

SOCIAL MAINTENANCE AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY— FOLK RELIGION AMONG
THE TU IN NORTHWEST CHINA

By

HAIYAN XING

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2015

© 2015 Haiyan Xing

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this dissertation has been one of the most significant academic challenges I have ever had to face. Without the support, patience, and guidance of numerous people, this study would not have been completed. I would like to thank the members of my committee for their extreme patience in the face of numerous obstacles.

First and foremost, my greatest thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Chuan-kang Shih, as his wisdom, knowledge, and commitment to the highest standards inspired and motivated me. This dissertation would not have been possible without Dr. Shih's help, support, and patience. I am grateful for his encouragement and efforts to promote my studies and research at the University of Florida.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Gerald Murray, for his excellent guidance, caring, and patience. I am particularly appreciative of his generous availability, keen interest, and encouragement.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Faye Harrison, who has been a wonderful committee member throughout the duration of this research. I would like to thank her for her immense interest in my topic of research and the valuable suggestions on the gender-related issues of my research.

I am highly thankful to Dr. Richard Wang for his valuable suggestions on my research and for providing me with material and links that were extremely helpful during my dissertation writing.

I would also like to acknowledge the enrollment and financial support of Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program and University of Florida, which provided me the precious opportunity to study anthropology at the University of Florida—the best place for me to extend my academic development.

I am indebted to many other individuals and organizations for their assistance and cooperation in carrying out this research and wish I could acknowledge every one of you who have contributed in this way by name.

Finally, I would love to thank my parents, my family, and my friends for supporting me over the years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	10
ABSTRACT	12
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	14
1.1 Literature Review	15
1.1.1 The Definition and Limitations of the Term “Popular/Folk Religion”	15
1.1.1.1 Folk belief vs. folk religion	15
1.1.1.2 Institution religion vs. folk religion	19
1.1.2 Research on the Religious Relationship	20
1.1.2.1 Religious conflict, exclusionism and tolerance	21
1.1.2.2 Religious pluralism and religious economy	22
1.1.2.3 Syncretism	23
1.1.3 Research on Ethnic Folk Religion in China	25
1.1.3.1 Research on the minorities ethnic groups in China	26
1.1.3.2 Studies on the Tu	28
1.2 The History and Cultural Background of the Tu	30
1.2.1 The History and Population Distribution of the Tu	30
1.2.1.1 Tu in Huzhu	30
1.2.1.2 Tu in Minhe	33
1.2.1.3 Tu in Tongren	34
1.2.1.4 Tu in other areas	36
1.2.2 Language, Customs, and Lifestyle	37
1.3 Fieldwork: Data and Methods	39
1.4 Summary of the Dissertation	42
2 MULTI-RELIGIONS AMONG THE TU	48
2.1 The Popularity and Influence of Tibetan Buddhism	48
2.2 The Dissemination and Decline of Daoism	55
2.3 The Competition between Different Religious Traditions	60
2.4 Belief in the Power of the Number Three — the Harmony among the Multiple Religions of the Tu	68
3 MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPIRITS AND SHARED WORLD: THE FOLK-RELIGIOUS PANTHEON OF THE TU	74
3.1 The Dragon King	74

3.1.1	Dragon Kings in Huzhu	75
3.1.1.1	Dazhuang dragon king	76
3.1.1.2	Nianxian dragon king	78
3.1.1.3	Yaoma dragon king	78
3.1.2	Duties of Dragon Kings	80
3.1.3	Territories of Dragon Kings	84
3.1.4	Changes of the Belief in Dragon Kings	87
3.2	<i>Niangniang</i> — the Female Deity from Daoism	92
3.2.1	Spiritual Power of <i>Niangniang</i>	95
3.2.2	The Origin of <i>Niangniang</i>	98
3.2.3	Taboos and Destiny of the <i>Niangniang</i> Temples	103
3.3	The <i>Nidang</i> — A Buddhist Guardian	105
3.4	Ancestral Spirits — Deities of the Family	110
3.4.1	<i>Lemusang</i> — Mule King	111
3.4.2	<i>Jiujian Sanba</i> (Black Tiger), <i>Chilie Sang</i> (Dragon King) and Others	113
3.5	Nature Worship	115
3.5.1	Worship of Mountain Deity	115
3.5.2	Animal Worship	116
3.5.3	Kitchen God Worship	118
3.6	Conclusion	119
4	RITUAL CYCLE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: RELIGIOUS SITES, ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIALISTS	124
4.1	Religious Sites	124
4.1.1	Village Temple	125
4.1.2	The <i>Benkang</i>	130
4.1.3	The <i>Lashize</i>	133
4.1.4	Marnyi Stones	136
4.2	Folk Religious Organizations	136
4.3	Religious Specialists and Mode of Succession	141
4.3.1	The <i>Bo</i> —Shaman in Huzhu	141
4.3.2	The <i>Shidianzeng</i> —the Spokesman of the Local Deities	147
4.3.3	The <i>Benbenzi</i>	151
5	FOLK RELIGION AND ECOLOGY IN COMMUNITY LIFE	156
5.1	Daily Religious Life of the Tu	156
5.1.1	Chanting <i>Mani</i> Scriptures	157
5.1.2	The <i>Zhuanguola</i> Ritual (Walking around <i>Guola</i>)	158
5.1.3	<i>Zuo Rangni</i> (Practicing <i>Rangni</i>)	159
5.2	Religious Festivals and Agricultural Ecological System	162
5.2.1	<i>Weidasang</i> : Welcome Deities and Celebrate the Lunar New Year	163
5.2.2	The <i>Biangbianhui</i> : Entertaining the Deities	167
5.2.3	The <i>Zhuanshanjing</i> : Make Harmony among Spirits, Nature and Human Beings	170

5.2.4	The <i>Xiejiang</i> : Thanking the Spirits and Hosting a Reception for Crop Protection	176
5.3	Healing, Divination and Taboo	178
5.3.1	Opinions on Souls and Soul Retrieval	179
5.3.2	Evil Spirits and Diseases	180
5.3.3	Shaman Made by Diseases	183
5.3.4	Taboos	188
6	WOMEN AND FOLK RELIGION	192
6.1	Gender Roles among the Tu	192
6.1.1	Gender in Daily Life	193
6.1.2	Women in Rites of Passage	197
6.1.2.1	The crying marriage and wedding	197
6.1.2.2	Pregnancy and fertility	200
6.1.2.3	Long-life ceremonies and crying funerals	202
6.2	Gender in Oral Tradition	207
6.2.1	Female Heroes in Legend and Folklore	207
6.2.2	Kinship Terminology and the Role of the Maternal Uncle	209
6.3	Females in Folk Religion	211
6.3.1	Religious Lives and the Socialization of Tu Women	212
6.3.2	Rituals and Taboo	214
6.3.3	Female Gods, The <i>Maoguishen</i> and Women	218
6.4	Changes in Tu Women's Social Status	221
7	FOLK RELIGION AND THE STATE	230
7.1	The Communist Party of China's Policy toward Ethnicity and Religion	230
7.1.1	Maoist China	231
7.1.2	Post-Mao Era	232
7.1.3	Ethnic Policy	235
7.2	The Tu Folk Religious Revival	241
7.2.1	Popular Attachment to Religious Belief	241
7.2.2	The Involvement of State Power	242
7.3	The Legalization of Folk Religion	246
7.3.1	Obtaining the Legal Status of Village Temples by Applying for Conservation and Protection of Historical Monuments	246
7.3.2	The Legalization of Temple Fair Activities	248
7.4	The Competition among Village Temples and the Influence of Local Elites	248
8	CONCLUSION	252
	APPENDIX	267
A	GLOSSARY OF TERMS	267
B	THE LIST OF FESTIVALS OF TU NATIONALITY	272

REFERENCES 274
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 284

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
A-1 The list of festival of Tu Nationality	272

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1-1 Location of Qinghai and Tu population distribution	27
1-2 Map of Huzhu County, Qinghai Province, China	31
1-3 Population distribution of Tu Nationality in Huzhu	32
2-1 Younging Monastery in Huzhu County, Qinghai Province, China	51
2-2 Daoists standing in front of the folk religious temple	56
3-1 The spiritual litters for dragon kings.	76
3-2 <i>chumashen</i> and <i>huimashen</i>	79
3-3 The <i>fashenjian</i> ritual by <i>shidianzeng</i>	82
3-4 Three spiritual spears for dragon kings.	87
3-5 Different deities are worshipped together	91
3-6 Different deities enshrined in the same hall	94
3-7 Jijialing <i>niangniang</i> in Dongshan	100
3-8 Spiritual litters and statues of <i>niangniang</i>	102
3-9 A hall of <i>nidang</i> and wall painting of <i>nidang</i>	107
3-10 Family deities worshipped on the roof of Tu people's houses.	111
4-1 Dragon King Temples, <i>xiazhen</i> and a wall painting	127
4-2 The <i>benkang</i> and <i>caca</i>	132
4-3 The <i>lashize</i> in two villages	134
4-4 A <i>miaoguan</i> and a <i>laozhe</i>	140
4-5 The <i>bo</i> is practicing ritual in Najia Village Temple.	143
4-6 The <i>fashenjian</i> ritual by <i>shidianzeng</i>	148
4-7 A <i>benbenzi</i> chanting scriptures in the village temple with his assistant.	152
5-1 Tu women participating religious activities	158
5-2 <i>Zuo rangni</i>	161
5-3 The <i>weisang</i>	163

5-4	The ritual of <i>biangbianhui</i>	168
5-5	The team of <i>zhuanshanjing</i>	172
5-6	The <i>xiazhen</i>	175
5-7	The <i>xiejiang</i> ritual in a Dragon King Temple	177
6-1	Daoists presiding the Tu funeral rituals.	203
6-2	Women changing into traditional costumes to attend <i>zhuanshanjing</i>	216
7-1	The <i>benkang</i> , expressed as a community center for elders	240

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SOCIAL MAINTENANCE AND CULTURAL CONTINUITY— FOLK RELIGION AMONG
THE TU IN NORTHWEST CHINA

By

Haiyan Xing

December 2015

Chair: Chuan-kang Shih

Major: Anthropology

This dissertation contains an ethnographic study of the folk religion of the Tu, an ethnic minority in Northwest China. Viewed by many Tu as the “soul” of their culture, folk religious beliefs and practices permeate all aspects of their lives at the personal, familial, and community levels. Every Tu is socially encouraged to participate in the group’s religious rituals and pageants. As a result of cross-cultural contact during the past centuries, the Tu have also borrowed elements of Buddhism from the Tibetans and of Daoism from the Han. Whereas most Tu people will at different times participate comfortably in the rituals of all three religious traditions to fulfill various spiritual and practical needs, their native folk religion is nonetheless the primary vehicle for maintaining social order and ethnic solidarity. Tu folk religion encourages conformity to established social codes.

The dissertation first examines the subjective meanings and internal functions of the folk religious system within the community. It then analyzes the interrelationships – both competitive and confrontational – among the three different religious systems in which the Tu participate. It also discusses in detail the gender dynamics that occur within the folk religious tradition. Finally, and of great importance, it analyzes the impact that the shifting policies of the Chinese State – from religious suppression during the Cultural Revolution to active governmental support of religious institutions in recent years – have had on the folk religion of the Tu.

This dissertation provides a new interpretation of the impact of popular religion on the social life of a Chinese minority group. It also documents the important phenomenon of religious pluralism, the manner in which individuals comfortably shift between rituals of different religions. This dissertation is concerned with the following specific research questions: What kind of interactions and symbiotic relations have emerged between different religions in Tu society? How do religious practices contribute to village and family autonomy? How does the folk religion help the Tu people identify unique features of their culture, and thus maintain their status as a culturally distinct ethnic group? How do inter-ethnic relations contribute to religious pluralism among the Tu? How does the folk religion influence behavior toward the natural environment, and how do the Tu respond to an environmental crisis in religious ways? What are the functions of religious rituals and organization in managing and protecting natural resources? How does the folk religion affect issues of gender roles and social status among the Tu? How do Tu women help to shape, create, and change the private and public worlds in which they live? How does the folk religion relate to issues of political power and how do changes in government policy influence the folk faith? What kind of negotiation exists between religious authorities and political authorities?

By addressing the above questions, the author attempts to contribute not only to our understanding of the religious landscape of a particular minority community, but also to the literature dealing with the relationships between religious dynamics and dynamics of ethnicity, gender and State power.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation describes and analyzes the folk religion practiced by the Tu ethnic minority group in Northwest China. More specifically, this project will first explore the subjective meanings and internal functions of the folk religious system within the minority community itself. The Tu are one of the 55 ethnic minority groups that have been officially recognized by the Chinese government. Viewed locally as the “soul” of Tu culture, folk religious beliefs and practices permeate all aspects of life. As will be shown in these pages, religion among the Tu serves important personal, familial, and community purposes. The folk deities serve as intermediaries between those who venerate them and local political authorities. Rich festivals and colorful rituals maintain the internal social order and govern the formation and operation of community cultural models. In my research, I will explore the following questions: What kind of folk religious system exists among the Tu? How does folk religion help the Tu people identify unique features of their culture and maintain their status as a culturally distinct ethnic group? How does folk religion influence behavior toward the natural environment, and how do the Tu respond to environmental crises in religious ways? How do religious practices contribute to village and family autonomy? How does folk religion affect issues of gender roles and the social status of women among the Tu?

We shall see that in their long history of cultural cross-fertilization, the Tu have borrowed elements of Buddhism from the Tibetans and elements of Daoism from the Han Chinese. Whereas most Tu people will participate comfortably in the rituals of all three religious traditions at different times to meet their spiritual and practical needs, their folk religion serves as the principal vehicle for maintaining social order by encouraging conformity to established social codes. Participation in religious rituals and pageants even has a quasi-compulsory dimension. In addition, folk religious beliefs and

practices interact with other features of society; thus, religious rituals not only survive, but also develop and change as a result of this interaction.

I will also document the important phenomenon of religious pluralism – the manner in which the Tu shift between rituals of different religions. I will also analyze the interrelationships, both competitive and confrontational, among the three different religious systems. Among the research questions to be answered here are: What kind of “religious ecology” exists in Tu society – that is, how does their folk religion guide their interaction with the natural environment? How do inter-ethnic relations contribute to religious pluralism among the Tu? How does folk religion relate to issues of political power, and how do changes in government policy influence the folk religion? What kind of negotiation takes place between religious authorities and political authorities? In short, the potential significance of this research lies not only in contributing to our understanding of the religious landscape of a particular minority community, but also in contributing to the literature on the relationships between religious dynamics and dynamics of ethnicity, gender and state power.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 The Definition and Limitations of the Term “Popular/Folk Religion”

For centuries western sinologists and anthropologists have been researching or commenting on folk religion in China, especially on the folk religion of the Han Chinese. Much of this research has been preoccupied with definitions of popular/folk religion. Scholars have debated whether there exists an official religion that is distinct from the teachings of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism – an issue that has been the subject of animated debate among international scholars.

1.1.1.1 Folk belief vs. folk religion

The term “folk belief” initially appeared in the 1890s in British and American academic journals dealing with anthropology and folklore (Hoke, 1892; Pinches, 1892). Some scholars of classical religious studies claim that Chinese folk belief blends

polytheism, animism, superstition and witchcraft, and that folk beliefs and practices can therefore be associated only with “primitive culture” but not with institutionalized religions (Frazer, [1918] 2002; Tylor, 1871). Later scholars have pointed out that folk belief does not have its own written classics or origin accounts. Since folk beliefs and rituals derive from ancient symbols but are not performed by institutionalized religious specialists, folk practices cannot, in their view, be considered a bona fide religion. (As will be argued below, we disagree with this position.)

On the whole, the folk rituals of Chinese ethnic groups embody the group’s core values. These systems of popular beliefs and rituals throughout China have been informed by concepts that are deeply embedded in Chinese culture, such as Yin-Yang principles, beliefs concerning local spirits, and attitudes toward popular charismatic specialists such as local shamans referred to as Wu. Chinese scholars started to classify folk belief as a form of superstition about 100 years ago, and there is a tendency to define religion in terms of spirit beliefs, downplaying the elements of rituals and specialists. From an anthropological point of view all religions have multiple components: spirit beliefs, rituals to interact with the spirits, and specialist experts who are believed by people to have more knowledge about, and perhaps more skill in contacting and influencing, the spirits. Spirit beliefs are only one element in the complex which anthropologists refer to as “religion.”

In the past, the academic and political mainstream believed that folk beliefs should be eradicated. But now popular religion is viewed as a topic worthy of research and even of governmental support under the rubric of cultural heritage. A rich range of studies of Chinese religious beliefs and practices has now coalesced into a recognized field of research. In contemporary China, research into folk religion is found in studies that focus on topics such as the social functions of folk beliefs in general, the relationship between religion and culture, religious and social changes, the relationship between socialism

and religion, and the present status of folk beliefs (Gao, 1998; Jin, 1989; Song, 1990; Wu, 1996).

Many scholars now recognize that Chinese folk belief and practices with respect to the spirit world do in fact constitute a popular or folk religion. According to a folk survey in Fujian, the Dutch sinologist De Groot wrote *The Religious System of China, Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*, arguing that Chinese folk belief and ritual complexes can indeed be called a religion. Scholars tend to make a distinction between folk culture and elite culture in Chinese tradition; in that light folk religion is often viewed as the religion of the lower classes (Yang, 1961) Anthropological studies of folk religion have begun to find relationships between religion and many aspects of social life. Some scholars maintain that, since a folk religion represents the popular practices and beliefs of the masses it thus fulfills a powerful function of social integration (Cohen, 1987; Dean, 1993). Many of these studies by scholars of China have, in this light, focused research on ancestor and clan rituals. A great deal of research on the religious practices of Chinese families or clans now emphasizes the role of folk religion in maintaining social solidarity within kin groups (Ahern, 1973; Baker, 1979; Hsu, 1948; Yang, 1961).

Other studies have instead emphasized cultural differences and struggles, and therefore situate folk religion in the framework of social conflicts (Bell, 1989; Gates & Weller, 1987; Sangren, 1984). Needham (1956) on the other hand analyzed the cosmology reflected in folk religion and claimed that the popular views of the organizational structure of Chinese society can be viewed in terms of the Five Elements and Ying-Yang. In short, scholars have interpreted the cultural and social status of folk religion from a variety of perspectives.

Most of these scholars have acknowledged that China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) does have multiple popular religious traditions that interact with other aspects of social life. Arthur Wolf's edited volume, *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (1974)

was the continuation of the work of De Groot (1892-1892-1910) and C.K. Yang (1961) and provided a comprehensive methodology for researching Chinese religions. Wolf believed that ghosts, ancestors and deities (a powerful benevolent spirit, whether male or female) in folk religion are the symbols of outsiders, insiders and officials, respectively; such studies have posited a relationship between the world of spirits and the world of humans (Wolf, 1974). In 1987, the *Modern China Journal* published a special issue, "Hegemony and Chinese Folk Ideologies" (Gates & Weller, 1987). In that issue, folk beliefs were considered to be a "folk ideology," and the relationship between folk and official beliefs and rituals was examined in terms of the emerging research themes of cultural hegemony and struggles for cultural autonomy. Since then, other ethnographers have revealed how Chinese folk religion has been expressed through cognitive structures (Sangren, 1987) or through community performance of dynastic rituals (Feuchtwang, 1992). These theories fall within the framework of symbolic anthropology, as introduced in Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical attempts to connect cultures and individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). The study of symbolic anthropology among such scholars has made a significant contribution to the study of Chinese popular/folk religion.

