The Xunhua Sala

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INTRODUCTION

Most Qinghai Sala live in Xunhua County in eastern Qinghai in an area drained by the Yellow River and characterized by many steep mountains. The county is located at 102.1′E–102.7′E and 35.4′N–35.8′N and is approximately 90 km long and 40 km wide (CHEN and FAN 1988, 90; ANONYMOUS 1984a, 160).

China's Sala population is 69,000 with 90% of that number living in Xunhua County, accounting for 60% of the county's total population. Other locations in Qinghai with significant Sala populations include Hualong 化隆 Hui Autonomous County (7,900), Xining 西寧, Huangnan 黃南 Tibetan Prefecture, Jianzha 尖扎 County, and Haixi 海西 Mongolian and Tibetan Prefecture. In Gansu, Sala are found in Baoan 保安, Dongxiang 東鄉, and Sala Autonomous County (4,000); Dahejia 大河家, Sibaozi 四堡子, Liuji 劉集, Zhumatan 吹麻灘, and Shiyuan 什園 villages of Jishishan 積石山 County; Xiahe; Lanzhou 蘭州; and Linxia 臨夏. In Xinjiang 新疆 Sala are found in Urumqi, and Salayuzi 撒拉玉孜 and Salafang 撒拉坊 villages. The Sala living in Xinjiang moved there, seeking refuge from social turbulence in the Qinghai-Gansu region (MA 1986, 105–109; ANONYMOUS 1987a, 68, 69; 1984a, 214, 217–224).

Because of an unusual geographic position, Xunhua County has virtually no winter, creating favorable conditions for agriculture. As are their Tibetan, Baoan, Hui, and Han neighbors, the Sala are for the most part farmers but do keep livestock—mostly sheep and goats with some draft animals. Most of what the largely self-sufficient Sala eat comes from their agricultural production, various grains serving as staple foods.

In terms of clothing, the Sala dress much as do their Han and Hui

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neighbors. Sala women, as do their Hui counterparts, wear open-faced veils.

ORIGINS

The origins of the Sala seem murky at best. Schram, quoting Ma Fu Xiang 馬福祥, argued the Sala may have come to China as early as the Tang 唐 Dynasty (A.D. 618–907) and settled in Xunhua during the Yuan 元 (1271–1368) or Ming 明 (1368–1644) dynasties (SCHRAM 1954, 23). In China, the question is controversial; however, it is commonly held the Sala originated in Central Asia, on the basis of language and physical appearance (ANONYMOUS 1987a, 91).

One line of argument has it that during the time of Genghis Khan, an army branch was organized in the Western Region, including more than 170 households which were called Saerte 撒爾特, Saertewule 撒爾特兀勒, and Saluer 撒魯爾 in various historical materials and were one branch of the Wugusi Tribe during the Sui 隋 (A.D. 581–618) and Tang dynasties (ANONYMOUS 1987a, 92). During the mid-17th century, this branch with other branches moved to Zungeer 準噶爾 Basin (in Xinjiang). During the period A.D. 742–756, areas formerly occupied by the West Tujue 西突厥 were crossed—the Amu 阿姆 River Basin and Xier 希爾 River Basin to Hualazimo 花剌子模 and Huluoshan 呼羅珊 (in northeast Iran) and the Sala became primary subjects of the Saierzhu 塞爾柱 Kingdom (1055–1258). Later, as a result of racial discrimination, they moved westward. Others also left and combined with local Russians and Armenians to become Tukuman 土庫曼 (Turkoman) people. During the 13th century, one branch crossed through Samarkand and the Turpan Basin in the present Xinjiang, moved southward, finally settling in Xunhua (ANONYMOUS 1987b, 1200). During the period 1225–1227, Genghis Khan returned from Central Asia and assaulted the West Xia 西夏 capital (now Yinchuan 銀川, Ningxia 寧夏 Hui Autonomous Region). The Saerte branch participated in this battle. Then Genghis Khan's army went on to breach Sichuan 四川, Xunhua, at that time to the right of the southern advance route, and the Sala army was stationed there (CHEN and FAN 1988, 6–12).

