FOREGO

The publication of Thomas Heberer’s Doing Business In Rural China marks at least three mileposts for the University of Washington Press series on Studies on Ethnic Groups in China, its editor, and its authors. This is the tenth book in the series, and it appears in the first return of the Year of the Pig, which saw the inaugural volume Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers. And it appears in the dinghai Year of the Golden Pig, the birth year and thus sixtieth birthday year both for my dear friend and age mate Thomas Heberer and for me.

Professor Heberer is justly known for re-introducing the study of the Nuosu, or Yi of Liangshan, to the scholarly literature in Western languages. As an editor and translator for Peking Rundschau (the German edition of the Chinese government magazine Peking Review) in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was granted what was then rare access to the minority areas of southwest China, in particular the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Sichuan. His visits to the prefectural capital of Xichang and to the counties of Zhaojue, Meigu, Xide, and Yuexi led to the publication, in 1984, of his pioneering work Nationalitätenpolitik und Entwicklungspolitik in den Gebieten Nationaler Minderheiten in China (Nationality politics and development politics in national minority areas of China). This was his first monograph and the first work in a European language to treat the Nuosu in detail since Lin Yaohua’s 1947 Liangshan Yijia (translated into English as Lolo of Liangshan in 1962). The general and theoretical sections of Heberer’s monograph appeared in a very abridged, but nonetheless informative and influential English edition, China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation (1987), but the rich ethnographic and empir-
tical sections dealing with his initial research in Liangshan remained inaccessible to those unable to read German.

Since that first book, Thomas Heberer has written or edited a long series of monographs and volumes of essays, on topics as diverse as the political legacy of Mao Zedong, corruption in China, women’s political participation in Asia, and Chinese rock music. But he has never given up his interest in Liangshan or the Nuosu people who live there, and in the intervening years he has published many articles in German, English, and Chinese, as well as organized two museum exhibits of Nuosu arts and crafts. He was a participant in the First International Conference on Yi Studies, held in Seattle in 1995, and organized the Second International Conference at his former University of Trier in 1998. Most notably, he secured the funding to endow a large elementary school in the county seat of Meigu, where the opening ceremonies were held for the Fourth International Conference in 2005. In the years from 1999 to 2002, he had the opportunity to return to his scholarly roots in Liangshan and to collaborate with colleagues at the Liangshan Prefecture Nationalities Research Institute in a four-year study of an important, emerging phenomenon—the rise of entrepreneurs among a people for whom business and commerce were previously despised occupations. Through four summers of rain, mud, jeeps, and drink, Heberer and his colleagues visited almost all of Liangshan’s seventeen counties, interviewed more than a hundred Nuosu and Han entrepreneurs, and collected reams of statistics on local economic development and the role of entrepreneurs in the local economy and society.

When Professor Heberer approached me about including a prospective monograph on Liangshan entrepreneurs in the Studies on Ethnic Groups in China series, I was enthusiastically receptive. Because of differing styles of writing and editing in German- and English-language scholarly publications, and because of the vagaries of translation, it has taken longer than any of us wished to bring the book to fruition. But it has been well worth the wait. This is the first study in a Western language of minority entrepreneurs anywhere in China, and one of the most detailed ethnographic accounts of any facet of Nuosu life or culture. In it, Heberer combines his scholarly training as a political scientist with his natural talent as an ethnographer to present us with both the daily life of Nuosu entrepreneurs and the larger social, political, and developmental contexts in which they live and work. His discussions of entrepreneurship and poverty, entrepreneurship and development, entrepreneurship and ethnicity have implications far beyond the detailed study of one remote region in China, shedding light
on the role of entrepreneurs in economic peripheries all over today’s glob-
alizing world.

What makes this work so special is perhaps best expressed by my mem-
ory of a conversation with the author and his wife, Jing, about the benefits
so much.” *Von Thomas Heberger haben wir alle so viel gelernt.*

STEVE HARRELL
Seattle, April 2007