In summary, early research by scholars from the West and from the Orient itself sought to link religion to social life, by identifying the ways in which people utilize religion to negotiate their interpersonal relationship and their relationship to nature. Unlike the residents of the Han areas, where involvement in religion is somewhat optional, research among the Tu provides evidence of strong social pressure for members of the ethnic group to become involved in the public practices of their religious system. This folk religion is in the process of being revived and strengthened at the present time, in part through government support of ethnic customs and heritage, and has proved its tenacity through time. For the remainder of this dissertation I will use the term "folk religion" to refer to the clearly delineated complex of beliefs and practice that groups such as the Tu

have, to distinguish it from the less clearly defined popular religious beliefs and practices of the Han people.

1.1.1.2 Institution religion vs. folk religion

In general, the term “popular/ folk religion” has two meanings when referring to China. First, it refers to the religion practiced by most of Chinese people. Among the most common religious practices are (1) the rites that govern the veneration and care of the spirits in the realm of the dead, (2) the ritual of consulting a spirit medium to diagnose and cure sickness or to deal with other misfortunes or problems, and (3) the traditional festivals in the yearly cycle. Scholars who use it in the second sense are referring to the religion of the lower classes as opposed to that of the elite.

C.K. Yang divides Chinese religions into two distinct parts: institutional and diffused. The former, such Buddhism or Daoism, is a system of religious life that consists of an independent theology or cosmology, symbolic worship (of gods, lesser spirits and their images), and an independent organization of clergy to develop formal theological teachings and to officiate at rituals. The latter – “diffused religion” – is defined as a religion with its theology, clergy, worship objects and rituals diffused or embedded into secular social institutions where informal popular religion is practiced (Yang, 1961). In other words, as a system with its own separate structures and a specialized hierarchy, institutional religion is somewhat autonomous with respect to other social institutions, whereas folk religions are embedded more deeply into other social institutions.

Scholars disagree on the distinction between popular and elite religion. David Johnson admits that the boundaries of two realms appear to overlap, but the distinction remains very powerful in terms of their respective effects on audiences, demands on performers, and differences between the written and vernacular language used in liturgy and opera performance (Johnson, 1995). Patricia Ebrey points out the difficulty in describing popular religion because of a lack of written sources and the absence of an organized priesthood, as well as the complex interaction between popular religion and

the other three institutional religions (Ebrey & Gregory, 1993). Moreover, the biases of written records also make it difficult to arrive at an overall picture of popular practices, and tends to reinforce the belief that there was a large gap between popular and elite practices (Ebrey & Gregory, 1993; Hansen, 1990; von Glahn, 2004).

Other scholars have challenged the distinction between the lay/popular/diffused religion and institutional religions by highlighting the importance of ongoing social experience in informing and modifying all religious beliefs and practices, not merely those of popular religion (Sangren, 1987; Gates & Weller, 1987). In other words, lived social experience has a potential for generating social change and for influencing the content of any religion, whether it be diffused religion or institutional religion. The difference between the two may therefore in some cases be murky. Studies such as these thus avoid the pitfalls of making an artificial disjuncture between popular and institutional religion; they recognize that institutional and popular religion are both part of a single cultural system. They emphasize that it is not a deity or a shrine but rather communal ritual that is the most important element in Chinese religion. Their concern is less with the content of spirit beliefs that with the social impact of collective rituals.

Because of the complex, broad and ambiguous interaction between popular and institutional religion, some scholars have questioned the terminology of popular religion, including Kenneth Dean, Edward Davis and Von Glahn. They claim that scholars of Chinese popular culture must continue to rethink religion and ritual in China and to seek another model that will analyze the syncretic and multiple forms of popular religious practices in China (Dean, 1998). Actually, based on the breadth and the heavy level of syncretism found in popular religion, many scholars have agreed on the difficulty of precisely delineating its boundaries.

1.1.2 Research on the Religious Relationship

Religious diversity has been a fact throughout world history (Gross, 1999; Smith, 1976). Anthropological studies of religion began in the late nineteenth century with

the seminal works of Max Müller, W. Robertson Smith, Edward B. Tylor, and Sir James G. Frazer. Religion has functioned, in different times and places, as both a source of intergroup conflict and as a vehicle for resolving conflict. Different scholars have accordingly studied different aspects of these questions, thus providing a multifaceted view of the shifting functions of religion. The main themes in those studies include religion and conflict/peace, religious exclusionism, religious tolerance and religious pluralism.

1.1.2.1 Religious conflict, exclusionism and tolerance

The role of religion in fostering conflict has become increasingly apparent and this aspect of religion as a promoter of violence has become a growing field of study. There have been religious and ethnic conflicts in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia for centuries. Especially after 9/11, religious language and metaphors have acquired a new significance (Hogan & Lehrke, 2009). There are many studies of religious conflict, including work on the theory of religious conflict (Bock, 2001; Cavanaugh, 2009; Schlee, 2008; de Ridder, 2010) and ethnic and religious conflict (Janke, 1994; Schlee, 2008; Sharma, 2009). Since the connections between religion and conflict are complex, it is not surprising that different scholars hold different opinions. The theological premises of some religious systems are exclusivist in character, asserting that adherence to a particular religion is the only path to salvation. Historically, theologies that are based on religious exclusivism have been used to justify wars of religion, forced conversion, bans on interreligious fellowship and intermarriage, and the persecution of religious minorities. Some scholars have challenged exclusivist theologies by examining the phenomenon of inter-religious pluralism within several major faith traditions. They argue that the presence of religious pluralism even within a single faith system presents an insurmountable challenge to the rationality of theologies based on exclusive religious belief (Baldwin & Thune, 2008). Jeroen Ridder and other scholars challenge the simplistic classification of religion as a source of conflict (de Ridder,

2010). Those scholars hold that religion is not usually the sole or even primary cause of conflict. According to them, despite the association with war, religion can also be a vehicle of intergroup reconciliation. There is strong evidence of the potential for religion to generate peace and justice in conflict-ridden societies (Brewer et al., 2010; Smock, 2006), and interfaith dialogue has been found to be another form of religious peacemaking (Brahm, 2005).

In stark contrast to many parts of the world where incompatible religious belief systems have been the source of conflict and atrocities, three religious traditions (the native folk religion, Tibetan Buddhism, and Daoism) have peacefully co-existed among the Tu for centuries. I will discuss in great detail the harmonious religious pluralism of the Tu. My analysis of the Tu case shows clearly that religious exclusion is by no means universal. The religious life of the Tu demonstrates dramatically that interreligious tolerance is possible. My conclusion is that “symbiosis and compromise” can guide adherents of different religious traditions towards peace. In this sense, “religion can play a role as ‘bridging social capital’ in peace processes” (Brewer et al., 2011, 62).

1.1.2.2 Religious pluralism and religious economy

Religious coexistence has been found in many societies in the past and continues to be present in the modern world. There have been anthologies of research on religious pluralism (Coward, 1985; Silk, 2007), religious pluralism and identity (Platvoet & van der Toorn, 1995); and on religious pluralism in the Islamic world (Jackson, 2005) and in Africa (Chakanza & Ross, 1992). Moreover, religious pluralism, to paraphrase one academic study, goes beyond mere toleration (Rouner, 1984; Sachedina, 2001).

The theory of “religious economy” was developed to explain why and how religions change. The consequences of religious market structures are now a significant research topic (Chaves & Cann, 1992; Finke & Iannacoone, 1993; Finke & Stark, 1988, 1989, 1992; Iannacoone, 1991, 1992; Stark, 1985; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Stark & McCann,

1993). Religious consumption¹ is expected to be greater in a free, competitive market than in a monopolistic or oligopolistic religious society. Based on American data, some studies indicate that religious pluralism has a positive impact, indicative of an ongoing paradigm shift in the sociology of religion (Stark & McCann, 1993; Warner, 1993). According to other studies, however, the pluralism of religious suppliers is a product of the pluralism of religious preferences and the number of potential adherents within an environment. This pluralism of suppliers, in turn, produces a pluralism of religious consumers (Blau et al., 1992; Breault, 1989; Land et al., 1991).

In my study, I will evaluate the theory of “the religious economy,” religious persons and organizations interacting within a market framework of competing groups and ideologies (Stark, 2007). To anticipate the conclusion, I will show that religious pluralism may lead, not to competition, but to cooperation. I will argue accordingly that societal and theological change is possible to overcome religious differences and conflicts.

1.1.2.3 Syncretism

“Syncretism” is the borrowing, combining, or adapting of elements from diverse sources. In her research on Chinese religion, Judith A. Berling has surveyed early patterns of religious interaction, as well as sectarianism and syncretism, within Chinese religion. In doing so she offers a broad definition of syncretism for the Chinese religious landscape. According to her, syncretism is the borrowing, affirmation, or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation (Berling, 1980). Following Berling’s study, Kenneth Dean also approaches Chinese popular religion from the perspective of syncretism. He coined the term “the syncretic field” to describe the reservoir of the cultural potential of local

¹ “Because individuals and societies have different beliefs, norms, commitments, and expressive needs, consumption choice can help to express these differences. In this explanations of models, the believers as rational consumers and religious organizations as clubs or firms that collectively constitute a religious market” (Minkler & Cosgel, 2004).

communal religion. Edward L. Davis draws on Dean's "syncretic field," marked by the ongoing tension between efficacy and hierarchy and Duara's "cultural nexus of power," which is defined as the set of segmentary hierarchies (lineages), territorial hierarchies (temple cults), interpersonal networks (patron-client, master-disciple, relationship), and voluntary associations (Davis, 2001). It can be viewed as a religious nexus because all secular hierarchies, networks, and associations may converge and diverge around temples, altars, and monasteries.

Insights derived from these studies help us to see the importance of syncretism as a concept useful in understanding the Chinese religious landscape, and especially the interaction that occurs between different religions. Syncretism finds full expression in folk religion. Most of the elements that were adapted and absorbed into folk religion can be traced to the Three Teachings. Tu folk religion also draws insights from Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism about hell and the afterlife and the concepts of merit and karma. We will also note the adoption of Daoist deities into the pantheon of Tu folk religion.

The theory of religious ecology was formulated by Duan Qi to interpret the relationships among several religions. It refers to the interaction of elements from various religions, which is analogous to the interaction of elements in a natural ecological system in which different aspects of a system constrain each other as they maintain mutual balance. In other words, in such a "religious ecology" each element of the constituent religions has its proper place and is an element in the "market" that offers religious options to meet the needs of different people. By the same token, however, if people artificially make inappropriate interventions, the balance of the religious ecology can be upset. Qi pointed out that because of China's lopsided religious ecology, Christianity has spread rapidly in China since the Chinese State opened the country to reform. The academic debate on religious ecology has thus become inextricably linked to the issue of the relationship between politics and religion in China. These debates entail reflection on the discourse of China's Anti-Feudal Superstition or Anti-Religion

Campaign. The theoretical foundation of religious ecology presupposes knowledge of local traditions in order to detect and avoid the danger of cultural discontinuity and the upsetting of the balance of cultural ecology. One element of continuity is provided by the beliefs and practices of Chinese traditional religions, especially folk religions. Such maintenance of continuity is an important ingredient of identity and citizenship in Chinese civil society.

Anthropological research has contributed several theoretical paradigms for the study of religion, from functionalism and secularization to religious market theory. These different theories have been used to interpret the relationships between religion and society in different historical periods. Chinese religion is characterized by diversity among different groups within China with respect to their backgrounds, cultures, and social and political situations. To deal with such diversity in the context of Chinese folk religions, it will be useful to view these traditions in the context of different anthropological theories. The goal will be to generate a theoretical platform with strong explanatory power. The major contribution that this study of Tu religion will hopefully make will be as a case study in interreligious tolerance. It will also be a case study in the manner in which religions interact with and influence each other.

1.1.3 Research on Ethnic Folk Religion in China

China is a multiethnic country. Most of its minority ethnic groups have their own folk religions. Over the last hundred years, the modernistic (nationalist) discourse has treated folk beliefs or folk sects as feudal superstitions or historical relics, and has consequently injected an anti-religious bias into much of the discourse about Chinese modernization. Despite this anti-religious bias, since the 1920s, Chinese ethnographers have conducted a series of systematic investigations of religious beliefs of ethnic groups in southern China and have collected a huge amount of valuable data.

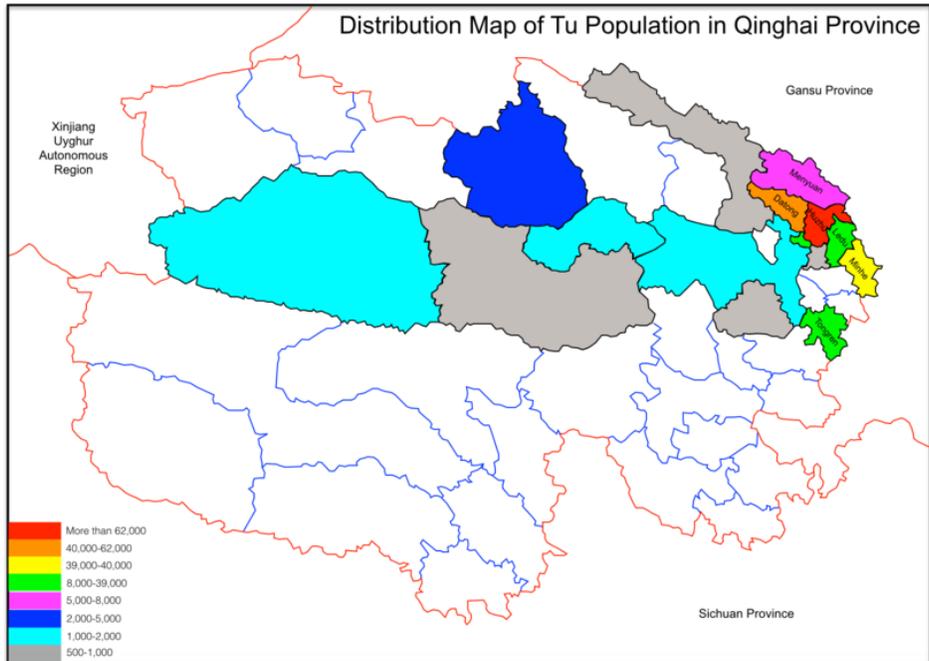
1.1.3.1 Research on the minorities ethnic groups in China

The 1950s produced a high point in comprehensive investigations of the social, historical and cultural status of China's ethnic groups. At that time, numerous investigative reports on folk beliefs were published by the Five Collections of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and became the cornerstone of ethnographic research. From the 1950s to the 1970s, folk beliefs were the target of the Cultural Revolution and political criticism. But academic research into these beliefs was still permitted. With post-Maoist changes in China, however, the existence of ethnic minorities was validated and they have become an object of academic research.

Since the 1980s, the religious beliefs of ethnic groups have been officially protected under the rubric of "ethnic culture" and have received far more attention than Han popular beliefs. Folk beliefs have revived since the 1980s; they have attracted more scholarly attention and have become the object of academic investigation. The moderate revival of folk beliefs in contemporary China has stimulated localized self-consciousness with respect to ethnic beliefs. In addition, the international value placed on "Intangible Cultural Heritage" has led to more favorable attitudes to the relationship between folk beliefs and Chinese society. Therefore ethnic beliefs have once again become an integral part of daily life among minority groups. Broadly speaking, these academic studies have created a certain protection of folk beliefs as valuable ethnic traditions (Intangible Cultural Heritage), and to the reconstruction of folk beliefs as an integral part of life (Gao, 1997; Tan, 1993).



A



B

Figure 1-1. A. The location of Qinghai Province in China; B. population distribution of Tu Nationality in Qinghai Province.

Anthropologists have devoted considerable attention to studies of minority religions in China (Shao, 2004; Shih, 2010; Yuan & Teng, 2008; Zhou, 2003). Among the studies, the most representative contain detailed interpretations and analyses of the origins, doctrines and organizations of folk religious subgroups (Ma & Han, 1992) and the collection of data on folk (secret) religions (Li, 1990; Lu, 2000; Pu, 1991). These studies have revealed the contours of certain folk (secret) religions that had been concealed by history. An analysis of this corpus of religious literature permits a better comprehension of diffused folk beliefs and demonstrates the existence of an organized folk society. Most of the academic scholarship consists of descriptive rather than theoretical analysis of Chinese minority religions. Studies of the religious beliefs of the Tu are furthermore scattered and fragmented; there is as yet no corpus of holistic integrated research on Tu religion.

In my dissertation, I will try to frame the discussion of Tu religion in an appropriate social and political context to draw a portrait of a Chinese minority's folk religious ecology in the broader context of modern China. I also hope to document how the new relationship between the State and religion was formed in the context of the local economy, society and politics. My hope is that this discussion will lead to further research and deeper understanding of minority societies.

1.1.3.2 Studies on the Tu

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both Chinese and Western scholars carried out research on the Tu. The Catholic missionary, Louis Schram was the first Western scholar to study the Tu in the 1950s. Schram traveled to the Tu areas and used participant observation and interviews in his research, eventually publishing a series of articles titled "The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier" (Part I, II and III) (Schram, 1954, 1957, 1961). He described the Tu's religious traditions in the second part of his book. Although Schram was not an anthropologist, he kept extensive field notes that are invaluable in understanding the history of the folk religion of the Tu. After 1980 the

volume of research on Tu folk religion increased substantially (E, 2002; Fan, 1997; Li & Li, 1998; Ren & Li, 1998; Zhao, 2007). With the growth of scholarly literature on Tibetan Buddhism in the last 15 years, most of the studies focus on Tibetan Buddhism among the Tu (Tang, 1996; Wen, 2002; Zhai, 2001, 2003c), including the role Tibetan temples in Tu history (Fang, 1990; Qin, 1994) and the living Buddha system of the Youning Temple (佑宁寺) (Pu, 1985; Zhang, 1990). Several scholars have investigated animism (Liu, 1993; SangjiRenqian, 2004, 2006; Xin et al., 2006; Yang, 2007), and totemism involving, for example, the use of the consecrated spear-length divinatory rods that will be discussed in these pages (Jin, 2006; Yang & Yang, 2005; Xu, 2004). There have also been studies of religious specialists and rituals (Cai, 2007; Deng & Sang, 2002; E, 2004; Lv, 1985), ancestor worship (Deng & Sang, 2002; E, 2006; Sang, 2002), the worship of the kitchen god (Li, 2006), and specialist roles surrounding folk beliefs (Yang, 2007). In short, Tu religious beliefs and practices have been the object of a fair amount of scholarly research.

This earlier corpus of research on the Tu, especially on Tu religions, will provide a valuable frame of reference for my study. However, most of the research has been descriptive in character. There has been up until now no comprehensive and systemic study of the entire Tu religious landscape that describes how Tu folk religion interacts with other elements of Tu society. My intent has been to map out the Tu folk religious landscape and analyze the manner in which Tu folk religion has interacted with Buddhism and Daoism, on the one hand, and how on the other hand their syncretic religious traditions have interacted with other elements of Tu social and political life. My dissertation will also venture into theoretically informed analysis about religious pluralism and religious diversity in Chinese minority society as a whole.