During the Yuan Dynasty, the Hexi Corridor 河西走廊 leading to the central section of the Silk Road was often rendered impassable by frequent battles. Previously, Central Asian and western region Moslems had taken the Silk Road to the Central Plains (along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River), but military strikes forced them to travel the only alternative, a southern route through the Yellow River and Huangshui 湟水 River areas, encompassing Xining and Xunhua.

A differing account argues that historically the Sala were known as Salur (Saluer), which was one tribe of the Oghaz from the first son, Dagh Khan, of Oghaz Khan. Followed by the other Oghaz tribes, this particular tribe moved from the Saihun River, Ili 伊犂 and Isighgol areas to Transoxania, Khorarim, and Khorasm. Later some of these people settled in Eastern Anatolia. The Sala were prominent in the Selzuk Empire and the Selzuk, wanting to scatter and disperse the Oghaz tribes, forced the western movement of most Salur. Those remaining in Marou and Sarakhs were later popularly known as Turkoman. Later, some of these people took the route to Samarkand via Turpan and Suzhou and in time reached Xining, and later were known as the Gansu Salar (ANONYMOUS 1982, 10–11).

One legend, which has some relation to the former, tells of a Samarkand king going to the Central Plains to offer tribute accompanied by two hundred people from a village named Saleer 撒勒爾. When they reached Xunhua, the king left the people, deciding to pick them up on his return. But later, he took a wrong route and was unable to return to Xunhua. The people were thus forgotten, settled in Xunhua, and became Sala (CHEN and FAN 1988, 9).

Camel Spring, near the grounds of the largest Sala mosque (the former old mosque was utterly destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and a new one recently has been built), is surrounded by legends related to the origins of the Sala (QIAN 1988, 111, 118). One tells of two brothers, Galemang 尕勒莽 and Ahemang 阿合莽, beloved by their people but envied and hated by the local king. Persecuted, they left their homes in Samarkand with eighteen people, one white camel, some water, soil, and a Koran to search for a new and happier life. After they set out, another forty-five sympathizers followed them. Passing over a north road along the Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang, they entered Jiayu Guan Pass 嘉峪關. They crossed Suzhou, Ningxia, Tianshui (in Gansu), Gangou, and Lingqiang and came to a place known as Ganjiatan 甘家灘 (in Xiahe 夏河 County, Gansu). The latter forty-five people passed Xinjiang along the South Tianshan 天山 Mountain road and entered Qinghai, passed by the southern shores of Qinghai lake (Kok Nor, West Lake), and reached Yuanzhugou 園珠溝 (in Guide 貴德 County, Qinghai). Twelve people stopped and settled, while others continued east. By coincidence, those who had gone on met Galemang and his group, and together they finally entered Xunhua. They passed through Xichanggou 夕場溝, climbed over Mengda 孟達 Mountain and went up Wutusi 烏土斯 Mountain. At this time, it was dark and they had lost their camel so they lit torches to search for it on the mountain slopes. Later, this slope was named Aotebeinahe 奧特見

那赫 (Fire Slope) and the village below the slope was called Fire Village. Finally, they reached Sand Slope on the east of the Gaizi 街子 Area. Suddenly it became bright, and later Sand Slope was called Tangguti 唐古提 (Daybreak). At dawn, they saw the Gaizi Area stretched out before them—a land criss-crossed with numerous rivers. When they descended the slope, they found their lost camel, which had turned to stone. All the people were extremely happy and when they weighed water from this spring and soil they found the weights identical to those of the water and soil they had brought from their home. Then they decided to go no further (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 22–45). Later, a mosque was erected in this place.

Related to this legend is the camel dance (*duiweiaoyina* 對委奧依納) which was often performed at night during weddings. Hosts invited folk dancers to perform this traditional folk dance. Two people wore furlined jackets, inside out. One led the "camel" and wore a long robe and scarf, representing an *ahong* 阿訇, a title meaning religious leader and here symbolizing the ancestor Galemang. The other man was a "Mongolian" and was called "Blind Man" and represented the common man, ignorant of Islam. The whole performance was one of joyous singing and soliloquy, relating what the ancestors had seen and heard along their long journey to Xunhua. In the dialogue, Blind Man asked, "Where are you from?" The *ahong* answered, "I am from Samarkand." Several place names were mentioned in the dialogue, including Jingzha 金扎 and Mingzha 明扎 along the route from Central Asia to Xunhua (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 24; ZHU 1988, 82–90; QIAN 1988, 11; CHEN and FAN 1988, 11).

