

PASSAGE TO MANHOOD: Youth Migration, Heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China. By *Shao-hua Liu*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011. xiv, 232 pp. (Figures, maps.) US\$22.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-8047-7025-5.

With *Passage to Manhood*, Shao-hua Liu has produced an engaging and innovative contribution to several fields of study. Readers concerned with more specialized branches of China studies, such as rural development, ethnic minorities or social change, will find this book a very significant addition to the field, but also those looking for a singular perspective from China on modernity and globalization or on issues in the discipline of medical anthropology should read *Passage to Manhood*.

As an anthropologist who has worked for the last fifteen years in the same prefecture as the author, i.e., Liangshan in Sichuan Province in Southwest China, albeit on a different ethnic group, I would first emphasize the value of this book as a carefully researched and well-written ethnography. Numbering around two million, the Nuosu people are a relatively large ethnic group living in a mountainous area on the border of ethnic Tibet, in other words, in the periphery of modernizing China. In the official ethnic classification scheme in the People's Republic of China they have been lumped together with other groups with whom they share certain linguistic affinities into the larger Yi national minority. Until the communist take-over, the clan-based Nuosu communities had only limited contact with the Han Chinese and their institutions. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, things changed when opium growing was introduced in Liangshan and Nuosu; Han interactions gradually increased. In the name of scientific development and in an effort to direct Nuosu loyalty towards the Communist Party, in 1956 the new regime embarked on a prolonged effort to destroy the traditional clan fabric of Nuosu society while providing, through the commune system, access to basic but free medical care to even the most remote villages. With the new market-oriented reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the Nuosu were presented with new opportunities, including the option to find jobs in the cities to improve their standard of living. The downside was that they lost the social security services provided by the commune. They were left to their own devices to confront the challenges of Chinese capitalist modernity and were quick to realize that the party state was not concerned with interfering in a partial restoration of their traditional clan-based social organization.

This is the backdrop for Liu's analysis of the increasingly widespread use of heroin among young Nuosu in Liangshan. Based on the fieldwork she conducted in a remote Nuosu community in the first decade of the new millennium, she explores the possible reasons for such a development while she also addresses the impact of the HIV/

AIDS epidemic that has hit the Nuosu as a result of the intravenous drug use. Tempted by the lures of making money and having a good time, young Nuosu travel to the big cities of China. While many return home again after only a couple of months, they take with them their new habits, such as the use of heroin. Inspired by the theories of Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim and Yunxiang Yan, Liu sees this risk-taking behaviour in the light of the increasing individualization of Chinese society brought about by capitalist modernity. For young Nuosu men, the stints in the city, with its enticements and dangers, have become important ingredients in establishing masculine identity and as such they constitute a new "rite of passage." Unfortunately for many of the men, after this transitory phase of liminality spent in the socio-economic margins of the Chinese urban modernity, their lives and that of their families are thoroughly devastated by heroin addiction, AIDS or prison, or any combination of these three calamities.

Liu further shows how the partially restored clan structures are not up to the task of solving the challenges to the individuals or the local community. Neither can the international HIV/AIDS NGO community contribute with any successful intervention. The main reason for this, according to Liu, is the refusal by representatives of the Chinese party state to acquire the necessary cultural competence. In the present setting it is simply politically inconceivable that central or local bureaucrats would be able to work *with* communities, taking into account and respecting their particularities.

Passage to Manhood is a distressing illustration of how the forces of globalization can wreak havoc, even in the more isolated corners of the globe. While Liu first of all has produced a solid piece of academic writing that adds a wealth of new knowledge and insights, she allows her book also to play an activist role in that it both directs attention to the predicament of a marginal group in China's breath-taking socio-economic rise and delivers some lessons that can be drawn from the unsuccessful attempts at getting rid of the twin scourges of heroin use and HIV/AIDS.

While Liu does not shy away from engaging theory relevant for her argument, the final result is a well-balanced and well-written book that is enjoyable to read.

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