1.2 The History and Cultural Background of the Tu

1.2.1 The History and Population Distribution of the Tu

The Tu ethnic group (土族) is one of 56 ethnic groups officially recognized by the People's Republic of China. In the past the Tu called themselves "Monguor," "Menggu'r Kong" and "Chahan Menggu'r." Tu people were called Tu Ren (土人) or Tu Min (土民) by the Han Chinese, Hui and other nationalities, and Huo'er by Tibetans. They are known as "Monguor" or "Mangghuer" in Western publications.

According to the national census of 2010, the Tu numbered 289,595 people distributed throughout the northwest regions of China, with a higher concentration in the Huzhu, Minhe, and Datong Tu autonomous counties, Ledu County and Tongren County of the Huangnan Tibetan Nationality Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province. There are also small pockets of Tu living in Tianzhu, Yongdeng, and Zhuoni counties in Gansu Province. Distributed in different areas, with various differences in customs, dialects, and festivals, they were classified as the Tu ethnic group (Tu Zu, 土族) by the Chinese Government in 1953. Below is a breakdown of the Tu in different regions and their population distribution.

1.2.1.1 Tu in Huzhu

Situated between the geographic coordinates 36°30' – 37°09'N and 101°46' – 102°45'E, Huzhu is the only autonomous county of the Tu ethnic group that is located in the northeastern part of Qinghai Province. With a total area of 3,425 square kilometers, Huzhu County extends 86 km from west to east and 64 km from north to south. Huzhu has a total population of 380,000 inhabitants, of which the minority population numbers 101,100 (26.60%). The latter consists of 11 minority ethnic groups, including the Tu, Tibetans, the Hui, Mongolians, and Manchu. Administratively, Huzhu County has eight towns and 11 townships (town-level divisions), including four minority towns and townships. On the sub-level, the county has 294 administrative villages and 2,015 advanced agricultural producers' cooperatives.



Figure 1-2. Map of Huzhu County, Qinghai Province, China

Huzhu County is located at the southern foot of the east section of the Qilian Mountains, which is the contiguous area of the Loess Plateau and Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, at an average elevation of 2,700 m. The elevation is higher in the north than the south. Huzhu's terrain consists of mountains crisscrossed by ravines and gullies, and six natural rivers, all tributaries of the Huangshui River. Because of the terrain and geographic location, the average temperature for the whole year is 3.4°C. The climate of Huzhu in spring is windy; in summer the temperature is cool and refreshing. Autumn is rainy and winter is cold with some snow. Qingshiling Mountain, the name

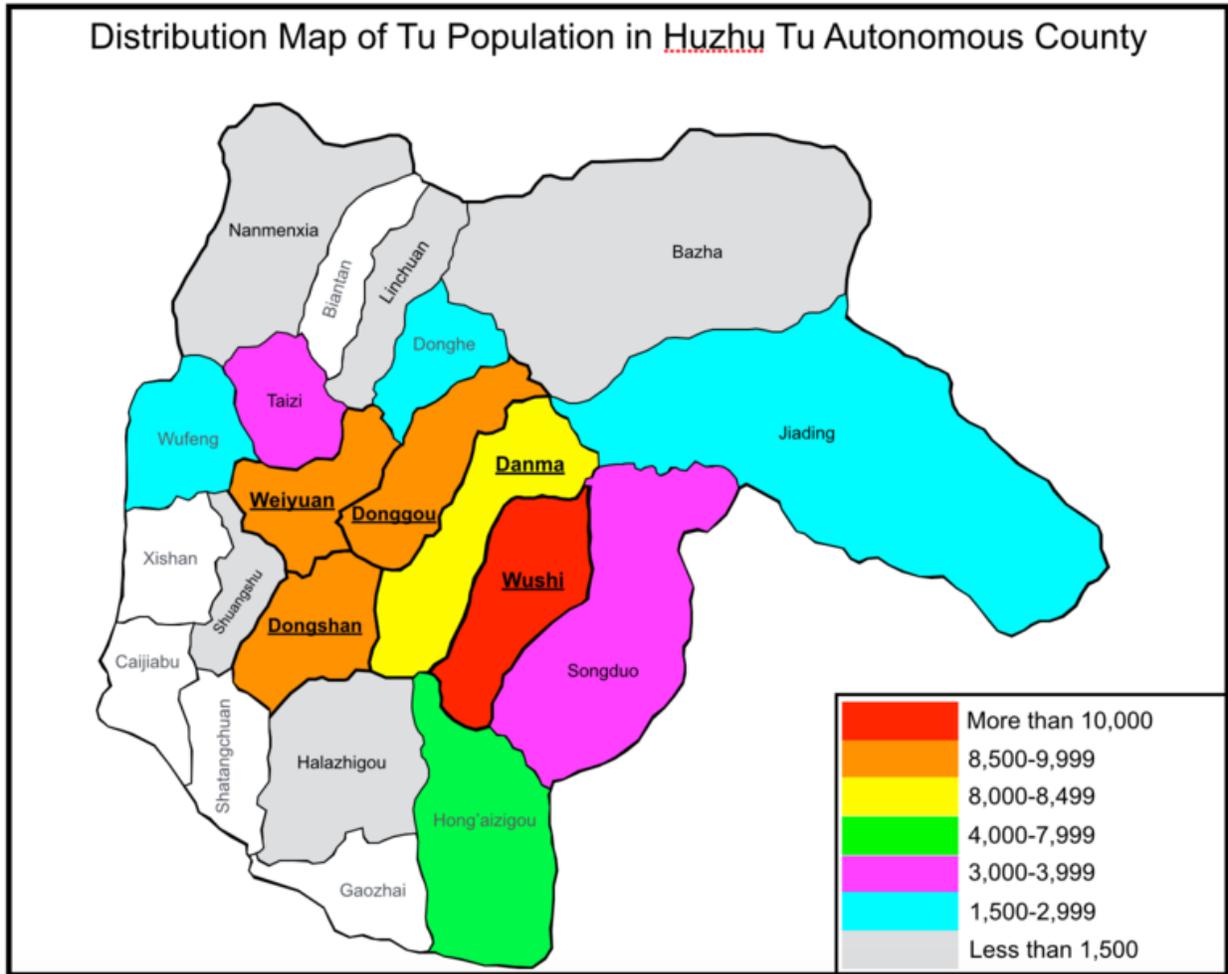


Figure 1-3. Population distribution of Tu Nationality in Huzhu

for the eastern part of the Qilian Mountains is located across the whole county from northwest to southeast. Huzhu is therefore naturally divided into two geographical units by Qingshiling Mountain, which runs from northwest to southeast. These two separate geographical units are called Qianshan (the southern section) and Houshan (the northern part, referred to as the “back” of the mountain). Chilebu Peak, also known as Dragon King Peak in Mandarin, located in the middle of Qingshiling Mountain, is venerated as a spiritually powerful mountain and functions as an important ritual site for the Tu, Tibetan, and ethnically mixed groups of Han people in Huzhu.

As the majority ethnic group of the Autonomous County, the Tu population is distributed across all towns and townships, but are concentrated mainly in Wushi, Danma, Donggou, Dongshan, Weiyuan, Hongaizigou, Songduo, and Taizi Town (or Township). According to the 2011 census, the Tu population in Huzhu County was 70,481 (18.19% of the total population of Huzhu and 36.2% of the total population of Tu people in Qinghai Province). We see, therefore, that Huzhu is the largest Tu-inhabited area in China.

The Tu people in Huzhu engage primarily in agricultural production; they also practice animal husbandry as well. The Tu-inhabited areas are for the most part located in the central part of Huzhu and in other major grain-producing areas. Their chief crops include wheat, highland barley, rapeseed plants, and potatoes. Their principal livestock are horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs. It is interesting to note that different subgroups of the Tu living in different parts of the Huzhu area have developed their own distinctive cultural characteristics in terms of traditional dress, language, and other cultural domains.

1.2.1.2 Tu in Minhe

Minhe County in Haidong City, Qinghai Province, contains the second largest cluster of Tu. It is located at the eastern edge of Qinghai Province and shares a common border with Gansu Province. The area of Minhe is 1,890.82 sq. km, and the total population is 351,000, of which Han Chinese comprises the majority and the Tu comprise about 12% (2011 Census). According to the Minhe County Annals, the area was the home of the Qiang people before the Qin (221–207 BC) and Han dynasties (206 BC–220 AD), and was incorporated by the central government of China during those periods. During the period of Emperor Wu Di of the Han Dynasty, the central government set up the county government for the Huangshui River valley, including the Minhe area. From that point on, Minhe became one of the main arteries of political, economic and culture contact between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the central plains.

The clothing of Tu women in Minhe differs slightly from the clothing worn by the Tu in Huzhu. The women in Minhe wear mostly green coats and red dresses, while the Tu men wear long gowns, similar to the clothing which the Han people wore during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). According to oral tradition, the ancestors of the Tu people in Minhe lived mainly in the Zhaomuchuan area, and descended from locals who had intermarried with the troops of one of Genghis Khan's generals, Gerilite. It is said that the Zhaomuchuan Caves contain relics of Mongolian troops at that time and are sacred to the locals. At present, some of the Tu people in the Sanchuan Region of Minhe believe that their ancestors were Mongolian and stage major ceremonies in which they pour out wine toward the east, where the Mongols lived, as a demonstration of their knowledge of their origins. In view of the agriculturally challenging geographical conditions in western China, the Tu in Minhe traditionally focused on animal husbandry. But now, most are engaged in both agriculture and animal husbandry. The language of the Minhe Tu has been heavily influenced by the local Han Chinese dialects. As a result, in their daily conversation, their native language has incorporated many lexical items from Han Chinese. Despite this, the Tu in Minhe have no problem communicating with the Tu in Huzhu.

1.2.1.3 Tu in Tongren

Tongren County is 181 km from the capital city, Xining, and is located in the southeastern part of Qinghai in the northeastern section of the Huangnan Autonomous Tibetan Prefecture. Tongren consists of two towns and ten townships and covers an area of 3,275 square kilometers. The population is 80,300.

Located at the transition zone of the Loess Plateau and the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau, Tongren has always been populated by nomads. According to historical documents from the Han Dynasty, Tongren traditionally fell under the political power and influence of Tibet. From the Yuan and Ming dynasties, Longwu Monastery was the seat of the largest theocratic system in Qinghai, a system that lasted until the Qing Dynasty. In

1929, the central government of China set up a county-level government in Tongren. Longwu Monastery was established as the administrative center in the fifth year of the Dade Period in the Yuan Dynasty (1301 A.D.). Initially, Longwu belonged to the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which later became the Gelug sect. The monastery later became the largest in south Qinghai and administered dozens of smaller monasteries such as Niangduhu, Guomari, Wutun Shangzhuang, and Xiazhuang. The temple now hosts four monastery schools of Exoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism, Medical Buddhism, and Astronomy., The monastery has also hosted more than 20 living Buddhas, and the famous Eighteen Nangqian (18 mansions for the living Buddha). In the Amdo Tibetan Region, the influence of the Longwu Monastery is second only to that of the Ta'er Monastery and the Labrang Monastery.

The Tu of Tongren reside mostly in villages such as Gasari, Guomari, and Wutong and speak their own dialect, which is quite different from the Tu dialects in Huzhu and Minhe. This dialect has many similarities with the language of the Baoan ethnic group (保安族), whose members practice Islam. When outside of their villages these Tu speak Tibetan or Han Chinese. They speak Tu within their families. This occurs because the Tu of Tongren came under the influence of Tibetan culture and therefore also speak Tibetan. They have also been heavily influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. Many Tu families make their living practicing the Regong Art tradition and have become well known for their craftsmanship in producing Tangkas² and sculptures. They hold different opinions regarding their own ethnic origins. Some believe that they are the descendants of earlier generations of Tu; however, others maintain that their ancestors were Tibetan.

² This is a Tibetan Buddhist painting or embroidery on cotton or silk, usually depicting a Buddhist deity or scene, used for teaching and meditation.

1.2.1.4 Tu in other areas

Besides living in the three above mentioned areas (Huzhu, Minhe, and Tongren), there are also Tu who reside in Datong County and Ledu County. . Datong, as an administered county of Xining City, is located in northeast Qinghai and shares a common border with Huzhu. Ledu County is located in eastern Qinghai and borders with Minhe to the southeast and with Huzhu to the northwest. Datong and Ledu are also located in the transition zone from the Loess Plateau to the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau. Archaeological finds in Sunjiazhai Village and Changning Town of Datong include dance-patterned painted pottery bowls produced by the Neolithic Majiayao Culture more than 5,000 years ago. Also in Datong are well-preserved relics of the Great Wall at its highest elevation, dating from the Ming Dynasty. The Tu people in Datong comprise only about 8% of the total population of the county.

Ledu County is the location of the large Qutan Monastery, which was originally established during the Ming Dynasty in the Han Chinese architectural style. Also located there is the Liuwan painted pottery burial ground, which is representative of Majiayao Culture. The Tu people in Datong and Ledu still preserve a number of historical and traditional ethnic characteristics, and a few old people speak almost the same language as the Huzhu Tu people. However, for the most part, because they have lived among Han Chinese, the majority of young people no longer learn to speak their ethnic language.

All in all, although the Tu are residentially dispersed into many different regions, they maintain many cultural similarities and have on the whole preserved their folk religion. However, at the same time, there are regional cultural differences between them. For example, the Tu who live in different regions speak different dialects of the Tu language and observe different festivals and customs.

1.2.2 Language, Customs, and Lifestyle

The Tu language belongs to the Mongolian group of the Altaic Phylum. Its basic vocabulary is the same as or similar to the Mongolian language. There are actually three main dialects that are identified as dialects of Tu: Huzhu, Minhe, and Niandhu/Baoan. Historically, the Tu people never had a written language of their own, but they are able to write in Chinese. Currently they use the characters of a new written system based on the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet created by a Tu linguist Li, Keyu, in 1979.

Due to their dispersion into different geographical environments and their linguistic interactions with other ethnic groups, substantial regional variations have arisen in the Tu language. Since Huzhu County is largely mountainous and relatively inaccessible, most of the Tu people there live together in ethnically homogeneous communities. For that reason the Tu from the Huzhu area have succeeded in retaining their ethnic language. Now most Huzhu Tu people can speak their native language, and their children are bilingual. They speak the Tu language at home but speak Mandarin at school. The neighboring Datong area of Huzhu is flat and transportation is easy and convenient; they have therefore had regular interaction with Han Chinese and their language reflects this interaction. The Tu language in Datong is on the verge of possible extinction. Only some elderly people can speak fluent Tu, but most of the young people have never learned the Tu language except for a few simple words. The third generation – those born in this area after the 1990s – are unable to speak any Tu words. They speak only the local Han Chinese dialect and Mandarin.

In contrast, the Tu language in the Tongren area remains relatively intact. However, the Tongren Tu cannot communicate with the Tu from Huzhu and Minhe because their language has diverged substantially from the Huzhu and Minhe dialects, except for a few words. I am a member of the Tu ethnic group. I conducted fieldwork in the Tongren area many times, but because I could not understand their dialect, I had to communicate with them by using the local Han Chinese dialect, or by finding locals to help with translation.

Interestingly, the Tu language in Tongren is almost exactly the same as the language of the Baoan, a small minority ethnic group that practices Islam. Actually, the Baoan lived in Tongren in past centuries but later moved to Linxia in Gansu Province because of ethnic conflict. In other regions the Tu language was strongly influenced by the Chinese dialects spoken by local Han, by the Tibetan language, and by other dialects to which the Tu were constantly exposed.

At present, the Tu people are engaged mainly in agriculture and are involved in animal husbandry as a secondary pursuit, specializing in sheep breeding. Tu villages are close-knit communities made up of extended families. Most villages are located at the foot of a hill and in proximity to a river. It is worth mentioning that the clothing and decorations of the Tu are bright and colorful and have distinctive styles. Both men and women prefer to wear delicately embroidered clothes with high collars. They consider the rainbow to be a symbol of happiness. A woman's dress will therefore usually have five colors. Furthermore embroidery is very popular in the Tu areas; Tu women are known for their skill in that activity. In addition, the Tu are very hospitable. They believe that "the visit of guests is the coming of happiness," so they will take great pains to entertain visitors with great enthusiasm. If guests for some reason cannot drink, they will at least dip their finger and flip three drops of wine to express their gratitude. The Tu have multiple, lively entertainment activities; they are renowned for their talent in singing and dancing.

The Tu also have many colorful folk festivals; they not only share some festivals with the Han Chinese, but also have their own distinct ethnic festivals with specific characteristics. At each festival, numerous religious rituals occur (These will be described in detail in Chapter 3). The Tu rites of passage, marking different transitions in the life cycle, also have many distinctive characteristics. This is particularly true of marriages and funerals.

1.3 Fieldwork: Data and Methods

The research underlying this dissertation was carried out in Huzhu County in Qinghai province, Northwest China. The Tu constitute 40% of the population in Huzhu County, though in some villages the percentage of Tu exceeds 74%. I am a member of the Tu (Mongour) and my hometown is in Datong County, 30 km from Huzhu. Since 2002, I have made several visits to the Huzhu Tu and have paid particular attention to the role of religion in local life. For my dissertation, I conducted intensive fieldwork from June 2012 to July 2013. I collected historical documents, publications from the library and official documents from the local county government. In my research I also employed ethnographic methods such as participant observation, key informant interviewing, as well as survey research including questionnaires and statistical analysis. I conducted participant observation and interviews in religious centers, homes, villages, government offices, organizations, and at public social events. I participated in religious rituals, festivals, weddings and funerals. I not only observed external behaviors, but I also elicited people's opinions about their religious traditions. Though I will go into great detail on some of the patterns in later chapters, the information can be summarized as follows.

The Tu religious tradition is hundreds of years old. In this long historical period, the changes that have occurred in China's political and social institutions have exerted an impact on the relationship between religion and the Chinese State. These changes have also exerted an impact on the Tu's ethnic identity. Their folk religion also guides their behavior toward the natural environment and thus plays an important role in local ecology. Some ethno-historiographies and other historical archives have valuable information about Tu history and society. I therefore collected historical documents, including official documents from the local museum, from official institutions and from local governmental offices. I collected data on the ecology of the Tu areas, including information on climate and geology, water resources, and other ecological resources.

I collected economic information from the annual governmental reports written about the Tu, including information on the government's socioeconomic development policies, major industries, agriculture, and other documents. I also reviewed documents that discussed the government's policy with respect to religion. In addition, I took field notes, recorded audiotapes and videotapes, made transcripts of conversations, and did library research consulting books, articles, and ethnographies written about the Tu.

I was particularly interested in gathering firsthand information on the religious landscape and the folk religious beliefs and practices in the different Tu areas. I carried out participant observation in several Tu communities in Huzhu county, Qinghai province, northwest China. In August 2012, I went to Huzhu and conducted an in-depth survey on the religious sites of different religious traditions. I went to village temples, Tibetan Buddhist temples, Daoist shrines and other holy sites in the Tu areas. Through statistical surveys, I collected data on the number and size of all religious places in Huzhu. Three research assistants helped me to carry out this work. In addition, I attended and collected data pertaining to religious rituals, festivals, and oral traditions. The religious rituals and festivals I attended included the *nadun* (纳顿) in Minghe, the *biangbianghui* (梆梆会) and the *guanjinghui* (观经会) in Huzhu, the *anzhao*³ (安昭) in Datong and other festivals like *chaoshanhui* (朝山会) and *zhuanshanjing* (转山经). Participant observation was my main method of research in this context. I focused on religious elements in the annual festival cycle and documented the relationships among different religious traditions.