The dance was usually performed on threshing grounds without musical instruments or colored clothing. Thousands gathered to watch and listen to questions and answers in the dialogue. The audience often participated, shouting "That's right!" and "Yes!" to urge the performance on. After the main parts of the dance concluded, performers added some original dialogue to get money from the groom's parents to pay for serving visiting guests. Their songs also were at times critical of the groom's parents for being careless in entertaining guests (ZHU 1988, 83). Xunhua is also commonly reputed to have been a Mongolian locale before Sala ancestors came. The Mongols happily sold the land to the Sala (some say they simply gave the land to the Sala) then went to herd on verdant grasslands west of Qinghai Lake. Presently, two old Mongol city ruins—Wendugoukou 文都溝口 and Xichanggoukou 夕場溝口 remain in Xunhua (CHEN and FAN 1988, 13–20).

Frequently overlooked ancestors of the Sala are the Tibetans, who

do constitute one ancestral branch of the Sala. According to local folklore, after early ancestors settled in the region, marriage proposals were made to local Tibetan women. These women agreed but made four demands: Lamaistic Buddhas must be worshipped; a *mani* 嘛呢 *tong* 筒 (*tong* refers to a tube-shaped object and *mani* refers to the six holy true words chanted by those devoted to Lamaism) must be placed on the roof of the home; sutra flags must be hung from a wooden pole in the courtyard; and some Tibetan customs must be accepted. The Sala did not feel the former three conditions were in conformity with Islam but did accept the fourth. This explains why, in recent years, some Sala observe some Tibetan customs such as spilling milk on horse hooves at weddings and placing white stones on the four corners of the courtyard (ANONYMOUS 1982, 14).

THE SALA HOUSE

Most houses are built of adobe and are flat-roofed. In the Mengda region, lumber is readily available and thus some houses are built of wood (CHEN and FAN 1988, 102). Houses are surrounded by an earthen wall courtyard (*zhuangkuo* 莊廓). Every *zhuangkuo* has two door leaves and most have a small flower plot in the middle encircled with stones or a brick wall. The remainder of the space is used for a vegetable garden (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 220). Chinese herbaceous peonies and dahlias are often planted in these flower plots. In Sala, the term *zhuangkuo* may also refer to the family living in the house.

Every *zhuangkuo* is composed of a main room, kitchen, guest room, and stable. The main room is the central part of the house and usually faces south or east, is large, and solidly constructed. The kitchen and guest room are connected with the main room on each side to form a ⌐¬ shape. Rooms are fabricated with wood then built up with clay. Generally, back walls are higher than front ones to permit easy drainage. Roofs are covered with thick boards or tree branches and then coated with a straw mix. White sandy soil is then applied to seal against rain.

The kitchen usually does not have windows but a square skylight. The stove is built from bricks and clay and is nearly one meter high. The chimney of the stove is connected with the back wall and smoke escapes through the roof rear.

The guest room is generally used as a spare room, for storage, and for accommodating visiting guests. Normally, old people sleep on the left side of the main room while young people sleep on the right-hand side of the main room and in the guest room.

The stable is located along the south wall in the southwest corner

of the family compound and may house mules, donkeys, cattle, and sheep. Thatched buildings at the side of the stable may also be built for storing straw and hay.

Windows are all square-framed with the window axle fixed at the top so that the windows open from the bottom. The four window frame corners and the center of the window frame often feature carved flowers. Instead of glass, white paper is used for window panes.

Religion

Sala are Islamic, and in rural areas Islam is taken particularly seriously. The Five Gong 功 (meritorious services) are observed (Chen and Fan 1988, 100). These are: expressing belief in Allah by saying "There are no gods except Allah, and Mohammed is Allah's messenger," religious services done five times daily, Ramadan, tithing, and pilgrimage to Mecca. In 1988, more than fifty Sala travelled to Mecca.

