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Introduction

QINGHAI 海青 PROVINCE is China's fourth largest major administrative region (province, autonomous region, special economic zone). It occupies a vast area in northwest China and is located southeast of Xinjiang 新疆 Uygur Autonomous Region, north of Tibet Autonomous Region, northwest of Sichuan 四川 Province, and west of Gansu 甘肅 Province. Qinghai is divided into five Tibetan autonomous prefectures (Yul shul, Yushu 玉樹; Mgo log, Guoluo 果洛; Mtsho byang, Haibei 海北; Mtsho lho, Hainan 海南; Rma lho, Huangnan 黃南), Mtsho nub (Haixi 海西) Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the densely populated Haidong Region 海東地區 located in east-central Qinghai, and two municipalities (Xining 西寧, Zi ling; Ge'ermu 格爾木, Gor mo, Golmud).¹ Home to the headwaters of three of Asia's most important rivers (Yellow, Yangtze, and Mekong), Qinghai's extensive land area of 721,000 square kilometers makes it nearly twice the size of Germany. Yul shul Prefecture alone is larger than Nepal.

The next census in the year 2000 will show that Qinghai's population is approximately five million, making it the second least populated of China's major administrative regions after Tibet. This population consists of the majority Han 漢, Hui 回 (Chinese-speaking Muslims), Monguor (a

Mongolian minority also referred to as Tu 土),² Salar (Turkic-speaking Muslims), and Mongolians. There are other people who do not easily fit into any ethnic category: the Mangghuer-speaking Tibetans in Minhe 民和 Hui and Mangghuer Autonomous County, Haidong Region; Tibetan-speaking Hui in Hualong 化隆 (Dpal lung), Hui Autonomous County, Haidong Region; and the Tibetan-speaking Mongols in Henan 河南 Mongolian Autonomous County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The Qinghai Han may be placed into two approximate categories: Han who have lived in Qinghai for many years and who have been much influenced by central Asian peoples; and Han who came to Qinghai after Liberation in 1949.

Most of Qinghai's population lives in Haidong Region, where agriculture (wheat, barley, oil-seed crops, potatoes, corn, and vegetables) is the main source of livelihood. The autonomous prefectures, in contrast, are areas where rearing yaks and sheep is more common than agriculture, particularly at high altitudes.

I moved to Xining, the capital of Qinghai, in 1987, and I have lived here since, except when I lived in Mongolia between 1992 and 1993. Teaching English has provided me with the opportunity to become acquainted with peoples from many areas of Qinghai. These articles are an outgrowth of those relationships and are all devoted to Qinghai folklore: a Salar wedding, the musical characteristics of Minhe Mangghuer wedding songs, Tibetan tricksters, a Monguor village exorcism performed in winter, and songs performed during Spring Festival in a Han village near Xining. The first author for each of the articles is a Salar, Tibetan, Monguor, or Han resident of Qinghai.

The article on Tibetan tricksters focuses on the trickster in Tibetan narratives—a topic that has received inadequate attention compared with the more extensive research on tricksters in Central Asia such as Balgansang, Afanti, and Nasreddin.

The Salar wedding article is the first major wedding study of this ethnic group that has a population exceeding 90,000. The study reviews the relevant literature, describes the wedding process, and presents wedding songs and speeches in the Salar written system with English translations. The article was co-authored by two young Salar academics whose knowledge of Salar culture informs the article in major ways. This is an important contribution to our knowledge of minority weddings in China.

The article on the musical characteristics of the noninstrumental Minhe Mangghuer weddings songs is the first major study of Minhe Mangghuer songs. The context and a discussion of the music of approximately thirty songs provide important data. This material is a summary of a

much larger ongoing study begun by Zhu Yongzhong 朱永忠 and Kevin Stuart in 1991 of the Minhe Mangghuer wedding songs. We have, as of 1999, written several hundred pages of original texts of songs that have been tape-recorded and partially translated. These songs, like much of traditional Qinghai folklore, are rapidly disappearing.

“Laughing on the Beacon Tower’: Spring Festival Songs From Qinghai, China” represents a team effort (a village resident, a linguist, a musicologist, and specialists in Qinghai folklore) that has produced an article that provides a context for the songs, IPA and Chinese characters for the songs, an English translation of the lyrics, and the musical scores for the songs. The authors recognize the importance of rendering the songs in the local Chinese dialect because rhyme schemes are better preserved and because this provides a record of a local Qinghai Chinese dialect that is speedily changing as the result of education and media presentations in modern standard Chinese.

Although rituals with exorcistic content are common in Qinghai, to our knowledge, the ritual in Gnyan thog Village is unique. It is performed in winter by young men who are aided by a trance medium. The residents of Gnyan thog Village, who are Tibetan Buddhists, are classified as Monguor, but they have been referred to as “Baoan” 保安 by some writers. Norbu and Zhu Yongzhong visited Gnyan thog Village in 1996 and videotaped and photographed the ritual. This article is the first to provide a detailed description of the ritual. It also offers comments on the possible origins of village residents.

These articles on the folklore of Muslims, Turkic people, Mongols, Tibetans, and long-time Qinghai Han residents emphasize how little we know about the folklore of “China”—a collection of many different cultures living across a vast area.

Finally, we sincerely thank Peter Knecht and Clark Chilson for their helpful critique of these articles.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Mr. Kun mchog dge legs for his help in rendering the Tibetan and Chinese.

2. The Monguor were classified as the “Tu” nationality by the Chinese government in the 1950s. We use Mangghuer to refer to residents of Minhe Hui and Mangghuer (Tu) Autonomous County and Mongghul to refer to residents of Huzhu 互助 Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County because these are the terms the people themselves use. When we do not know what term the people call themselves, we use the term “Monguor.”