While observing these important events, I took particular note of the role of the town and county governments in these religious rituals, to understand the local dynamics of the interaction between religion and the Chinese State. I used my own social network

³ The “*anzhao*” is an old folk song and dance form that is very popular in Tu areas. The words “*anzhao suoluoluo*” are often repeated in the song, giving it its name.

to interview local cadres⁴ and religious leaders to obtain information about the possible use of religion as a vehicle of social control. In these interviews, I learned how the different religions negotiate with each other and with the local government.

In addition, I studied rites of passage among the Tu, particularly weddings and funerals. I also observed the roles of women in rituals and the relations between folk religion and gender among the Tu. At the same time, I visited religious sites and ordinary villages to investigate the history of gender dynamics and the differential roles of men and women in religious performance in the Tu areas. I also used interviews and participant observation to learn about differences among folk religion, Daoism, and Tibetan Buddhism with respect to culturally mandated gender roles in Tu religious life. I paid particular attention to certain taboos against female religious participation, taboos which will be discussed in some detail in a later chapter of the dissertation.

Since the Tu do not have a writing system, their oral tradition is the most important source for exploring their religious history. I began recording oral accounts in 2002, including folk stories, myths, legends, epics, and songs. These accounts were elicited both in Han Chinese and in the Tu language itself. I also explored the relationship between religion and the environment. In that context I observed how the three religions interact with each other as they exert an impact on the behavior of the Tu with respect to their natural environment.

I resided in Huzhu for eight months to interview monks, Daoist priests, shamans and other members of folk religious organizations. Through interviews with these informants, I learned local opinions about religious traditions and collected detailed information about their life experiences and personal histories. At the same time, I made repeat visits to several families and administered a questionnaire to them. Though

⁴ An official member at different levels of the Chinese government, such as mayor in village, president in County, etc.

qualitative interviews, I endeavored to understand how nature is conceptualized and valued in the different religious systems and how their religion affects their response to environmental dilemmas. In summary, the observation of everyday practices constituted a daily part of my research. It allowed me to uncover details of Tu identities and to trace fascinating interactions among the three different religious traditions. The observations took place in religious sites, homes, villages, government offices and organizations, and at public events. Based on my research questions, five kinds of data were collected about the Tu: religious history, ethnicity and religious landscape, ecology and religion, gender and religion, and social/political power and religion.

In conclusion, it is my conviction that a study of the living knowledge of the Chinese people particularly through analysis of popular religious beliefs, and the study of the folk religion of a specific Chinese minority community, will generate understanding of the social psychology of its believers. But beyond a phenomenological understanding of the subjective understanding of believers, an investigation informed by sociological and anthropological theory can place folk religion in a broader conceptual framework that identifies the function of religious beliefs and practices as a vehicle of cultural continuity, on the one hand, and on the other hand as a domain that has been used in China as a vehicle for constructing harmonious social relations between local religious communities and the nation-state.

1.4 Summary of the Dissertation

My dissertation consists of eight chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Several chapters will be principally descriptive and partially analytical.

Chapter 2 presents a general picture of the religious pluralism among the Tu. Through a description of the complex religious system – a harmonious blend of Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism, and folk beliefs, the chapter provides essential historical information. Multiple religions coexist within the Tu tradition in a harmonious but sometimes contradictory way. I also detailed showing how competition among the different religious

power still exists and has enhanced the revival of folk religion to some extent. In Huzhu, folk religion occupies a privileged position; it not only maintains the traditional culture in ritual life, but is also the principal mechanism by which the Tu maintain their system of social order.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of folk religion in the Tu areas, giving particular attention to the concept of "multifunctional spirits." The chapter includes a detailed ethnography of beliefs concerning the origin of folk deities, as well as discussions of nature worship, cosmology and the manner in which the polytheistic belief system of Tu villagers differs from that of the concept of "sin" in the monotheistic religions of the West. In Tu folk religion, deities and evil spirits are both supernatural beings who influence the lives of humans. The wars between them preserve the vitality of the folk religion; the evil spirits cause misfortune or disaster, while the benevolent deities meet people's needs, help them solve problems, and restore the original order of society. Any social or political disorder is interpreted as a result of the anger of the deities. Moreover, the simultaneous participation of the Tu in multiple religious traditions demonstrates an attitude of religious tolerance. No matter what tradition the deities derive from, as long as the deities are able to bring them benefits, the Tu worship them. The beliefs of the Tu people are in this sense very utilitarian and malleable.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed ethnography of the Tu folk religious landscape, paying particular attention to its religious sites, specialists and organization. By discussion the function of religious sites, this paper shows that village temples and the *benkang*⁵ (苯康) are not only as sacred places for the spiritual life of the local people, but are also centers of local political, economic, cultural and social dynamics rich in symbolic meanings. This ethnography of religious sites is followed by a description

⁵ It is a small religious squared pavilion and is located at the intersection near villages for keeps bad weather and disasters away

of the roles of different religious specialists. The *bo* (孛) is the shaman in Huzhu. As intermediaries between the spiritual and material worlds, the *shidianzeng* (什殿增, the specialist who communicates with deities) are a kind of “spirit medium.” The *shidianzeng* communicate with spirits using consecrated sword-like rods, which are used as the iconic representations of local deities and are usually housed in village temples. The *benbenzi* (苯苯子) are spiritual practitioners who have studied Tibetan Buddhism (*Nyingma sect*) but are not monks. They have also played a role in shaping the development of the Tu folk religion. The religious organization, *qingmiaohui*⁶ (青苗会), plays an important role in folk religious activities and rituals, and is responsible for the enforcement of law. To some extent, the informal administrative functions of *qingmiaohui* have a more powerful impact on local life than the functions of formal village government. In short, this chapter shows that Tu folk religion is a logical belief system that has an integrated organization and structure.

Chapter 5 examines the folk religious festivals and rituals of the Tu and the ways in which folk religion affects community life and the local natural environment. Because of the adverse natural conditions and the shortage of cultivated land and water resources in the Tu areas, conflicts often arise among the villages. This ecological crisis provokes an inter-religious dialogue and collaboration in form, content and consciousness. Moreover, I argue that daily religious rituals give external expression to internal religious beliefs rooted in the minds and hearts of the Tu people. Folk religions imperceptibly influence people’s moral values as well as their general ideology. In addition, their distinctive festivals and rituals strengthen the internal interaction among members of an ethnic group and thus have an impact on their self-consciousness as a distinct ethnic group. The *biangbianghui* prays to the spirits to ward off calamities and to send

⁶ A kind of organization of the temple fair but has high authority in Tu community, and also protects green shoots of grain.

down blessings; the local spirits are entertained by the shaman's ritual and dance. The *zhuanshanjing* is the God Pageant Ceremony during the Festival. The parade that occurs in the course of this ceremony publicly delineates the territory occupied by every dragon god. The *xiazhen* (下镇) and *chapai* (插牌) are two rituals the petition local spirits to protect the people against the Hail Disaster. The *xiejing* (谢将) is the end-of-the-year ritual to thank the spirits for their protection for the crops. In these rituals, all the villagers have to abide by the village's regulations. They are obliged to maintain harmonious relationships within the family and the community. Thus we can see that folk religion functions to promote harmonious relationships within the local population. Furthermore the reverence for nature that is expressed in various ceremonies also encourages people to have a harmonious relationship with the natural environment.

Chapter 6 examines gender dynamics in the context of folk religion. I first show that Tu women occupy a low social position and have less freedom than men when it comes to decisions concerning marriage and education. They are allowed less freedom to express themselves and have less decision-making power in family matters. After this, I discuss how the woman's role in Tu folk religion is a bundle of contradictions: female supernatural beings, including the indigenous goddess named *Sanxiao niangniang* (三孝娘娘) and *Jinshan niangniang* (金山娘娘), stand out as an effective challenge to the patriarchal Tu society. At the same time, I point out that in the Tu oral tradition, women emerge as having a paradoxical power in the religious world that contrasts with their relative powerlessness in ordinary social life. For example, in classical texts and folk traditions, the dual character of the Tu female reappears in the roles of the wife (good, benevolent, dutiful, and controlled) and mother (fertile and powerful, but dangerous and uncontrolled). It is obvious that the structural centrality of the maternal role in Tu ideology conflicts with the structural marginalization of women in many domains of social and political life. This has created among the Tu a dualistic and internally contradictory ideology regarding the role of females.

Chapter 7 examines the interaction between folk religion, government policy with respect to religion and the power of the Chinese state. In this chapter, I first discuss the changes that have taken place in the policy of the Chinese Communist government regarding religion. Tu folk religion was once banned as “feudal superstition” in China. But it has been revived in the last two decades. Folk religion has played several roles in the development of political awareness in traditional Tu society. For instance the Chinese State has attempted to recruit folk religion to justify political power, to establish administrative authority, and to maintain social order. In some Tu villages, the governmental administrators are also the religious interpreters, emitting judgments in the name of the village deity. In this chapter I also look at the interaction between folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism. I show that in addition to the process of internal cultural cross-fertilization, the religious pluralism of the Tu is also in part an outcome of their external political environment.

Chapter 8 recapitulates and summarizes the key points of my dissertation. Although different traditions such as Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism mingle seamlessly in the daily practice of the Tu, there are specific local spirit beliefs, rituals, and specialists associated with Tu folk religion, as distinct from those of Buddhism and Daoism, that serve to integrate and give a distinct character to local culture. The Tu have traditionally had a closed community. As distinct from the formal administrative territorial division, Tu culture is divided into discrete worshipping circles that center on distinct local deities. The Tu kinship system and community structure as expressed in local folk religion has had an important influence on local political power. Religious symbols, objects and ideas are the means of construction, maintenance, and transmission of these local cultural identities that are quite autonomous of formal administrative structures. In short, it is hoped that my study of Tu folk religion will provide insight into the relationship between folk religion and ethnic identity on the one hand, and on the other hand the manner in

which folk religion mediates the relationship between a particular ethnic group and the nation-state at large.

CHAPTER 2 MULTI-RELIGIONS AMONG THE TU

The Tu people point out that they have been universally religious from traditional times. As we shall see in this chapter, their religion is a complex syncretic system, a harmonious blend of Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and autochthonous folk beliefs. The ancestors of the Tu practiced an indigenous folk religion, but they began to accept elements of Buddhism and Daoism in the fifth century. They adopted Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Bon Religion in the middle of the seventh century. Thus the evolution of Tu folk religion has been significantly influenced by exposure to those two religions. In terms of their spirit beliefs, the Tu have incorporated spirits from other ethnic groups through interactions with them. Their current belief system is thus characterized by great diversity.

The religions currently practiced by the Tu are now either a variant of Tibetan Buddhism or a folk religion that incorporates elements of Buddhism, but that also has many traces of Daoism. These pages will focus on the Tu folk religion, discussing Buddhism insofar as it has influenced the folk religion. We will see that the development, survival, and evolution of Tu folk religion cannot be understood apart from Tibetan Buddhism. In this chapter, I will discuss the protector deities of the Tibetan Buddhist system and the historical remnants of Daoism in Tu areas; I also discuss the relationship among the three religions, the symbolic meaning of the number three, and the phenomenon of religious pluralism among the Tu.

2.1 The Popularity and Influence of Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism is a powerful religion with a long history in the Tu region. It was introduced and was widely disseminated through the region of the Tu and has had a significant impact on Tu folk religion. This influence is not only reflected in the spirit beings whose images are housed in village temples; it can also be seen in the participation of Tibetan monks in various public religious rites and activities. You Ning

Si (佑宁寺, Youning monastery) is the most important Buddhist temple in Huzhu. Its sui-generis system of protector deities reflects the mutual integration of Tu folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism. The different status attributed to different spirits, however, also reflects some tensions and conflicts that have surfaced, particularly in times past.

With the development of Tibetan Buddhism after the Ming Dynasty, and as a result of generations of close contact with Tibetans and Mongolians, nearly all of the Tu believe in the spirits and rituals of Tibetan Buddhism. In the past, Tu areas were home to a huge number of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and produced many eminent monks. For the Tu, temples are both sites for religious activity and for educational and cultural events. There have been eminent Buddhist monks among the Tu. They are highly respected intellectuals who have transmitted elements of Tibetan Buddhist culture to their ethnic group. Thus, Tibetan Buddhism has had a powerful influence on the Tu and has permeated their society. For example, it is common for a Tu family to send a son into a Tibetan monastery to be a monk if they have more than two children. And most Tu families have a *manigan* (嘛呢杆), which is a colorfully decorated wooden pillar in the center of their yards. It is a symbol of Tibetan Buddhism, with prayers printed on the flag as an offering to Buddha.

More than 40 temples serve as centers of Buddhist activities in Tu areas. You Ning Si (Youning monastery) was constructed in the Ming Dynasty in 1604. It belongs to the *Gelug Sect* of Tibetan Buddhism and has had a deep influence on the Tu belief system. You Ning Si, also known as Gönlung Jampa Ling Monastery, is located in Sitan Village, 35 kilometers from the capital of Huzhu County. According to the You Ning Si Annals, the earliest decision to construct a Gelug temple was made by the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588). In 1584, the Third Dalai Lama stopped by the location of current You Ning Si on the way to Inner Mongolia and judged the site to be a geographic treasure ground. He publicly promised to construct a Tibetan Buddhist temple there.

However, the Third Dalai Lama passed away in Inner Mongolia. In 1602, the Fourth Dalai Lama (1589-1662), who had been reincarnated in Inner Mongolia, passed through the same place on the way to his enthronement ceremony in Tibet. The chiefs of 13 local tribes requested the Fourth Dalai Lama to construct a temple to honor the commitment made by the Third Dalai Lama. The Fourth Dalai Lama granted their request. He sent the Fourth Panchen Lama and the Seventh Gyatso Rinpoche living Buddha to Huzhu Qinghai to supervise the construction of You Ning Si the following year. Under continuous expansion, the temple reached its peak in the early Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty. At that time, You Ning Si included more than 2,000 buildings of scripture halls and dormitories for monks, more than 7,700 monks, four Buddhist schools of Exoteric Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism, *Kalachakra* (wheel of time), and Medicine, and a large number of affiliated temples. Because You Ning Si had forty-nine affiliated temples in the Huangbei Region and East Qilian Mountains, it has been honored as the Mother of All the Temples in Huangbei.

In You Ning Si, there is a complicated living Buddha system with more than 20 living Buddhas, including nine minor incarnation lineages and five major incarnation lineages. These are Changkya (Zhangjia Living Buddha), Thuken (Tuguan Living Buddha), Chusang (Quezang Living Buddha), Sumpa (Songbu Living Buddha) and Wangfo Living Buddha (named after the birthplaces of the first of them). All the incarnated living Buddhas of those five major incarnation lineages were proficient in Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian, Manchu, and Buddhist classics and composed many literary works. By the time of the imperial government of Qing Dynasty, all of them had significant power throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world. They received the honorific title of *Khutukhtu*, a phonetic transcription from Mongolian meaning “a person with a long life,” suggesting immortality. During the National Division that occurred in the Qing Dynasty and the subsequent period of the Republic of China in Mainland China, the Changkya Living Buddha had always been considered the religious leader in Inner Mongolian areas and



Figure 2-1. Youning Monastery in Huzhu County, Qinghai Province, China

honored along with the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama and the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu as one of the “Four Saints of the Yellow Sect.”

Some of the living Buddhas in You Ning Si are of Tu ethnicity and others are Tibetan, but all of them were incarnated in Huzhu or in neighboring regions. In addition to their achievements in Tibetan Buddhism, they also enjoy high political status locally, and some of them occupy the political positions of Provincial CPPCC¹ Vice Chairman, County-level or CPPCC Vice Chairman. This is evidence of the power and influence of Tibetan Buddhism in Tu areas.

¹ CPPCC: Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

You Ning Si has its own unique pantheon of protector deities that illustrates the mutual integration, the conflicts and the co-evolution of Tu folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism. The system of four protector deities – the mule king, the *bahaer*, the *danjian* (丹尖, a protector deity of Tibetan Buddhism) and the *nidang* (尼当) – is different from the complex found in Tibetan Buddhist temples in other areas. The first three deities are widely worshipped in the Tibetan Buddhist system, but the *nidang* is a deity peculiar to Huzhu. The monks identify the *nidang* as a descendant of that mixed group whose ancestors were local Tu (descendants of Tuyuhun, 吐谷浑) who intermarried with a follower of the Mongolian general, Gerilite (格日利特). According to legend, mighty Gerilite had performed numerous glorious feats and was transformed into a powerful spirit hidden in the rocks of Guolong Mountain. Later, under the supervision of the Fourth Panchen Lama and the Seventh Gyatso Rinpoche living Buddha, on the way to preside over the construction of You Ning Si, the Seventh Jiase Living Buddha encountered the spirit of Gerilite. He honored him with his gold statue and the posthumous title of the *nidang*, thus conferring on him the status of a local protector deity. Another version says that the *nidang* was originally Mongolian. Over a long period of time, the Tu have come to worship him and to regard him as their ancestor. For that reason the statue of the *nidang* in the temple wears a Mongolian hat.

The entire complex of You Ning Si is built on mountains facing south. It consists of schools in Tantric Buddhism, Exoteric Buddhism, and others, official residences of living Buddha, and dormitories for monks in residence. All of the buildings harmoniously integrate Han and Tibetan architectural styles. At the road crossing into You Ning Si, a huge *benkang* (苯康, an open air shrine) stands next to a small courtyard where the *nidang* has been enshrined to protect You Ning Si. On the hillside, a separate group of buildings referred to as the *shanshendian* (山神殿, the Hall of the Mountain Deity) is the official site where rituals for the *nidang* take place. The outside walls are painted maroon and decorated with Tibetan Buddhist themes. Like that of many village temples, the door

of the main hall is painted red and the upper part of the door consists of woodcarvings. Because of the steepness of the mountain, there is only a narrow aisle instead of a courtyard between the front gate and the hall. Worshippers have decorated the top of the outside walls with plastic flowers, colorful *Chhatra* (Buddhist canopies), and ritual divination rods at the corner. Local people say that the functions carried out by the *nidang* enshrined in You Ning Si are the same as those of the *nidang* that are enshrined by villagers in their own communities. When facing disaster, local people come here to pray for blessings. The *nidang* is in fact the main deity worshipped by the villagers. (Some villages instead worship *bahaer*. Both *nidang* and *bahaer* are guardians of the You Ning Si.)

The *nidang*, which is a category of spirit rather than a single spirit, is widely worshipped among the Tu, each community having its own *nidang*. But the figure of the *nidang* also has been harmoniously merged into the local Tibetan Buddhist system and honored by Buddhists themselves as a local protector deity. The *nidang* protects Tibetan Buddhist temples in addition to local temples. However, the *nidang* in Tibetan Buddhism also performs functions of communication with the spirit world and divination.