The Gaizi Mosque is the general mosque and is the site of the oldest, largest, and most authoritative Sala mosque. Mosques in each *gong* 工 (commune) are subsidiary and are called *zongsi* 宗寺. Village mosques are third-level mosques (*zhisi* 支寺).

The Sala hold six major beliefs which include belief in Allah, the messengers of Allah, the scriptures (104 scriptures inspired by Allah over different periods such as the Bible, Koran, etc.), the saints (emissaries of Allah), the fact that all things, living or non-living, have been arranged and decided by Allah, and the Later Ages (Heaven after the world has been destroyed).

Gaizhui 尕最, *haiyi* 海依, *yimamu* 依馬目, and *haitibu* 海提布 are regarded as the four major religious leaders. The *gaizhui* is the most authoritative and has power to enforce religious rules and supervise religious rites; *haiyi* lead prayer; *yimamu* teach scriptures; and *haitibu* lead chanting (Anonymous 1984a, 31–32).

Religious institutions in conjunction with the *gong*, *agele* 阿格勒, and *kongmusan* 孔木散 implement rules and religious doctrine. The mosque is the center of religious and social activities. The *da ahong* 大阿訇 (big *ahong*) is the leading religious leader in the mosque and is responsible for leading prayer, teaching, and presiding over religious ceremonies (Chen and Fan 1988, 85, 100). The *ahong* (second *ahong*) leads prayer and is responsible for teaching Arabic and scriptures to *manla* 滿拉 (students—young men learning religious knowledge in the mosque). After passing an examination, they become *ahong*. *Muzhawai* 木扎外 call people to pray. In the past, they climbed the high calling buildings to chant, calling Moslems to prayer, but now loudspeakers installed on calling buildings are used.

One mosque is usually composed of a prayer room, *minaluo* 米那羅 (calling building), bathing room, and classroom. The prayer room is the main room of the mosque. The *minaluo* is located on each side of the prayer room or else between the two doors of a mosque. Large mosques have two *minaluo* while small mosques have but one.

Social Structure

There are five levels of organizations—*gong*, *agele*, *kongmusan*, *agenai* 阿格乃, and *zhuangkuo*. The *gong* includes several villages in the same region and its size is comparable to that of a commune. At present in Xunhua, there are eight *gong*s. The upper four are Gaizi 街子, Chajia 察加, Chahandasi 察汗大寺, and Suzhi. The lower four are Zhangga 張尕, Aiman 崖曼, Qingshui 清水, and Mengda. The upper four *gong*s have forty-six villages and the lower four have thirty-six villages. In Hualong Hui Autonomous County there are five Sala *gong*s—Gandu 甘都, Kaergang 卡爾崗, Shangshuidi 上水地, Heichengzi 黑城子, and Shiwuhui 十五會. The *agele* is a village-level unit. Several *kongmusan* form one *agele* and one *agele* has one mosque where people gather for religious services, to celebrate religious days, and to discuss and decide important *agele* affairs.

Kongmusan means "from the same root" or "from distant relatives." Several *agenai* form one *kongmusan* and every *kongmusan* has its own public graveyard (*maizha* 麥扎). People from other *kongmusan* cannot be buried in local *maizha*. To some extent, the *kongmusan* may be considered as an expanded *agenai*.

Agenai may be literally interpreted as brothers living in the same family and is constructed on the basis of a paternal lineage. Several *zhuangkuo* comprise one *agenai*. Marriage is prohibited among households of the same *agenai*, which is, in reality, an expanded family.

The Life Cycle

Birthgiving

Birthgiving and the ceremony surrounding the birth of the first and second child are considered important. Three days after the child is born, an invited *ahong* chants for the infant and bestows a scriptural name. Afterwards, family members from the mother's side and female friends visit with clothes, brown sugar, and other food to extend congratulations. This is called "visiting on the occasion of the small month birthday." When the baby is one month old, there is another celebration called "visiting on the occasion of the big month birthday." The completion of the month for the boys is thirty days while for girls it is forty days. When this period has passed, maternal relatives cook mutton and

drape red silk over the shoulders of the parents to congratulate them (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 1, 4). Friends bring tea and *supanmo* 素盘馍 (steamed cake, usually six to seven times larger than ordinary) (HAN 1988, 97). Women bring new clothing for the baby and mother as well as foods and toys.

