and God." It began with the story of Grandfather Zeng, a member who had just passed his citizenship test at the age of ninety-one, after many years of effort. The minister said,

> America is a free country, and God has opened the door of saving grace, allowing everyone to have the good fortune of becoming Americans. But this free country is full of materialism, sex, violence, and sin. If we use our freedom carelessly, we will encounter danger and be damaged, even to the point that we may exterminate ourselves. If we don't have God's love, if we leave God's embrace, the free country may become the most unfree of places. Only if you believe in God and allow God to be your protector can you achieve true freedom, only the Gospel is an eternally free country.

The English translation of the service was very well done. Amber praised the sermon, saying that the minister was able to take advantage of the timing of Independence Day, cleverly moving from Grandpa Zeng's citizenship to the main topic of the sermon; he was undoubtedly an experienced minister who had graduated from seminary. Actually, the minister, whose name was Zeng Jincai, had gotten a computer degree and had worked at a very influential computer company in Washington State. Later on, following God's call, he had given up his high-salaried position to become an impoverished minister. Pastor Zeng's wife was called Yingmei; it was she who had shown us to our seats. Yingmei had been a dominating basketball player, a famous member of the national team in Taiwan. She was now retired, taking care of her husband and children, and helping him run the church. I was invited to their house for dinner. I didn't think that the athlete Yingmei would cook an excellent meal; but it was the most elaborate and tasty Chinese dinner I had eaten since I arrived in America.

The year passed quickly, and it was time to go home. I went to church to say good-bye to Mark, and to thank him for letting me participate in church activities—particularly his church membership class—and to thank him and his parishioners for a year of caring. Mark said, "It seems like you are already a member of our church; when you leave, we will miss you." After Amber and I had said all our good-byes in the church offices and were ready to get in the car, Mark hurried out of the church with a book in his hand. He told me that it was a book he had just written, called *Spirituality in a Mixed-up Age*. It was an advance copy that he had just received; I was the first person to get a copy. On the way home from church, Amber and I went to Pastor Zeng's church to say good-bye to him and Yingmei.

On the morning of September 30, 1997, in the waiting room of Sea-Tac Airport, as I was saying a reluctant good-bye to Steve after the announcement came to board the plane, an out-of-breath Pastor Zeng suddenly appeared in front of us. He handed me several books on Christianity and a couple of presents for my daughter, and said a special prayer for my trip. He prayed to the Lord for my safe journey and to help me to come soon to believe in the Lord. Taking with me Pastor Zeng's blessing and Steve's friendship, I left Seattle and America.