For instance, it is considered normal to draw sacred lots for purposes of divination in local temples and Daoist temples but not in Tibetan Buddhist temples; however, in You Ning Si, people also draw sacred lots in the main hall, the *shanshendian*. During my visit in 2003, I spoke with a Tibetan Buddhist Lama who was in charge of caring for the *nidang* hall. On the table of the shrine I saw the pot holding the divinatory lots. But the Lama told me that it was better not to draw lots; he said it was enough to burn incense and kowtow if there were no special problems to address. Answering my questions about drawing sacred lots in the *shanshendian*, the Lama told me that the spiritual power of the *nidang* there was unusually efficacious in helping people who faced disaster to drive away the evil and to keep them safe.

During rituals in which *nidang* is invoked to help people, a *niqiang*², will communicate with *nidang* to learn what has caused the calamity and how to avert it. However, unlike the *shidianzeng* in village temples, the role of the *niqiang* must be undertaken by monks in Tibetan Buddhist temples. Introduced by the Lamas there, in You Ning Si, only one was selected to be the *niqiang* among more than 200 Lamas.

In the past, when the Lama was spiritually communicating with *nidang*, all the other major Lamas would offer *hada*³ (哈达) to him and bump heads with him (a ritual of Tibetan Buddhism), since he was viewed as the representative of this deity introduced from Tu culture. In addition, in large Buddhist memorial rituals, the Lama, a (Tibetan Buddhist monk, invokes all the protector deities with specific scriptures. For example, they chant scriptures for *bahaer* on the second day of each lunar month, and for *nidang* on the eighth day of each lunar month. This incorporation of a Tu deity into rituals by Buddhist Lamas illustrates the dynamic relation between local folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism.

Furthermore elements of Tibetan Buddhism have also become a part of local folk religious activities in Huzhu. This had resulted in a harmonious coexistence of the two religions, which enter into constant contact and interaction with each other. For example, local deities and Tibetan Buddhist deities are enshrined in the same village temples. And in many folk religious rituals, Tibetan Buddhist monks are invited to chant scriptures. The local Tu acknowledge Tibetan Buddhism as a part of their religious traditions, but Buddhist monks do not directly perform healing and fortunetelling. These functions are left to the specialist of the Tu folk religion. In the view of locals, Buddhist

² The person who communicates with spirits, similar to the *shidianzeng* (Usually he shakes the spiritual spear to communicate with folk deities) in Tu.

³ This is a white silk, traditional ceremonial scarf, about a meter long, used in ethnic groups where Tibetan Buddhism is practiced.

rituals have important symbolic meaning. But in the final analysis local Tu spirits are believed to have more power to intervene in practical affairs.

In summary, Tibetan Buddhism was introduced and widely disseminated through the region of the Tu and has had a significant impact on the evolution of Tu folk religion. You Ning Si, which has risen and fallen numerous times in its long history, holds the highest religious status in the Tibetan Buddhist areas of Northwest China. It has exerted a profound influence on the Tu folk religion, though the current size of the temple is not as large as when it was at its historical peak. There has thus been an intimate interaction between Tu folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism and the two have become integrated. The Tu people “accept and co-exist” with other religions. There is a constant process of negotiation, which has resulted in religious symbiosis and compromise.

2.2 The Dissemination and Decline of Daoism

The Tu people also accepted elements of Daoism as they came in contact with Han Chinese in an earlier period of Chinese history. According to the historical records, Daoism was imported into Tu areas around the time of the Ming Dynasty. Over the years, Tu folk religion has absorbed and assimilated elements of Daoism. Local Daoism in turn has also absorbed and assimilated elements of Tu folk religion.

The mutual influences and interactions between Daoism and Tu folk religion are extensive and span a variety of domains, these include both the structure of the pantheon and the liturgical rituals. The contemporary folk religion of the Tu retains a large number of Daoist elements: including scriptures, rituals and even the clothing of the religious specialists. The influence of Daoism can be seen everywhere. Daoist decorations, the elements of Yin-Yang Eight Diagrams (阴阳八卦) and representations of the Eight Immortals (八仙) are found everywhere in Tu village temples. I also found that most of the sacred writings used by local folk religious specialist had actually come from Daoist classics and philosophical works; some had even been copied directly from Daoist scriptural texts. Moreover, the folk religion borrowed the concepts and images



Figure 2-2. Daoists standing in front of the folk religious temple

of some Daoist deities and adapted them to local religious belief. For example, the specialists of Tu folk religion don the hat of the Daoist religious specialists. This hat is called Wu Fo Guan, meaning five Buddha crowns, since it is decorated with images of five spirits, three of which are from Daoism. These three are Yu Huang (玉皇, the Jade Emperor), the *niangniang* (娘娘, the Queen Mother of the Western Heavens) and the god of thunder.

It should be pointed out that the influence of Buddhism and Daoism on the folk religion of the Tu varies by area. In the Huzhu and Tongren regions, Tibetan Buddhism had the heaviest impact on Tu folk religion. On the other hand clear historical influences of Daoism can be seen in the scriptures and the customs of the masters in the variant of Tu folk religion found in the Datong and Minhe regions. In those places Daoism plays an important role in the religious life of the Tu; it can be seen in several rituals

such as those associated with building houses, organizing weddings and funerals, and others. Much of the folk religious practice in these Tu areas follows Daoist ritual, and emphasizes the Yin-yang and the concept of the Five-Elements in their rituals. In some Tu villages, people still bring in Daoist priests to preside over important lifecycle rituals. A typical example occurs in the Donghe village in Huzhu. Today every family there still calls on a Daoist priest to lead funeral rituals. I have met such a Daoist priest and witnessed the process. That particular Daoist is Han Chinese and comes from another village. He led the chanting in the ritual, and escorted the family members to the local temple to pray. He told me that he has been doing this ritual for Tu families in the area for many years.

The elements of folk religion and of Daoism are often difficult to distinguish from each other. The Han Chinese area also has its own folk religion apart from Daoism. But it is much closer to Daoism, and Han people expect that their folk deities will be admitted to the formal Daoist system. But in the Tu area, the process works somewhat in reverse. It is Daoist beliefs and practices that are incorporated into the local folk religion, thus integrating Daoist and local folk religion; a hybrid folk religion has emerged, with a strong Daoist strain. In Tu areas Daoist deities have been partially transformed and have taken on the form of local deities with Tu characteristics.

The impact of Tibetan Buddhism differs in that regard. Although Tibetan Buddhism has spread widely in Tu areas, comes into contact with Tu folk religion, and remains strong among the Tu, there has not been the same incorporation of Tibetan Buddhism into the Tu folk religion itself; Tibetan Buddhism maintains a certain distance and a relative independence. It is true that some Tu deities are admitted into the pantheon of protective deities in local Tibetan Buddhist sites. But on the whole there tends to be a competition between the deities of Tibetan Buddhism and the folk religious deities housed in the local village temples; unlike the deities of Daoism. Tibetan deities in

these particular communities are never fully absorbed or integrated into the Tu religious system.

Despite this, in comparison with Tibetan Buddhism, the influence of Daoism on Tu religion is paradoxically much less significant in other regions. There is no authentic Daoism, for example, in Tu areas in Huzhu. At present, Daoist priests can be found only in neighboring Han villages. I have heard some Tu in that area affirm that they do not believe in Daoism.

The stronger influence of Buddhism in this area stems not only from the fact that Tibetan culture was stronger than that of the Han Chinese in this area in the past, but also from factors related to the recent decline of Daoism in these areas. According to official documents, Buddhism has some 13,000 temples and 200,000 monks and nuns throughout China, whereas Daoism currently has approximately 1,500 temples and 25,000 priests and nuns in China (2006)⁴. During the Cultural Revolution, many Daoist temples were destroyed, and Daoist monks, nuns and priests were imprisoned or sent to labor camps. The Communist government considered Daoist practices to be a form of superstition, and prohibited them. As a result, Daoist practice – in its public forms – was practically eliminated on Mainland China. Since 1980, Daoist practice has once again become a part of the Chinese cultural landscape, and has spread to other countries. But in most Tu areas, Daoism has not experienced such a revival.

It is possible that Daoism did not flourish also because the Daoist concept of nature clashed with the concept of culture, which the classical Confucians held in high esteem. The distinction is considered unnatural and artificial. Daoists on the other hand tended toward an iconoclastic view of social forms, so important in Confucian cosmology. Buddhists in contrast tended to accommodate to Chinese social forms, adapting to local culture rather than standing apart from it. Therefore Daoism remained

⁴ <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/zgjj/ssysz/Society/t247490.htm>

more private and exclusive and perhaps was even stigmatized socially and thus went somewhat underground. It is only now enjoying a new freedom of expression. Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism) in contrast was accepted by China, not only because of the open-minded and all-inclusive character of the Chinese nation, but also because Buddhism has rich and colorful elements that supplement and mesh easily with Chinese traditional culture.

A special configuration has emerged in The Hehuang region, which is home to the Tu people of Huzhu. It has been a multi-ethnic zone throughout history. Different ethnic groups have migrated into and out of the region at different times, and these multiple influences have shaped the evolution of Tu culture. Although the size of Daoist temples and the population of Daoists is less than those of Buddhism, Daoism remains important in the religious life of the Chinese people here and a key component in village religion (Xie, 2006). Similarly, local Daoism here continues to be important in the religious life of the Tu. It has been influenced by Tu folk religion and incorporates shamanism, animism, and many folk deities and traditions. Therefore, among the Tu, “Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism) occupies the privileged position, and has been an overwhelming influence in the country of the Monguors” but “notwithstanding the conditions favoring Lamaism, the Monguors are fervent adherents of shamanism, and occasionally of Daoism” (Schram, 1957, 6).

In short, the worship of secondary gods is not seen as being in conflict with an individual’s principal religion. Thus, although Buddhism has in many regards had a greater influence on Tu folk religion than Daoism, Daoist elements continue to be one of the cornerstones of Tu folk religion. After its dissemination into Tu areas and through continuous processes of local adaptation, elements of Daoism made their way into the local folk religious system and influenced the form of that folk system. Moreover, although Tibetan Buddhism has a very high social standing in Huzhu and Tongren, in Tu areas such as Minhe and Datong counties, Daoism is more popular than Tibetan

Buddhism. In many Tu villages, a Buddhist monastery and a Daoist temple coexist. Though on the surface it appears that Daoism has declined in Huzhu areas, in actuality it has been internalized into several central features of the local folk religion.

2.3 The Competition between Different Religious Traditions

There has been much discussion about how religion fosters conflict and violence – particularly in the context of ethnic nationalism. Eric Brahm said, “at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a casual glance at world affairs would suggest that religion is at the core of much of the strife around the globe. Often, religion is a contentious issue” (Brahm, 2005, 3). An anthropological perspective should therefore be applied to explore the interactions of religion, conflict and peace. In China, religious diversity has a long history and tradition, and multiple religions have co- existed among the Tu for centuries. The relationship between the different religious traditions does have elements of competition, but much more prominent are the elements of cooperation that have permitted different religious systems to achieve symbiotic compromise. Local mechanisms of religious pluralism have become a part of the local sociocultural context.

We have seen that, In the process of their historical and cultural evolution, the Tu have adopted elements of Buddhism from the Tibetans and of Daoism from the Han, in addition to their own folk beliefs and rituals, including a widely practiced form of shamanism. Though Tibetan Buddhism and the Daoism play a role in the religious life of the Tu, however, their folk religion plays a much more fundamental role in their lives. Because many Tu people live in the mountains, they worship their own local mountain deities who are believed to protect them from natural disasters. As pointed out by Schram, the Family God is also revered in all households as the family protector. Shamans, Kurtains, and other specialists who become possessed by benevolent spirits are called on to defend the local population against evil spirits. Those protector deities are fighters; they therefore use all the weapons befitting the job (Schram, 1957). Under the influence of the Han people, the Tu also venerate their ancestors and pay homage

to the God of Wealth, the Kitchen God, the Door God and others. In short the religion of the Tu is an extremely complex syncretic system, in which elements from multiple religions coexist in a harmonious but occasionally contradictory way.

It is common for competition to exist among exclusivist religions that claim unique divine origin and consider other religions to be false or even demonic. Though Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and folk religion have none of these militantly exclusivist elements, it is nonetheless understandable that some level of competition or conflict did in fact arise as these three religions came into contact. Tu people comfortably incorporate elements of three different religious traditions into their lives, but there is obvious disparity among the spirit beings in terms of the powers attributed to them. There is certainly evidence that underneath the surface harmony there is a secret contest between them. When a new foreign religion has spread to the Tu area, it has not always been easily accepted by the local people. Penetration and incorporation of these other religious elements developed slowly and subtly. The competition can perhaps be summarized as follows. Whereas the promoters of foreign religions want to expand the acceptance of their traditions, practitioners of indigenous religion try to maintain the power of their own traditions. There occurs, therefore, a constant interaction and somewhat hidden competition. Among the Tu the result of this competition has been the emergence of a compromise arrangement.

It is interesting to note that there are two separate attitudes concerning the power attributed to the spirits of the two religions. In my investigation I discovered that most of the local people considered their local deities to be more powerful and therefore of higher status than the Tibetan Buddhist deities. The spirits of folk religions in general are valued more for their utilitarian purposes in the present life than for their ability to redeem people for a future life after death. The Tu believe that their local spirits can help them solve problems and avert disasters through the interventions of shamans. Tibetan Buddhism, in contrast, focuses on preparing for the afterlife and on philosophical

questions about the soul, all of which are felt as remote from the real life concerns of local people. Local people in fact have only superficial knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism and are more inclined to make offerings to the local spirits that they believe are more likely to meet their immediate needs.

Therefore, for most Tu villagers, the local spirits such as the dragon kings, the *niangniang* and the *nidang*, play a more important role in their religious lives than the Buddha of Tibetan Buddhism. It is believed that, unlike the instrumentally more useful local deities such as the dragon king, the *niangniang* and *nidang*, Buddha does not get involved in the solution of their problems. Local deities can protect people from disease and disaster, bring good luck and wealth and solve their immediate problems. Sakyamuni Buddha and the Jade Emperor of Daoism are too remote to bestow specific blessings on particular people, although the people do worship them. They place a greater priority on venerating dragon kings or the *niangniang* than Je Tsongkhapa (the famous teacher that led to *Gelug Sect* of Tibetan Buddhism) or Guanyin (观音, Goddess of Mercy) Veneration of these remote spirit beings is placed at a lower level of priority.

In contrast, in the Tibetan Buddhist temples, the opposite belief prevails. Lamas in Younging Monastery believe that Buddha is higher than any of the local deities, so much so that they cannot be worshipped together. According to them, Tibetan Buddhism is the higher religion and deserves more ritual attention. Dragon kings, Niangniang and other local deities should, in their view, be housed separately. I asked a Lama how they considered the protector deities that came from the folk religion. He answered that, "Protector deities are at the lowest level in the system of Tibetan Buddhism. As the guardians, they are responsible to protect the sites of Tibetan Buddhism. We monks are practitioners of a system with much higher status than that of the protector deities. So we only need to burn incense and butter lamps for these lesser spirits, but we do not need to kowtow to them."

The interview revealed that even Buddhist Lamas believe in the existence local deities, such as dragon kings and the *niangniang* (female local deity in Tu areas), and treat them with an open, tolerant attitude, even though the deities do not belong to the system of Tibetan Buddhism. The Lamas also participate in religious activities related to these local deities, but they do not offer the local spirits the same offerings that are proffered to the Buddhist deities. In their mind, the female deity Dolma from Tibetan Buddhism is of higher status than the local female spirit, the *niangniang*. Offerings can be made to the Dragon King and the *niangniang*, but it must be done separately, never in the main hall with Je Tsongkhapa and other spirits of Buddhism, considered to be higher. The Lamas regard the local deities as Bodhisattva at a lower level. Even in the protector deity system of You Ning Si, they told me that the Mule King from Tibetan Buddhism holds a higher status than the *nidang* of the Tu, though both fill the role of protectors.

It is true that in some Tu villages it is customary to have Lamas from Tibetan Buddhist temples officiate in local rituals in addition to local *bo* (孝) and *shidianzeng* (什殿增). However, in some folk rituals there is a taboo against involving Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism. In some villages' *biangbianghui* (梆梆会), it is permitted to invite Daoist priests, but not Lamas. I asked some local elders why and was told that the Dragon King would be offended if Lamas were invited. When I asked why the Dragon King would be angry, the elders recounted the following legend:

At the very beginning, the local belief was shamanism and the worshipped deity was the Dragon King. Later, Thuken Hutuktu (Tuguan Living Buddha of Youning Monastery) came and settled on this mountain. After he settled down, he was excessively happy to dance with joy and scatter the soil for fun. But he did not realize that he had thrown soil on the head of Dragon King and made the King angry. Then all the grains were destroyed by heavy rain and the people had no harvest for three years in a row. Thuken Hutuktu came back to tell the Dragon King, "I do not demand any rights against you in these mountains, but you still do not allow a good harvest. I do not appreciate the way you doing this." The enmity was sparked between the two at that time, and that is why Lamas are not invited to the *biangbianghui*.

In addition, the *biangbianhui* in Dazhuang keeps Tibetan Buddhist monks away from religious activities, because of a similar folk legend:

A long time ago, the danjian had an unhappy history of fighting with the heihu (黑虎, Black Tiger, a local deity of folk religion). At that time, the danjian rode a goat as his mount, and held a steel mace in his left hand and a gold diamond in his right hand. But the heihu said that he would like to kill the goat and make a drum with the goatskin. Finally, the heihu won the fighting and then the danjian stopped participating in religious activities.

It is apparent that local people attribute mutual antipathy to the spirits of the two different religions. Such folk legends help clarify why conflicts and contradictions between the spirits of different traditions arose from the earliest time of Tibetan Buddhist dissemination into Tu areas.

In another Tu community, Minhe County, a similar conflict also prevails between the two religions. Though not as widely practiced as the folk religion, Daoism is more popular than Tibetan Buddhism in the Minhe area. But Tibetan Buddhist specialists constantly attempted to interfere with local folk religion and Daoism. In the summer of 2010, when I did my fieldwork in Minhe, I found a certain degree of competition among the specialists of these different religions.

Zhu Jia Si (朱家寺) is the biggest Tibetan Buddhism temple in Zhujia Village in Minhe. *Zhu Lama* (朱喇嘛) (a lama who lived in the early part of the 20th century) was a famous Tibetan Buddhist monk in Minhe and enjoyed great prestige in his hometown. As a representative of the power of Tibetan Buddhism, the Zhu Lama has a large say in the celebration of the local *nadun* (纳顿) Festival. “Previously, village *nadun* were held in a very disorderly way - several *nadun* might have been held on the same day. This continued until Zhu Lama carefully arranged different dates for each village” (Stuart & Hu, 1993, 16).

Another popular story narrated how the Daoist deity the “erlangshen” (二郎神) spread to the Minhe Tu area and how the tradition of the *nadun* festival originated:

In the past, the Tu of Sanchuan often suffered disasters. Since the deity of heaven was angry, there was not one drop of rain throughout the entire year; drought caused the failure of crops, and in autumn they were unable to collect even a handful of grass. Then the *fala* (法拉, a folk religious shaman) was invited to fasten boards and build altars to pray for help from the heavens. Led by an important Lama, local people carried 108 volumes of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures *ganzhuer* (甘珠尔) from the Wenjia village temple, performed ceremonies all around the mountains, and prayed for the blessings of the Buddha for a good harvest. But it seems that none of these supplications was successful. Later some people had a wooden image of the *erlangshen* brought from Sichuan province to Minhe. And all the villages in Sanchuan built a shrine and made a vow: “if you bless us with an abundant autumn harvest, we shall kill sheep and chickens, drape you with all sorts of colored vestments, beat drums and gongs, and praise you for your favors.” Remarkably that year a very abundant harvest was produced. Afterwards the Tu communities had bumper harvests every year and they thus continue to perform the *nadun* ceremony. That’s how the *nadun* started (Ma, 2005, 108)(Stuart & Hu, 1993, 16).