Marriage

In the Sala social context, men have much more status than women, with authority for daily life completely in men's hands. The oldest man in each household organizes family production and labor. Usually, after the sons marry, parents live with the youngest son. Other sons and their families live separately (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 106). Wives are expected to obey their husbands at home and in public and give unquestioning obedience. For example, in a few families, if the mother-in-law and husband are watching television with others, the wife cannot enter the room and sit down to watch with them. If she does, she will be considered not filially obedient and her mother-in-law will criticize her when she talks with other mothers-in-law. In the past, one man could have three or four wives but this is no longer true. The custom of a man being able to divorce his wife by repeating " I don't want you " three times before an *ahong* has also been discontinued. In such cases in the past, the man usually gave the woman money in compensation. The wife had absolutely no say. Though this custom has been officially abolished, women still have little power in divorce. Once married, the wife becomes virtually the private property of the husband and must be subservient to him and her mother-in-law. If the woman desires to divorce, she must persuade her husband, otherwise she has no recourse except the law.

Marriage of young people is completely controlled by parents (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 106). Generally, in more developed areas early marriage is rare, but in some villages it does occur. Though in recent years the government has advocated the desirability of late marriage and implementation of the Marriage Law, preferential treatment has been extended to the Sala in deference to their preference for early marriage, their small population, and in some families, their limited labor force. In the past, when boys were twelve and girls were nine years old, they could marry. At present, girls of eighteen and boys of twenty may marry. In some villages, however, girls of fourteen to fifteen are secretly married by parents. Marriage among maternal relatives is common. The reason given for this by some informants was " Brothers live with brothers, close with close, and we don't want foreign people to corrupt us." There are very strong taboos against marrying outside the brother-

hood of Islam and some Sala feel marriage outside the Sala nationality is wrong.

Matchmaking

When the boy or parents decide on a girl (*ana* 阿娜, young girl), matchmakers (*suji* 素吉) are invited to make a match. Matchmakers may be male or female. Male *suji* are generally two men while female *suji* are four women. One man and two women may also form a *suji* team. It is considered a great honor for people to be invited as *suji* and the latter are usually enthusiastic in the execution of their duties. Matchmakers think Fridays are the best times to visit the girl's home with clothing and one or two bricks of tea. If the parents of the girl (usually her father has the absolute power) agree, they accept the clothing and tea (QIAN 1988, 73, 115; ANONYMOUS 1984a, 106).

When *suji* come, a meal is served featuring *youjiaotuan* 油攪團 (flour mixed with oil, then constantly stirred over a fire until cooked) and other dishes. After the *suji* leave, the girl's father asks relatives for their opinions concerning the match. The girl's maternal uncle's opinion is very important and if he fails to agree, the match cannot take place (HAN 1988, 97).

If the uncle has no objections, family members cut the tea bricks into pieces and distribute them among relatives and friends to show all agree to the marriage and to give public notice of the impending wedding. This is called " decided by tea " (*dingcha* 定茶). If the clothing and tea are returned, it signifies the marriage is not agreed to.

On the second day of *dingcha*, the matchmakers return to the girl's home with satin, silk, and a scarf. The couple is not considered engaged until the scarf and cloth are accepted. Once accepted, however, the girl's parents cannot change their decision.

Once the engagement is finalized, the matchmakers busily shuttle between the two families discussing betrothal gifts (*maihaile* 麥海勒) and the wedding date. When the issue of betrothal gifts is settled, the boy's parents formally present betrothal gifts to the girl's parents. Generally, men who are relatives and friends of the boy's parents present betrothal gifts. The number of people who present betrothal gifts may range from several to more than fifty. Bluffing and blustering, they march with the betrothal gifts to the bride's home. When they reach the door, they stop and do not enter the *zhuangkuo* until the *ana*'s parents invite them. In the past, they sat by the door while the *ahong* chanted *nikahai* 尼卡亥 (" words signifying marriage ") with the groom kneeling outside the door and the bride inside (CHEN and FAN 1988, 103; QIAN 1988, 115).

