

Boredom, Everydayness and the Institutionalized Flirting and Courting of the *Hmub* in Eastern Guizhou

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ABSTRACT

The local Miao term *rat* is used commonly to express personal feelings--boredom, dullness, or having nothing to do -- in the daily life of the *Hmub* villagers in Eastern Guizhou. In contrast to the bustling of seasonal festivals or rites, *rat* represents a specific kind of bodily experience and feeling related to the work and leisure of *Hmub* that fully displays the tone of everydayness. With regard to its content, situation or meaning, boredom is often considered a distinguishing feature of people's everyday life and work in industrial or capitalized society, or simply, the West. In the highland *Hmub* villages, which are still based on agricultural production but have a close relationship with the local commercial market economy, is the *rat* of the villagers any different from the feeling of boredom in the industrial Western society? If so, what are the differences? This paper is based particularly on the ethnographic data of my field notes and diary written from 1998 to 2000. I will describe and analyze the *iut fub*, institutionalized courting or flirting, of *Hmub* youths and the features and transformation of their boredom, personal feelings and experiences of *rat* in the context of work and leisure in Fangf Bil village. Finally I will discuss the agency of *iut fub*, which for the *Hmub* young villagers is not necessarily followed by marriage. It is a 'zone' in the community where an individual can display their everydayness and subjectivity through experiences of physical contact and expressed feelings.

Keywords: institutionalized flirting and courting, everydayness, bodily experience, *Hmub*, Eastern Guizhou

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