Actually, after the “Erlang Shen” was introduced into Minhe, it has become a local folk deity. But since Daoism was also prospering in Minhe, local people call the Daoist priests *fashi* (法师), to distinguish them from *fala* (shaman). Both of these two religious specialists perform in the *nadun* festival – but in different phases: the *fashi* is in charge of the overall ritual, and *fala* dances during the last stage of the ritual. These performances illustrate the syncretism that incorporates elements of different religions into the same ceremony.

The folk religious temple and the Tibetan monastery are located in the same village. However the promoters of Tibetan Buddhism have tried to exercise power and have constantly attempted to interfere with the local folk religion and even to control it. When I visited the local temple, *Erlang Shen Miao* (二郎神庙) in Zhujia Village, I was surprised to find a Buddhist monk taking care of this temple as doorkeeper. I subsequently learned that the Tibetan monastery Zhu Jia Si (朱家寺) in this same village had invested a great deal of money for the renovation of this temple in Zhu Lama’s name. The monastery therefore assigned this monk to take care of the temple. At the same time, some local people told me that while renovating the temple, a well-known Lama donated

a sum of money and invited some Tibetan Buddhist monks to the *zhuangzang* ritual (装脏仪式, that is, filling the inside of statues of the deity to liberate its spiritual power), and those monks strongly recommended that the “*jingzang*” (经脏, Buddhist scripts) be put inside of the statues of the deity, which they then did. However, some local elders were dissatisfied, because their folk religious custom was to fill the statues with the *hunzang* (荤脏, animal organs). These elders feared that “*jingzang*” (Buddhist scripts) would render the statue powerless. They rapidly organized themselves to prevent this modification. They attributed the failure of crops in that year to the loss of power by the local deity. Finally, after a protracted dispute, another major ritual was held the following year to fill the statue once more with animal organs in accordance with folk religious tradition. This anecdote illustrates, on the one hand, patterns of competition between Tibetan Buddhism and village folk religion. But it also illustrates local belief in the superior instrumental power of village folk religion and the utility of fighting for the preservation of folk religious practices.

Similarly, the ritual for selecting a new shaman (*lawa*, 拉瓦) in Tongren Tu area also shows how elements of Tibetan Buddhism have become incorporated into the folk religion. In Tongren, to be a qualified shaman a person has to come from a certain shamanic family. But in addition the person also requires a certification ceremony from Tibetan Buddhism. In order to inherit the role of *lawa*, a prospective shaman has to pass a qualifying exam in the Tibetan Buddhist temple. When the old *lawa* passes away, one of his sons will replace him. But the heir has to be first tested by the living Buddha in Longwu monastery in Tongren. He will be certified only if he passes the test. Otherwise the villagers themselves will doubt that he possesses the spiritual power to be a *lawa*. It is said that in administering the test the living Buddha inserts some strange questions that can be answered only by someone with spiritual power who has been instructed by oracles.

On the one hand, we see that the interaction and competition among those religions leads to an imbalance in the locally perceived power of the different religions. “While Buddhist monks are common in most villages, Daoist priests and shamans have become very few and serve the whole area. The Daoist priests take charge of diverse functions that include weddings, funerals, and looking after the shrines, whereas the shaman’s primary function is to serve as a trance medium during the *nadun* celebration and sometimes during the treatment of illness.” (Stuart & Hu, 1991, 1992a,b) On the other hand, the competition among the different religious traditions has unleashed a process of resistance that to some extent enhances the revival of folk religion.

Thus it can be seen that as these three religions came into contact, competition or conflict was bound to ensue. The Tu people accepted elements of Daoism, Tibetan Buddhism, along with the religious elements based on their original folk religion. But they have not abandoned the original form of the folk religion. However, during the lengthy process of competition and compromise among these religions, the initial conflicts have been resolved and there is currently a degree of harmonious coexistence. At present each of the religions incorporates some elements of the others. In most Tu regions, some folk religious spirits have been included in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhist protector deities. For example, the four protector deities include the *danjian* Protector and the *nidang*, as well as the *shidianzeng* in village temples, which communicates spiritually with the *heihu*, the dragon king, and sometimes *danjian*.

This illustrates how religious pluralism can come about. It seems to indicate that societal and theological change are necessary prerequisites to overcoming differences between different religions, or for dealing with conflicts between the religions. In the next section, I will follow up on this theme and document a mode of interreligious dialogue in multi-religious settings among the Tu that successfully maintains the co-existence of the different religious traditions. Hopefully this can be seen as a possible option for the resolution of religious conflict and the promotion of social peace.

2.4 Belief in the Power of the Number Three — the Harmony among the Multiple Religions of the Tu

In animistic and religious hero accounts, multiple deities almost always coexist. Platvoet reserves the term “religious pluralism” for that cultural and /or religious ideology, or attitude, which positively welcomes encounters among religions (Platvoet & van der Toorn, 1995, 3). Indeed, that situation of co-existence of religions has been found in many societies in the past and as well as in the present. Among China’s minority ethnic groups, plurality of beliefs is commonplace (He, 2009; Kang, 2009; Gao, 2008; Shih, 2010; Wang, 2010; Wickeri & Tam, 2011; Zou, 2008). In the history of China, Buddhism and Daoism have, as we have seen among the Tu, exercised an important influence on the evolution of folk religion. Different religions can harmoniously co-exist (Cohen 1992). Over the years, Chinese folk religion has absorbed and assimilated elements of Buddhism and Daoism; and these latter religions in turn have absorbed and assimilated elements of Chinese folk religion. Each often calls on specialists of the other traditions to perform its rituals and to organize events (Feuchtwang, 2001).

In the Tu’s case, although there have been competitive and sometimes even confrontational undertones, the three religious traditions have co-existed peacefully for a long time. The phrase “honoring number” can be used as a conceptual framework for interpreting religious pluralism. It refers not only to religious diversity, but also to the condition of harmonious co-existence among adherents of different religions or religious denominations. Despite ambiguities we know that the images and functions of the deities of Tu folk religion are inextricably linked to those of Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism. The degree to which these two religions have influenced Tu folk religion differs, but both religions harmoniously coexist within Tu folk religion, sharing space within the Tu religious belief system. Under the influence of multiple religions, the Tu have adopted many symbolic concepts, such as the number “Three (≡)” in their cosmology. The

symbol of Number Three is highly significant and has come to have meaning in various aspects of life and culture among the Tu.

Three is not only a lucky number; it also has many meanings and magical power for the Tu. First, it stands for the three religions consisting of Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and folk religion. Second, it means happiness, luck, and harmony. Three also represents Heaven, the earth, and human beings; and it is the symbol of good fortune, wealth, and longevity. Therefore the number three is highly significant among the Tu. As a core element of Tu culture, religion has played an important role in helping the Tu to preserve their ethnic identity, traditions, and customs for centuries.

In Tu folk custom, there is a series of symbolic activities related to the number three. For example, to serve dinner to honored guests, there are three steps: hosts provide hot tea and steamed breads as the first course, stir-fried dishes and boiled meat as the second, and cooked wheat food as the last. The traditional Tu folk ritual of drinking also utilizes the number three. Hosts propose three toasts of wine to welcome their guests, and then propose three more toasts to guests upon leaving. When hosts offer wine to their guests, the guests should dip a finger into the wine and splash it toward the sky three times. That indicates their respect to the Heaven, earth and ancestors. In the construction of houses, the number of rooms must be three or a multiple of three. Moreover, the number of buttons on mourning apparel is also a multiple of three.

There are many stylized expressions about the number three in the oral tradition of the Tu, such as in narrative poems, known as *Qijianxi*⁵ (祁家延西), and especially in the Song of *Huoni*⁶ (the song of the sheep). In these accounts the heroes or heroines triumph after three tribulations. In the Tu origin myth, the Tu ancestor is a three-year-old boy. In a popular Tu series of mythical stories of three brothers, the brothers go out to

⁵ The longest heroic epic poem among the Tu

⁶ In the Tu language, it means the sheep.

complete work assigned by their father, and have to face three difficult situations, to be helped by a spirit only after having faced the third. The importance attributed to the number three is also the result of ethnic integration into the religions and societies of these regions. So the number three represents the Tu, Tibetan and Han Chinese, and this idea appears in Tu oral tradition, which deals with the nature of ethnic relationships throughout their history. For example, in the famous narrative poem “Huoni,” the number three is repeatedly chanted:

*There are three pots and stoves
Upper, middle and lower
The upper pot is Tibetan
The middle pot is Tu
The lower pot is Han*

There are many events with the number three in this epic, such as three mountains – golden, silver, and jade; three gods – the dragon king, the god of heaven, and the mountain god. Tu folk religion has always been inclusive, and has handled relations with the other two religions; it has somewhat melded three religions into one. Moreover, without excluding any deities, Tu folk religion has integrated a wide variety of folk beliefs (with their accompanying spirits) and so local people can freely choose the spirits in whom they wish to believe. Through intentionally strengthening and broadening the special spiritual functions of deities, a spectrum of deities with Tu characteristics has been formed. At first glance it seems disordered, but a religious order and a set of rules giving it stability are hidden behind what at first seems chaotic. The structure of folk songs is also repeated three times, especially the *sanqisanluoling* (三起三落令, Three-up-three-down Melody). All these features show that the ethnic culture and identity of the Tu reflect this long historical process under the influence of Tibetan and Han cultures. The cult of the magic number three reflects the multi-cultural origin of Tu and illustrates how Tu identity has been forged in the context of interaction among multiple groups.

Furthermore, the overall shape of local religious life has been governed by the co-existence of three religious traditions. Thus the religious specialists from Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and folk belief all appear at important rites of passage such as birth ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. The Tu people almost equally welcome Lamas, geomantic specialists, the *bo* (Shaman) and *benbenzi*. In Tu society, all religious specialists maintain their own social status and fulfill their functions in the same rituals (Wen, 2002). In this light, the most majestic ceremony for Tu people is the ritual performed together by Lamas, Daoists, and shamans. Especially at funerals, *Fo-Fa-Seng*⁷ (佛法僧) Three Courses of Scriptures are chanted to release the souls from death and suffering. Tibetan Buddhists, Shamans and Daoist priests each recite one chant.

E Chongrong, a Tu scholar, has noted that the coexistence of multiple religions is illustrated in the religious site, the *lashize*⁸ (E, 2002). The construction of the *lashize* is presided over by Lamas or geomantic specialists, which in effect means that specialists both of Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism are included. Moreover, the *lashize* contains willow branches, white stones and arrows, which are elements of folk belief. Once again we see that the original folk religious culture of the Tu has long been integrating with Tibetan Buddhist culture and Daoist culture (E, 2002).

But integration has occurred not only among different religions, but also between Tu religion and other aspects of social life. As a part of traditional culture, the religious life of the Tu reflects the historical tradition, the social structure, the economic production, the life habits, the social concepts and other aspects of Tu life. This integration has influenced the material culture, spiritual culture, and also the secular culture of this ethnic group.

⁷ Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and Folk religion

⁸ It is a holy site usually located on a mountaintop for worshipping the mountain deities.

According to Dr. Paul Knitter we need a model for dialogue that manages conflict among religions. He posits that religious pluralism need not be a problem (or even a threat), but can be rather a promise of a situation that is potentially enriching and that can be viewed as a providential blessing (Knitter, 2002). The case of the Tu is of potential relevance here. It can provide an ethnographically documented paradigm to illustrate how mechanisms of symbiosis and compromise can defuse interreligious tensions that could cause future conflict (or that may survive from previous conflicts). The ethnographically documented “Three in One” patterns discussed above indicate that religious coexistence is not an idealistic fantasy, but can occur in reality. It continues to exist in contemporary society under particular conditions. The Tu’s case shows that interreligious tolerance is possible and that religious exclusivity is not universal. Moreover, religious pluralism not only shapes the identity of a person or group; it also help complex societies share a public cultural arena.

The symbol of the Number Three, which in Tu culture came as a result of lengthy coexistence, communication, and integration among multiple cultures, is also a symbol of, and an unspoken rule about, seeking common ground for different religions. A number of religious traditions – including Daoism, Tibetan Buddhism, and folk religion – have interacted with the State, and these now form the religious landscape of the Tu. This multi-religious landscape leads to a worldview centered symbolically on the number Three. This “magic number” symbolizes the harmonious integration of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Daoism and the *shenjiao* (神轿), the folk religion of Chinese villages.

It can be seen that their religion. dominated as it is by the powerful number “three,” reflects the historical peculiarities of the Tu and thus distinguishes Tu identity from that of other groups. These and other cultural features are used as markers of ethnic identity. They also form part of the process of the shaping of ethnic boundaries. The structure of one house with three rooms representing the three religions in one was formed in

the context of dynamic interactions within a multiethnic and plural society. It is an apt metaphor of the multicultural nature of Chinese society as a whole.

To conclude this chapter, the Chinese worship of deities is closely related to everyday life. When we look at the relationship between the human and the spiritual in Chinese culture, we see a contrast with Western religion, which places God, lesser spirits (such as angels and demons), and human beings at three independent levels, with God as the highest and human beings as the lowest. Under the Western pattern, human beings inevitably are drawn into a stronger sense of awe towards God, the Supreme Being. Chinese religious traditions, which do not include the concept of a Supreme Being who created the world and oversees the conduct of each human, follow a different pattern. Chinese folk religion unfolds within an animist world in which everyone has a place and in which multiple spirit beings coexist with humans and become involved in the world. Though different Chinese religions have different deities with different functions, these deities coexist with each other.

The interaction between human beings and the spirit world of Chinese religions, in short, emphasizes the coexistence, and communications between the two worlds. Unlike traditions of exclusionary Western monotheism, none of these distinct religions tries to exclude or eliminate the others, even though each gives emphasis to the worship of one particular set of deities. The folk religion of the Tu, in short, illustrates the manner in which the coexistence of various deities from different traditions, having become a prominent feature of Chinese religion, could serve as a religiously integrative template in other societies as well.

CHAPTER 3 MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPIRITS AND SHARED WORLD: THE FOLK-RELIGIOUS PANTHEON OF THE TU

The folk religion which has been transmitted across generations by the Tu has had an impact on the political, economic, and cultural development of Tu society, in addition to addressing their emotional and religious needs. The folk theology of the Tu focuses on four types of spirit beings that will be discussed in this chapter: dragon kings, female deities, ancestors, and personified natural forces. In contrast to the monotheistic religions of the West, in Tu theology there is no “Supreme Being” who is the sole source of power and who created all the other lesser spirits. The Tu villagers instead focus their attention on local spirits with immediate utilitarian functions. A distinction is made between benevolent spirits and harmful spirits. The interaction among these spirits enhances the vitality of the folk religion. Harmful spirits cause misfortune or disaster. Benevolent spirits, on the other hand, are symbols of power and moral rule who meet people’s needs, help them solve problems, and restore social order. I will refer to these benevolent spirits as deities. In this chapter, I will discuss the variety of deities and their functions among the Tu.

3.1 The Dragon King

The *longwang* (龙王, dragon king) is by far the most prominent spirit being in the pantheon of Tu folk religion. The dragon king temple is likewise central to the villages’ religious rituals. A longwing is best understood as a type of spirit, rather than the proper name of a single spirit. Each community has its *longwang*. In Huzhu County, the *longwang* has clear authority. In terms of their iconographic representation, the *longwang* in Tu area were in times past neither theriomorphic (i.e. depicted as animals) nor anthropomorphic. They were instead often represented more abstractly as wooden litters and spear-like rods rather than as animals or humans. This still occurs in some instances in the present. (In this they differ from the *longwang* in Han areas. As for its functions, the *longwang* not only protects the local village that has a *longwang*

miao (龙王庙, dragon king temple), but also oversees other villages, which “belong” to this temple. This broad territorial charge of the *longwang* parallels the geographical administrative division, bestowing a spiritual validation of sorts on the civil administrative division of the territory.

According to Tu legend, the original dragon king came from the *Chilibu*¹ (Mountain of the Dragon). In Chinese mythology the dragon has an important function as a rain god. In that light the Han venerate the dragon in the context of rituals to bring rain. In the Tu region, however, the dragon king is not only a rain god, but also the deity associated with disease and disaster and with good and bad fortune. The dragon king is entrusted with protecting the village, and with settling neighborhood disputes, among other things. Whether fortune is good or bad, whether their economy brings profits or loss, whether the harvests are abundant or poor, the villagers venerate their dragon king. Tu villages that venerate the dragon king will build a temple at the highest place or near the main roads that lead to the outside world, in hopes that the deity will protect their village. This temple will not only be a center of religious activities but also a gathering place for village public affairs. An examination of several dragon king temples in Huzhu will in addition help us see how Tu folk religions exist alongside of other religions and adapt to them.

3.1.1 Dragon Kings in Huzhu

As the major protector of the village, the dragon king is also the major focus of collective worship. Cult activities that originated on the villages of Yaoma, Dazhuang and Nianxian have spread to neighboring villages and towns.

¹ This is the term in the Tu language, as well as the local Han people call it *longwang* Shan (龙王山).



A



B

Figure 3-1. The spiritual litters for dragon kings.

3.1.1.1 Dazhuang dragon king

The village of Dazhuang has a total area of 9.68 square kilometers, an average elevation of 2,600 meters, and is only five kilometers from the seat of Huzhu County.

About 30 households containing a total of about 150 people, mostly Tu, live in this village. The annual average temperature of this village is 2-3 degree Celsius and the average annual precipitation is about 550 mm. Dazhuang Village sits in a shallow mountain area suitable for forestry and animal husbandry. In the village center stands a village dragon king temple named Guang Fu Si (Guangfu Monastery). According to records, Guangfu Si was built during the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty (1875 – 1908), and later repaired and painted in 1984². Although known as “Si” (Monastery), there are no Lamas (Tibetan monks), and it functions more as a folk religious temple. Although images of Guanyin Bodhisattva, Manjushri and Sakyamuni Buddha are found in the main hall of the Dazhuang dragon king Temple, three dragon kings’ (Red, Black and White occupy an even higher position. They are housed in transportable litters with cloth coverings.

According to the villagers, those three dragon kings are brothers. The red dragon king is the eldest, with the highest status. The statue resembles a man sitting on a sofa with hands in his lap and filled with “heart.”³ The black dragon king (the second oldest) and the white dragon king (the youngest) are enshrined in the Shen Jiao (神轿, a wooden litter for housing spirits) with inscriptions engraved on a large wood board which is also filled with the “heart” and is covered with colorful silk. No one is permitted to open the litter to see the faces of the dragon kings except on New Year’s Eve. When the temple guardian sweeps the temple and the litter, he (and only he) is allowed to see their faces. The villagers respectfully call the dragon kings Foye (佛爷, Buddha). In addition, Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels, *Tangka* paintings, and pictures of the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama are also found in this temple.

² The data sources came from the Administration of Cultural Heritage in Huzhu County, Qinghai Province, China, 2012.