Nowadays, some rich families give two gold earrings, a good watch, and several thousand *renminbi* 人民幣 as betrothal gifts. In some villages, however, a watch and several hundred *yuan* 圓 are common. The *ana*'s father and mother present pairs of shoes to the boy's family, the number depending on the number of family members (CHEN and FAN 1988, 89).

Weddings

Sala weddings generally are held in winter due to there being less work at that time. When the wedding date arrives, the groom's father and best men accompany the groom to the bride's home. A formal ceremony then ensues during which an *ahong* serves as the chief witness. The ceremony begins with an old man putting a new hat on the groom's head and tying his shoelaces. Before the Cultural Revolution the boy's relatives draped a strip of red silk over his shoulder and pinned flowers on his chest as a token of honor. However, since the late 1970s, this practice has been abandoned in the face of criticism that it does not conform with the Koran. The groom is then led to the main room and seated on a bench in front of the *kang* 炕 (heatable brick bed). The *ahong* is seated on the *kang* also and the groom's father-in-law asks, "Has my daughter been betrothed to you?" The groom answers in the positive or else simply nods. The invited *ahong* will ask, "Have you given all the betrothal gifts and the money?" The groom responds and the *ahong* asks the fathers of the pair and the young couple whether or not they agree to the marriage. Then the *ahong* chants *nikahai*. The bride wails as loudly as possible to express her feelings of reluctance at leaving her parents. The *ahong* then finishes his chanting (CHEN and FAN 1988, 76, 106).

After *nikahai* is chanted, the groom shows respect by greeting old people and bowing. Chinese dates, walnuts, and *gugumama* 古古麻麻 (very thin long fried dough) are distributed to all at the wedding. When the bride leaves, she sings *Sahesi* 撒赫斯 and weeps to show gratitude to her mother and father for the hardships they endured in rearing her. If she does not sing, she will be ridiculed. Her mother, father, and sometimes others at the wedding join in the wailing. The bride is dressed in green, wears gold and silver ornaments, and her face should be covered with a black veil. Her older brother or uncle carries her out of the main room to a horse or donkey waiting outside and places her on the animal's back. Women living in the same village come with *youjiaotuan* and hold tea cups to see the bride off. This is done in keeping with an old custom when Sala ancestors married Tibetan women. The bride should wail as loudly as possible once mounted on

horseback. The bride's dowry is carried by livestock. Two old married women and other relatives accompany her to her new hearth. When they reach the door, one old person from the groom's side comes out and carries her directly to the *kang* of the new wedding room (usually the father-in-law). At the same time, firecrackers are lit. It is not permitted for the bride to stand on the ground when all this happens. Then the bride's veil is removed, signifying she is married and is no longer an *ana* (QIAN 1988, 115–116; ZHU 1988, 82; ANONYMOUS 1985a 109; CHEN and FAN 1988, 105).

A grand feast is then held in both the main room and *zhuangkuo* with the groom's parents and relatives serving. Foods on the table are mainly wheaten foods, mutton, bread, fruits, candies, and hot pot dishes. Some ten years ago, invited singers performed on this occasion, urging the groom's parents in their songs to care for the bride who was yet to reach maturity (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 36). However, this practice has been almost completely abandoned in the late 1980s, again, under criticism by *ahong* that Sala wedding songs are not in conformity with basic Islamic tenets.

On the third day, the bride comes to the kitchen to use the kitchen knife to prepare food. Her father or uncle comes to the new home at this time to watch by her side (*kanfang* 看房). The bride is given cloth to reassure her. Also on this day, the groom accompanies his new wife to her parents' home to chat and have dinner, then they return. After a few days, the bride returns to her parents' home for about ten days.

Because many couples are immature and have had their marriages arranged by their parents, quarreling is common. Another problem for some newly married wives is that their status is the lowest in the family and not only must they do housework but also they must work in the fields—sometimes enduring ill treatment at the hands of their mothers-in-law (ANONYMOUS 1985a, 109).

Sala regard wedding ceremonies with great seriousness and inviting the *ahong* is extremely important. If *nikahai* is not chanted, the marriage is regarded as abnormal and illegal. Although freedom in choosing spouses is legally assured, in actuality, marriage without a single exception abides by old customs (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 221).