³ This consists of crops, birds, snakes, bones of animals and Buddhist scripts, depending on the ritual.

3.1.1.2 Nianxian dragon king

There are no records of the construction of the original dragon temple in the village of Nianxian. In 1957 the temple was burned down in an attempt by the Cultural Revolution to eradicate superstition. But it was rebuilt in the 1980s. This dragon king temple is slightly different from the temples in Dazhuang. Sakyamuni Buddha, Two dragon kings, and Cai Shen (财神, the Deity of Wealth), are housed in the temple. There is no litter for the dragon kings, who are instead housed within *shenjian* (神箭, consecrated spear-length divining rods) made of iron and used to communicate with spirits.

This temple has also adopted several decorative themes from Tibetan Buddhism. On top of the main gate, a consecrated vase stands near a five-colored cloth curtain that is commonly seen in Tibetan monasteries. In the main hall corridor, three bronze prayer wheels, also of Tibetan Buddhist origin, stand on each side of the pillars. Inside the door of the main hall is an incense table on top of which is a large covered glass box. Inside the box is a *Tangka* (a Buddhist painting) covered by a curtain; this is said to be the dragon king's portrait. And on the two sides of the *Tangka*, two divination spears stand on the table. Outside the box, some small *Tangkas* hang on the wall; the one above is Sakyamuni Buddha, the one on the far right is Tsongkhapa and the one on the left is the god of wealth. The presence of these objects in a Tu temple illustrates the syncretic incorporation of Tibetan Buddhist themes into Tu folk religion.

3.1.1.3 Yaoma dragon king

The dragon king temple of Yaoma was built during the reign of Emperor Guangxu, in the Qing Dynasty (AD 1844). Similar to the dragon king temple in Dazhuang, it houses the litters of three dragon kings. According to local oral tradition, originally there were five dragon kings in the Yaoma temple. But villagers from Najia stole two of them, leaving only three dragons in Yaoma. Subsequently villagers from Dazhuang stole another one of them. After the Yaoma villagers retrieved it, the villagers of Dazhuang

stole it back again. After several rounds of thievery, this issue remains unresolved; Yaoma villagers had to make another elder dragon statue for their temple. Thus the Yaoma temple still houses three dragon kings. The villagers of Yaoma boast that their village temple is the original home of the dragon kings and that the dragon kings of other villages were stolen from their temple.



A



B



C



D

Figure 3-2. A & C. *chumashen*; B & D. *huimashen*.

Unlike the villages of Dazhuang and Nianxian, Yaoma does not display a statue of Sakyamuni or Tibetan Buddhist prayer wheels around the main hall. The temple's *mawangye* (马王爷, the horse deity's hall) is associated with livestock and animal husbandry, reminiscent of the time when the Tu were nomads and horses were

important in their lives. *mawangye* used to be enshrined in earlier temples of the past. An exception is the village of Yaoma, where several dragon king temples in the town of Wushi have a wall painting of *mawangye* depicting two people holding two horses. These horse spirits are called *chumashen* (出马神, a horse spirit who protects people leaving home) and *huimashen* (回马神, a horse spirit who receives those returning home). The sacrifices offered to *mawangye* in those dragon king temples remind us of the nomadic life of the Tu ancestors. But when the Tu abandoned their nomadic lifestyle for an agricultural one, horses became less important; it is therefore rare to encounter *mawangye* in newer village temples. The Yaoma dragon temple, in that sense, has retained more elements from the distant past.

The observations made on religious syncretism in the previous chapter are relevant here as well. We can see that each of the three dragon temples in different villages combine elements of Tu folk religion with elements of other religions. Although the dragon king temples in Dazhuang and Nianxian show heavy influences from Tibetan Buddhism, those temples do not actually belong to any branch of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, the multifunctional dragon kings in the Tu areas become involved in practical matters of personal interest to villagers, somewhat remote from the more abstract concerns of classical Tibetan Buddhism. Village dragon kings become involved in the daily life of Tu villagers.

3.1.2 Duties of Dragon Kings

Although different representations of the dragon king are found at different religious sites, all of the dragon kings are expected to drive away disease and evil spirits, to ensure safety and good luck and above all to protect agriculture.

In dry weather, the primary responsibility of the dragon king is to bring rain. To achieve this, three dragon kings on their litters are brought out of the temple and carried by a team of young men to the place where the ritual is to be performed. Some villagers go to a nearby spring, whereas others travel all the way to distant Qinghai Lake. An old

villager told me that in the past, the young men who carried the litters had to walk very long distances and were soaked with sweat by the time they arrived at their destination; the process of praying for rain is therefore associated with strenuous physical effort. In the Tu areas, the ritual in which the villagers pray for rain is called *jiuzi*⁴. It begins with the construction of a tent and the selection of people who can perform the ceremonial chant. During the *jiuzi* ritual, some people sing specific songs while other people kneel in prayer before the dragon king's litter. Several villagers walk barefoot on the stones in the river while carrying the litters on their shoulders, no matter how cold the weather or how sharp the stones. Then villagers put the litter on the ground and wait for rain. They do not carry the litters back to the temple until it rains. Sometimes they have to wait for two weeks or a month. Some villagers said, "It worked better in the past but there is no guarantee now. In the past we just walked to the bridge near the village. Now we have to walk much farther if the ritual doesn't work."

Another important task for the dragon kings concerns the diagnosis of illnesses. When villagers get sick, they first come to the temple to ask the *shidianzeng* to ask for the intervention of the dragon kings. If the dragon king says there is no need to go to the hospital, the *shidianzeng* simply chants scripts to supplicate in behalf of the sick person. If the dragon king says that the sick person should go to the hospital, they will follow this command. To ask the dragon king to heal the sick person, the family is required to put fresh flowers and offerings on the incense burner table at their home. To ask the dragon king to heal the sick person, the family is required to put fresh flowers and offerings on the incense burner table at their home. He must then assign four people to bring the litter or the special consecrated spear used for divination from the temple to their home. (I will henceforth refer to this as the "sacred spear.") Those four people must be "clean," meaning that they have not been to funerals or hospitals in the past week.

⁴ In the Tu language, this means to pray for the rain.



Figure 3-3. The *fashenjian* ritual by *shidianzeng*.

To invoke the dragon king, they must first proceed to the main hall where they light the lamps and kneel down to pray. Then they carry the litter or consecrated sacred spear to the courtyard of the family of the sick person. The religious specialist also comes to the family with litters or sacred spears and tries to communicate with the spirits to diagnose the illness. To obtain a diagnosis, the patient's family members kneel on the ground, and the four people carrying the litter stand at the center of the courtyard. The *shidianzeng* faces the litter and asks yes or no questions about the sickness and how to cure it. If the answer from the dragon king is "yes," the four people carrying the litter take a step forward. If the answer is "no," the four take a step backward. It is believed that their movements are controlled by the spirits.

Sometimes, the *shidianzeng* holds the sacred spear and instructs a respected male elder to ask questions of the dragon king, such as whether they need to chant scripts

and if so, which ones. Again, the only answers to the questions are “yes” or “no.” If the answer is “yes,” the sacred spear shakes intensely. Otherwise, they do not. After several rounds of questions, the family of the patient has the answers they need on how to treat the patient’s illness. In fact, it is not clear to an observer whether the movement of the and the shaking of the sacred spear are made by the people holding them. According to the Tu, it is the spirits who make the *shidianzeng* move. I have observed many times that the people carrying the litter move at exactly the same pace. When I asked the people that carry the litter how they are able do this, they answered that some power emanating from the litter forced them to move spontaneously forward or backward.

In the 1980s, these two rituals of diagnosis and healing were still popular in many villages in Huzhu. As the villagers have become better informed about modern medical approaches to disease, these divinatory rituals have become less common. However, villagers still ask the spirits for guidance on the occasion of important family events such as a marriage or building and moving into a new home. Moreover, before young people leave the village in search of employment, they go to the temple and ask a blessing of the local deity for themselves and their families. When they earn money and come back home, they go to the temple again to offer thanks.

The dragon kings also offer other types of prophecy and divination. For example, if a person’s property is lost or stolen, he may come to the temple to pray for instructions on where to look for it, in hopes that the dragon kings can help them recover their property. The villagers also consult with the spirits before naming their newborn children. The ritual for ascertaining names is similar to the ritual of diagnosis and healing. The parents or elders in the family read the names that they are considering one by one. If the spirit likes the name, the litter moves forward or the divinatory spear shakes.

One knowledgeable resident of Dazhuang village, Hu Zongxiang, said that in his area, the villagers invite the dragon kings to help them with special events such as setting a wedding date, constructing a home, and planning a funeral ceremony.

According to him, the dragon kings are extremely busy. I asked him if the villagers pray to Shakyamuni Buddha for help. He said, no, that they only burn incense for Shakyamuni. I then asked, "So, you feel the dragon king is more powerful, right?" He laughed and said, "The dragon king manages the locals and is the protector of the locals. And Shakyamuni is the leader of world Buddhism." Therefore, although Buddha is worshiped in the local temple, the dragon kings are given more ritual attention. Because he is more involved in their daily lives, veneration of the dragon king is viewed by the Tu as having greater utility than veneration of Buddha.

3.1.3 Territories of Dragon Kings

Though the dragon kings are seen as being more powerful to solve practical problems than the Buddha, each dragon king, at least as understood by the Tu, nonetheless operates within a limited territory. The dragon king is first and foremost the protector of the village where his shrine is located. But he is also responsible for the protection of neighboring villages as well. This geographical "charge" parallels the territorial divisions established by the local Chinese government and subtly gives quasi-spiritual support to these administrative divisions. For example, the dragon kings of Dazhuang are in charge of five villages: Huayuan, Qiazi, Kouzi, Lamaguan and Dazhuang itself. Though some villages have their own village temple, they perform some religious ceremonies at the dragon king temple of Dazhuang. Moreover, when there are important events, the villagers in all five villages take part in the rituals performed in the Dazhuang temple. The converse is not true; the villagers of Dazhuang do not go to the temples of the other four villages. These are seen as being simple subsidiaries of the Dazhuang temple.

The dragon king in Nianxian is conceptualized as being the same spirit as the one housed in the Dazhuang temple, but this spirit has its own territory. The 57-year-old temple guardian, Zhang, pointed out to me that there are several administrative subdivisions of Nianxian village, and that each of the local communities originally

venerated the same spirit. Now however only the villagers of the first community of Nianxian and the first community of Luoshao continue to venerate the dragon king in this temple. Villagers in the other communities now pay homage to *nidang* (another local deity). During my research the villagers from the first community of Nianxian pointed out to me that they had originally venerated *nidang* in the past as others in Nianxian did, but that they later turned to worship of the dragon kings. They explained this change through the following legend.

A long time ago, the village temple split up because of conflicts among villagers. Those that left the main group did not yet have a deity of their own to follow. Some older villagers went to the Mountain of Dragon Kings and prayed to the dragon kings, lamenting that they did not have their deities and asking for their help. At that point a white hada (a long silk ritual scarf) flew down from the top of the mountain and alighted on the shoulder of an older villager. The villagers were told that the white hada was the incarnation of a dragon king. From then on, our community has worshipped this deity.

A senior shaman from Najia village in Huzhu County told me another story:

Five dragon brothers stopped by our place [Najia] and found that the fengshui ("wind-water," referring to the orientation of buildings) was very good. For that reason the eldest of the dragon kings settled here while the others flew off to Donggou. Later, the villagers here in Najia invited [actually stole] another dragon king to settle here. I still remember, when I was young, that the second dragon king fled back to his original community but was later enticed to return here by the elders in Najia who pleaded and succeeded in capturing for themselves the power of this deity.

At present this village has the shrine of one dragon king and three female *niang-niang*, as well as an icon of Guanyin Buddha in the north wing. This is an analytically interesting point that reflects the ritual context in which inter-village competition over dragon kings plays out:

It is said that, in the earliest time, five dragon kings, who were brothers, flew to the Huzhu area from the dragon king mountain and settled there. They were then sent to different villages as protectors. But villagers began stealing the dragon kings from each other's communities, which led to differences in local beliefs. The dragon temple of Dazhuang is a good example. A long time ago, the villagers of Dazhuang stole the dragon kings from Yaoma, but later the dragon kings were stolen back by Yaoma villagers. Later the Yaoma

villagers made another brand new litter to enshrine the dragon king and hid the original one. The villagers of Dazhuang then took the Elder Dragon's litter from Yaoma to court and the conflict was legally documented. As the government had relaxed the policy for religions by that time, the President of the Court, Li Zongxing, sent a truck to carry the litter back to Dazhuang, and there the matter ended. But since then, the people in Yaoma have been in constant conflict with Dazhuang villagers because of this.

Similarly, the dragon king temple in Dongshan village was also involved in conflict. In the past, the villagers of several communities of Dongshan worshipped both the dragon kings and Guan Gong (关公, Lord Guan)⁵. But because of disagreements among the chief representatives of the communities, the spirits were separated into different temples. After the separation, one community stopped venerating Guan Gong and kept in their temple only the litters of three dragon kings and a *zhuozishen*⁶ (桌子神, a "table spirit"). Thus the belief in dragon kings was retained but in some communities the belief in Guan Gong was eventually abandoned. The local elders explained that ten years ago, their chief representative got into an argument with the rich boss of a company from another community. Then they somehow convinced the villagers to build separate temples. Accounts heard from other villages support this version of events.

Inter-community or intra-community conflicts are the chief cause of the emergence of new worship sites. These modifications entail no change in the basic belief system; the Tu villagers remain united under the belief in the same spirits and in the use of village temples as ritual centers. In general, there are no discrepancies with regard to belief in the dragon kings. When the village hosts a temple fair, every family contributes a liter of highland barley, a liter of wheat and half a bottle of rapeseed oil. The organizing committee does not have to go house to house to collect the donations; people

⁵ A general in the late Eastern Han dynasty. After his death, he became a figure in Chinese folk religion and is worshipped by many Chinese people, especially in southern China.

⁶ The family deity of some shamans is the small table, and the shaman specially communicates with spirits using it.



Figure 3-4. Three spiritual spears for dragon kings.

voluntarily provide the offerings. However, if there are disagreements about who has ritual authority within the community, then there may be a schism leading to the construction of separate temples to house different spirits. In short the creation of new religious sites, though caused by many factors, is driven principally by competition among different group either in different villages or even within the same village.

3.1.4 Changes of the Belief in Dragon Kings

Though conflicts do not themselves lead to changes in spirit belief and rituals, over time there are changes that gradually have occurred. Due to the multiplicity of different religious systems that have coexisted in the Tu areas, there has been a mingling of traditions, a mutual borrowing of spirits and rituals. Among the Tu, it is very common for deities of different traditions to be housed in the same religious site. For instance, some local temples not only enshrine dragon kings but also have pictures of the living

Buddha in the main hall. In the dragon king temple in Dongshan, there are three black-and-white cloth paintings depicting the story of the Eight Immortals in Daoism; these paintings have been placed above the three gates of the main hall. Once I even saw an embroidery of the Guanyin Buddha of Han Buddhism and a portrait of the Maitreya Buddha in a crystal frame placed at the center on the incense-burning table in the dragon temple. I asked the villagers if they also believe in Guanyin Buddha. “No,” they said, “Guanyin Buddha is not common here. However, someone stitched a beautiful embroidery of Guanyin and sent it to us here. We enshrined it as a deity because we did not want it to get dirty.”

In similar fashion, a temple guardian told me that he once brought the portrait of Buddha from Youning monastery⁷ and enshrined it here. Visitors occasionally give portraits of different deities to the local temples as gifts; the locals graciously accept the portrait and find a proper place for it. They never reject any gift that reflects the religious beliefs of others. Any deity is treated as sacred, regardless of the form with which the deity is depicted. Villagers are willing to find a suitable spot to place the deity. However, it is interesting to note that, though the portraits of the dragon kings and other religious gods are housed in the same room, the portraits and spaces allocated to local deities are bigger than those of the others. Ritual attention to local dragon kings continues to be much stronger and more frequent than attention in the spirits of other religions.

The Tu are very tolerant of and receptive to different religious traditions, and they never consider other religions to be “false.” I often heard my informants claim that “we believe in the dragon kings, as they believe in their *niangniang*. Their deity also has power.” Referred to as “henotheism,” this belief that there are many powerful spirits but that each society or person chooses one for special veneration, has been found in

⁷ Youning Monastery is the biggest Gelug (Yellow Hat) Sect of Tibetan Buddhism temple in Huzhu County, and has a high religious status in Hehuang area of Qinghai Province. (I will introduce Youning Monastery in detail in a later chapter.)

many parts of the world. During my fieldwork I encountered no clear rules about the placement of shrines, except for that of the village's primary deity; other shrines are placed without distinction of rank. This apparent randomness reflects the syncretism that characterizes folk religion. Because Buddhism and traditional Chinese Daoism are both polytheistic, it is very easy for Tu to accept the validity of these two religion and to incorporate elements from them into their own belief system and rituals, and even to find spaces to house them in their own village temples.

In addition, it is clear that there are differences among different Chinese groups in terms of which deities are given special worship. But we can say with confidence that belief in the *longwang* is the most prevalent folk belief in the Tu areas. In some villages, people worship other deities such as the *niangniang*, *nidang* and Guan Gong, but they still have the images representing dragon kings in the temples – for example, the sacred spear used for divination and the engravings of dragons on the gates, the cast metal dragons on the roof, and the paintings on the wall and pillars. Sometimes the *hada* (ritual scarfs) in the temples have the image of dragons.

It should be pointed out that the images used to represent dragon kings are quite diverse. Some of them are wood sculptures of warrior-like figures, some are only wood boards, some are sacred spears and some have very explicit images of dragons (especially in the newer temples). For example, in the dragon king temple in Dongshan Town, a huge glass painting with a green background hangs over the shrine. At the center of the painting is the sun, and two red dragons are flying on each side of the sun. In front of the glass, three butter lamps stand on the incense table of the main hall, and plastic flowers and offerings such as fruit are on the table. In this temple, there are no litters or sacred spears to represent dragon kings. Not only do they offer the dragon king modern materials such as glass and plastic, but also the images of the dragons are obviously modern. In fact, in most of the newer dragon king temples that were repaired or constructed in the 1990s, the images of dragons are modern images

explicitly representing dragons, similar to the dragons in Han areas. It would appear that there has been a diachronic shift in the iconography of spirit beings such as the *longwang* among the Tu. There has been a movement from abstract representations (such as the cloth-covered sacred spears) to concrete representations such as actual images of dragons.

There have been other transformations as well besides those that entail iconography. If a particular dragon king temple has a longer history or is geographically more distant from a modern city, older religious traditions are preserved more tenaciously. For instance, the worshippers will observe traditional rituals and customs; the power of religious specialists will be passed on to sons as an inheritance, and there will be more taboos governing behavior in the temple. Villages that are geographically remote and economically less developed will tend to retain more traditional characteristics in their beliefs and rituals. For example, they will prohibit married women from entering the main hall of temples, allowing them to kneel and burn incense only in the courtyard outside the hall. Men who have recently been to a hospital or a funeral are also barred from entering the main hall because those locations are considered unclean. Someone who has recently been there may anger the spirits by entering the temple.