Death

Those who lie dying are consoled by being told that all life and death is controlled by Allah who should be relied on, and to cease worrying. The dying person is also asked whether or not he has something left unsolved. An *ahong* is invited to chant *taobai* 討白 (confession), which asks Allah to forgive the dying person's evil deeds. When a person

dies, he is buried within two days. After death, the corpse is placed on a board in the main room of the house and an invited *ahong* washes the corpse (an old woman washes a dead female). The corpse is then wrapped in a white cloth and placed in a *zenaze* 责那责, a case for carrying the dead. The standing ceremony takes place just prior to the burying of the corpse. It may take place in a mosque, at a large flat area, or the graveyard. The corpse and *ahong* are positioned to the front and people (only males attend), in lines facing west, stand to the rear. The *ahong* says, "Allah is greatest," and the *ahong* and all the people raise their hands briefly, palms outward. All the people then silently repeat what the *ahong* has said and, additionally, praise Allah. Then the *ahong* repeats "Allah is greatest" a second time and the people silently wish the Prophet well. The *ahong* repeats for the third time "Allah is greatest" and the people ask Allah to forgive the dead person. The *ahong* repeats "Allah is greatest" the final time and then the people turn their heads first to the right and then to the left and each time say, "May Allah grant you happiness and peace." Thus the standing ceremony concludes, lasting no more than five minutes. Most, if not all, of those who have attended the standing ceremony then go to the graveyard and kneel as the corpse is buried. As the *ahong* chants, all wail. After the corpse is buried, family members of the deceased distribute tea, money, and salt. Regardless of age (only males are permitted entry to the graveyard), all receive something. The purpose of this is to ask all to do good things for the dead to lessen the deceased's guilt (ANONYMOUS 1984a, 37; HAN 1988, 98).

Some graves are covered with white and black colored stones. However, this practice has been largely discontinued as of the late 1980s under criticism from *ahong* who argue it contradicts Islamic doctrine. For others, tombs may be erected. The grave pit is rectangular, dug in a north-south direction, and is two meters in depth. On the west side of the bottom of the grave, a side-hole (small cave) is dug in which the corpse, which has been removed from the *zenaze*, is placed. The white cloth covering the deceased's face is removed and the head is turned west to face the Holy Land of Islam so that the soul of the deceased may return to Allah. On the third day after burial, an *ahong* is invited to chant. Family members cook *mairen* 麦仁 (gruel mixed with wheat, highland barley, and chopped meat) which is sent to all people and friends in the village. During this period, visitors to the deceased's family bring black tea, money, and salt to offer their condolences (*kuangxin* 宽心, consoling the family members). The family members cook *mairen* on the seventh, 27th, and 37th days after death. During these days, the graveyard is also visited to pay homage to the deceased.

After the corpse has been buried, the family cooks nothing for three days. All food is sent by neighbors and friends (ANONYMOUS 1985a, 110). Just prior to the Cultural Revolution Sala wore black armbands, as do Han presently, as indications of mourning. The character *xiao* 孝 ('filial piety') was sewn on the armband. Today, however, Sala do not wear any indication of mourning.

NOTE

1. For words used by the Sala 撒拉 we give Chinese characters and a standard *putonghua* 普通話 (national language) *pin yin* 拼音 (romanization). However, the reader should understand some of these words are Chinese but spoken in the distinctive Qinghai Chinese dialect which has some sounds impossible to record in *putonghua pin yin*. For example, Qinghai Chinese (and there are several Qinghai Chinese dialects) has a very strong 'v' sound (as in 'very') which cannot be written in standard *pin yin*. Thus the standard *pin yin* for the spoken Sala, which has no written language, and Qinghai Chinese dialect are to be understood as transliterations.

This study is a general overview of the Sala. We present an introduction and then discuss origins, the Sala house, religion, social structure, birthgiving, marriage and funerals. Parts of the paper which are not referenced to particular published materials are based on interviews done with various Sala informants by the senior author in a 1988 field research trip to Suzhi 蘇集 Commune located on the southern bend of the Yellow River in the west of Xunhua 循化, Hui 回 and Sala Autonomous County.

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