Conversely, the newer dragon king temples have fewer taboos and convictions concerning belief in the spirits gives evidence of having waned. For example, the dragon temple in Dongshan Village now allows females to enter the main hall. The open and easygoing 67-year-old temple guardian, Zhao Changshou, said, "Fewer people chant scripts in the temple. A *biangbiang* is held on the first day of the tenth month of the lunar calendar, but there is no *bo* (a kind of shaman) in our village. We have to invite a *bo* from another village for the ritual. *Zhuanshanjing* a particular (religious ritual) has almost disappeared, since fewer people believe in it."



A



B

Figure 3-5. A. Worshipped in Bujia Village, the wall painting is Buddha and the spiritual spear on the table is for dragon kings; B. the spiritual spears for different deities are enshrined together.

These developments indicate that the Tu folk religion is experiencing a dynamic process of change. That is, even in the Tu's traditional ethnic religious system, the belief in dragon kings varies in intensity by region and degree of socio-economic development. The content and forms of the belief have changed greatly. There is greater acceptance of other religions, a harmonious coexistence of deities from different traditions, and even a growing tendency to posit kinship relations among different spirits.

Some Tu seem to have dilemma concerning the issue of commitment to particular spirits. For example, we have seen that the Chinese dragon is one of the key religious figures in their folk pantheon. Regardless of how a particular dragon king came to them, they will adopt some material representation of the dragon king on which to focus, whether it be a litter or some other object or portrait. But at the same time, their belief in the special power of the dragon king may be on the wane, since they now also enshrine images of Shakyamuni Buddha, Guanyin Buddha and many other deities in their temples. This gesture of tolerance toward other spirits may eventually exert a possible negative impact on the strength of their commitment to their primary spirit, the dragon king.

3.2 *Niangniang* — the Female Deity from Daoism

The female *niangniang* (娘娘) is a popular type of spirit venerated in many Tu villages, though somewhat less prevalent than in Han areas. The Han venerate three types of *niangniang*: People in the hinterlands of China tend to worship Jiutian Niangniang(九天娘娘, Holy Mother of the Nine Heavens) and Taishan Niangniang (泰山娘娘, the mountain deities), whereas people in the coastal areas venerate Tianfei Niangniang/Mazu (天妃娘娘/妈祖, the ocean deity). There is another *niangniang* who in charge of fertility under different names such as Zisun Niangniang (子孙娘娘) and Songzi Niangniang (送子娘娘), depending on the area. In addition to the fertility role attributed to her by the Han, the *niangniang* in the Tu areas is a multi-functional deity.

Her most important function is protecting crops from heavy rain and hail. The local *niangniang* is also responsible for the diagnosis and curing of illnesses.

It was said in Tu areas that their *niangniang* came originally from the Niangniang of the Nine Skies. This was a female deity in ancient Chinese mythology, later incorporated into the rituals of Daoism as the deity that helped people in distress and poverty. She is now associated with the delivery and protection of babies. However, in the Tu areas, the local *niangniang* is in charge of life and death, of happiness and disaster, and in charge of ensuring an abundant harvest. The *niangniang* in the Tu areas is different in this respect from the *niangniang* in the Han areas.

In Huzhu County, most of the *niangniang*'s temples are located in Danma and Dongshan Town. The *niangniang* in the Tu areas is related to the myths of Three Sisters and is often considered to be a family of related spirits. So some temples venerate three *niangniang*, though some villages venerate only one. Regardless of how many *niangniang* receive homage, the duties of *niangniang* are similar to those of the dragon kings. For example, the *niangniang* in Han areas in Qinghai Province is linked to fertility, but in the Tu areas, people ask not only for the safe delivery and protection of children; they also pray to their *niangniang* to protect the crops and harvests, and call on her for fortunetelling and healing, and for driving away floods and other types of evil. In cases of healing and fortunetelling, the Tu rely on religious specialists to communicate with the *niangniang* and to obtain instructions from her through the use of sacred divination spears.

As is true of the dragon king temples, each *niangniang* temple in the Tu areas has its own peculiar features. Dongjia is a typical Tu village in Huzhu; its name means Dong Family. It has this name because most people living there have the surname Dong. There are about 180 households and a population of 780, most of whom are Tu. The *niangniang* temple in Dongjia is the center of religious activities for the surrounding villages. This temple was initially constructed in the Qing dynasty but was destroyed



Figure 3-6. Different deities enshrined in the same hall, in which the right wall painting is from Daoism.

during the Cultural Revolution in the name of the “anti-superstition” campaign. It was destroyed around 1958 and was eventually rebuilt in 1992. In addition to its religious functions, it now functions as a social center for elderly residents.

In terms of its physical features, the temple consists of the main hall, the entrance gate, the north wing and the surrounding walls. The main hall faces to the west of three large rooms, where the *niangniang* and the dragon kings are enshrined. The residents of Dongjia told me that there were originally three sisters discussed in the legend, each living in a different village. Now the oldest sister is enshrined in Tuguan and the second sister in Bahong. As the two older *niangniang* are married, they are depicted wearing phoenix crowns and colored silk embroidered robes and sitting on *mingjiao* (exposed litters). The youngest sister is enshrined in Dongjia’s *niangniang* temple. It is said that

she has been reincarnated many times but has never been married. She committed suicide when forced to marry somebody. Because she was still a virgin, her statue is not shown publicly and is housed in the *anjiao* (hidden litter). The temple guardian told me that in fact there is no statue in the litter but only a piece of wood.

Another *niangniang* temple is in Bahong. Three *niangniang* are enshrined inside; in the middle is the eldest sister who is the primary deity. A consecrated divination spear is also in the shrine. A painting on the temple wall shows the *niangniang* touring and patrolling. This *niangniang* is very well known locally. Many people come to see her from as far away as Gansu province and even from Xinjiang, Heilongjiang and Shanxi provinces.

3.2.1 Spiritual Power of *Niangniang*

Local people believe that a *niangniang* has great spiritual power, and they respectfully address their *niangniang* as “Foye” (Buddha). The Tu consider the most important function of their local *niangniang* to be that of protecting crops from heavy rain and hail. On the one hand, the Tu fear drought after planting their crops and pray to the dragon kings for rain. On the other hand, they also fear that heavy rainfall or hail will destroy the harvest. So they pray to their *niangniang* to protect the crops from excessive rain or hail. The dragon king makes the rain fall. The *niangniang* makes it stop.

In the courtyard of Dongjia’s *niangniang* temple, a huge pot has been placed upside down on the ground. The pot is said to protect the crops by drawing upon the spiritual power of the *niangniang*. Accordingly whenever the hail or heavy rains come, the pot will be placed upside down. The temple guardian assured me, “This pot is really powerful. One day, I went out and felt that a heavy shower was coming. I ran back here and by then the rain was falling. I blew the white conch and put the pot upside down on the ground. Very soon the clouds cleared away. You can see how powerful the pot is. If I had not been here when the heavy shower or hail came, it would have destroyed the crops and it would have been my fault.” He said that sometimes the pot by itself

suffices to stop the rain. But at other times the *niangniang* is invited as well. When the *niangniang* is invited, four people chosen by the spirits carry her litter into the courtyard. These four people are called *majiao*⁸ (马脚). Once selected, the *majiao* are not allowed to leave the village for an entire year. They have to stay at home and run to the temple as soon as they hear the sound of the white conch, which is a sign that something important is happening.

In addition to stopping weather emergencies, the *niangniang* is also responsible for the diagnosis and healing of illness. Every summer, two older *niangniang* stay in the temple, and the youngest *niangniang* is invited to the family for healing and other events. When the summer ends, it is the turn of the youngest *niangniang* to stay in the temple and the older *niangniang* can leave. When I asked why they have this arrangement, the villagers said that the oldest *niangniang* is the most powerful and has to stay in the temple to protect crops from heavy rain and hail.

Local people affirmed their belief in the power of the *niangniang*. They even pray to their *niangniang* when their children take the College Entrance Exam. Many villagers stated that they are very faithful to the *niangniang* because they have seen cases in which people have been punished for neglecting the *niangniang*. There is a story that several years ago, many villagers suffered from facial acne. After consulting the *niangniang*, they found that the floor of the litter that housed the *niangniang* had rotted away leaving the *niangniang* uncomfortable. She therefore put a curse on the village. As soon as the villagers repaired the litter, their acne healed.

It was also reported that some people came to pray to the *niangniang* when some villager had lost something through theft. The *niangniang* informed them that, if the thief returned the stolen items, he or she would not be punished, but if the stolen items were not returned, he or she would be in serious trouble. The stolen items were returned

⁸ A kind of religious assistant.

because the thief was afraid of the punishment. In addition, the local people take delight in recounting what happened with the Secretary of the Department of Education from Tianzhu County, Gansu province. He came to the temple to ask forgiveness for a mistake which he had inadvertently made. The *niangniang* told him through a *shidianzeng* that his mistake could be easily corrected by investing in and improving his social network. He followed the *niangniang*'s instruction and the problem was solved. He later came back to the temple and donated 5000 Chinese yuan to the *niangniang* as a token of his gratitude.

From the above stories, it is clear that the female spirits called *niangniang* play many different roles for the Tu. People worship them because they are viewed as very powerful spirits with multiple practical functions. Through examples such as these, we also can see that in Tu culture, as someone commented to me, people “would rather offend people than spirits. If they offend the spirits, the results can be really serious.” In short, as is true of their relation to the dragon king, the Tu approach the *niangniang* with utilitarian and practical goals, aware of their potential usefulness to individuals and to a community.

We have alluded earlier to the coexistence of the dragon king with spirits of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. Similarly, Tibetan Buddhist beliefs and rituals coexist with the cult of the *niangniang* and may even exert an influence on people's perception of the spiritual power of the *niangniang*. This is seen in a very important ritual referred to as *zantan* (赞坛, cleansing). At the end of every summer, villagers perform this cleansing ritual for their community's *niangniang*. The villagers carry the litters of their *niangniang* to meet the living Buddha in Youning Monastery. They explain to the Buddha that their *niangniang* have worked hard all year for the villagers and have been sullied by their involvement in the real world. A *zantan* ritual will restore their cleanliness. This ritual implies belief on the part of the villagers that the *niangniang* have perhaps lost some of their power to stop bad weather. Their power needs to be replenished via a cleansing

ritual performed in the context of Tibetan Buddhism. This is a clear example of how Tibetan Buddhism has become intertwined with elements of the Tu folk religious system.

It is also worth mentioning that this *zantan* ritual is never held in summer. The rains fall in the summer and the protective presence of the *niangniang* is required. A *zantan* ritual performed at that time would require the *niangniang*'s absence – which of course cannot be permitted. This once again illustrates the utilitarian character of the *niangniang* complex. The cleansing of a *niangniang* is delayed until after she has done a service for them.

There is an old saying in China, to “clasp Buddha’s feet when in dire need.” That refers to the practice of attending religious events with prayers and gifts to the spirits when there is a need for help or for a blessing. Unlike the typical Han Chinese, however, the Tu do perform regular religious practices in their daily life. However their religiosity focuses not on theological or philosophical study. They pay more attention to practical rituals, such as burning incense to Buddha or to the *niangniang*. In the worldview of the Tu, it is more important to carry out rituals pleasing to the spirits than to learn doctrine.

3.2.2 The Origin of *Niangniang*

As mentioned previously, a *niangniang* is a local female deity with human characteristics. Oral traditions about the *niangniang* in particular reflect elements in Tu society. The Tu community has the custom of honoring *jiujiu* (舅舅, maternal uncles). In Tu tradition maternal uncles have higher status than paternal uncles. As an important local deity, the *niangniang* is no exception. Some older people from Dongjia Village mentioned that the *niangniang* in their temple has a *jiujiu* who was a real person.

In the past, the production team of peasants woke up and went to work very early. One day, the old men went to plow the fields when they heard a little boy knock on the door and shout, “Open the door, open the door.” Then one old man gave a piece of steamed bread to the boy when he heard the boy shouting again the next morning. Then when they arrived at the farm, they found a gold baby in the field, and the baby called the man who gave him the bread *jiujiu*. Later, the gold baby was put into the litter of the oldest

niangniang. And after that, from generation to generation, all the family members from that man were *jiujiu* of niangniang.

It seems farfetched to believe that spirits can be the cousins of mortals. However, this is precisely the belief of the Tu. In their view, young females must have their own maternal family, particularly a maternal uncle, when they marry; otherwise, they are scorned as homeless. In rites of passage, especially weddings and funerals, the *jiujiu* has the highest rank in the whole family. At the engagement and wedding ceremonies, the bride's *jiujiu*, not her father, gives the speeches. On the day of wedding, the *jiujiu* is the guest of honor. If he is not satisfied with the wedding ceremony, he can bring the bride back to her home and cancel the marriage. At funerals, a *jiujiu* gives a short eulogy. If he feels that the family had not treated the deceased kindly, he may complain about it at the funeral. The family, including the spouse of the dead, must apologize to him.

In this sense the story of the gold baby reflects the traditional social structure of the Tu. Even female deities have a *jiujiu*. So during the big event at the *niangniang* temple, people need to invite the *jiujiu* of the village *niangniang* to the ritual. For example, on the eighth day of the last lunar month, the ritual of *biangbianghui* begins after the *jiujiu* has been seated. On the sixth and eighth days of the first lunar month, villagers go to the *jiujiu*'s home with gifts and money to pay New Year visits. This custom illustrates the links between local kinship structures and the folk religion. The Tu have adapted their folk rituals to make them mesh with prevailing kinship practices.



A



B

Figure 3-7. A. The spiritual litter of Jijialing *niangniang* in Dongshan; B. The wall painted portraits of Jijialing *niangniang* in Dongshan.

Moreover, most of the Tu who worship *niangniang* also worship gods from other religions, although some of them do not seem interested in Daoism. (Some even told me that they do not believe in it) . But as an elderly man said in an interview: “*niangniang* is just our Buddha. According to our view, there are three kinds of religious authorities in the world, of which the first is the Lama of Yellow Hat or Benbenzi (Tibetan Buddhism), the second is Laoshifu (Daoist) and the third is our belief, *niangniang*. It is shenjiao (folk religion).” I asked, “Do the people here believe in all three religions? Which one has the higher rank?” “Yellow Hat, the biggest one,” he answered. In their opinion, Tibetan Buddhism is of the highest rank; but in real life, they pay the most attention to their shenjiao (folk religion), and Daoism is ignored. Most people know Daoist priests in Han villages, but do not invite them to attend their temple fairs. Only a few villages invite Daoist priests to their family events. Therefore, the fact that the original spirits of Daoism are preserved but that local people lack knowledge of Daoism reflects the changes that come over religious beliefs when they are incorporated into local village religion. The case of the *niangniang* shows that in terms of objects of belief, the Tu have absorbed the spirit beliefs of other ethnic groups. Recall: the *niangniang* is of Han origin. But they

have incorporated this spirit into their own folk pantheon and have lost any memory of the *niangniang*'s Han origin.

In addition, the *niangniang* temple is found only in the Tu village that is adjacent to a Han village, and the belief in *niangniang* is even more popular in those Han areas. This is another indication that the *niangniang* was imported into Tu religion from the Han Chinese. Since ancient times, China has been a unified multi-ethnic country, one ethnic group living compactly in a small community but mixing with others in a large area. The Huzhu areas where the Tu live are regions in which multiple ethnic groups coexist – sometimes in conflict, other times in harmony. The proximity of neighboring Tu and Han villages provides opportunities for social, cultural and economic contact.

This special historical background of interaction with other ethnic groups laid the foundation for the emergence Tu culture and accounts to a large degree for the diversity of Tu religious belief. Because the Tu have their own language but no written characters, in the transmission or inheritance of national culture, it was easy for them to absorb elements from other cultures. In fact, other ethnic groups also attend Tu rituals or events such as temple fairs. This multi-ethnic communication and integration encourages people to learn each other's customs, cultures and religious beliefs. This leads to the emergence of a new intergenerationally transmitted cultural system. The importance of Tu belief in the *niangniang* reflects this pattern, since the *niangniang* belief is of Han origin. It was only after Han Daoism was introduced to Tu areas that the *niangniang* complex entered into the folk religion of the Tu.



A



B

Figure 3-8. A. The spiritual litters of Najia *niangniang*; B. The spiritual statues of *niangniang*.

3.2.3 Taboos and Destiny of the *Niangniang* Temples

As is true of the dragon king temples, the *niangniang* temples in Tu areas are very important sites for religious rituals. These include the *biangbianhui* ritual on the eighth day of the last month in the lunar calendar, as well as the chanting of scriptures on the first and fifteenth days of every month, plus the performance of a folk religious event called *rangni*⁹ .

However, just as with the belief in dragon kings, there are many religious taboos associated with the *niangniang* temple. For example, people who have just attended a funeral or have recently gone to the hospital cannot enter the *niangniang* temple. There is also a special taboo on married women. In some religious rituals, the *niangniang* is brought from inside the temple out to the courtyards to receive worship from villagers and to observe a shaman dance in their honor. When the *niangniang* is in the process of exiting the temple and the gongs and white conches are sounded, the streets must be empty. It is absolutely forbidden for women to encounter the *niangniang* when she is on the way from the temple to the courtyards. Only after the litters of the *niangniang* have been placed in the courtyards can women enter. Women must walk backwards to avoid the litters. Every woman fears that if she runs into the litters, she will be cursed. But if a woman from outside of the village accidentally encounters the litter, the litter will turn away and move back. “All our local women know that they have to kneel or back away or hide when they meet *niangniang* by accident,” said many villagers.

In addition there are many legends about the *niangniang* that illustrate her strong personality, as well as the jealousy which she feels toward the beauty of other women. It was often said that girls who are more beautiful than the village *niangniang* would die. Moreover, if a beautiful woman married a man in such a village, even if they have

⁹ On specific days, older women gather in the temples to fast and read scripts for the safety and health of all villagers and families.

divorced and the woman has moved away, the *niangniang* will continue to make her life difficult. In an interview a villager told me, “We know a lot of things like that. A woman was divorced and moved to another place, but later died in the earthquake.”

The woman continued, “There are a lot of taboos in this temple. The people in this village are not allowed to enter into the temple in short sleeves but must wear traditional Tu clothes with colorful long sleeves. The women who are not ‘clean’, for example, who are having their period, do not step into the temple, and do not even get close to the temple. This is a strictly local rule. It is bad to offend or insult a *niangniang*. People will get sick or have an accident if they break the rule.”

From such stories and conversations, we concluded that the *niangniang* is a character full of contradictions. On the one hand, like the dragon king, the *niangniang* is a benevolent multifunctional deity who can help locals in many ways. But on the other hand, she is also a jealous woman who does not like competition. In fact, from the *jiujiu* of *niangniang* to taboos on women, folk religion gives to the *niangniang* many human characteristics reflecting traditional Tu social structure and ideology.

In Tu communities, the belief in *niangniang* has experienced a cycle of initial growth, subsequent decline and eventual gradual revival. At one point belief in the *niangniang* was derided as superstition by the government. Many village temples were damaged and activities related to the belief in *niangniang* were suspended. These temples are once again in use.

Like the temple of the dragon kings, the temple of the *niangniang* was destroyed in 1958. It was said that the sacred divination spears were thrown behind the mountain as trash. The villagers thought that these relics were associated with Buddha. Individuals who were able to communicate with the spirit world recovered the sacred spears, brought them home, and sealed them in the walls with mud. Now the sacred spears have been returned to the temples. The villagers also mentioned that when a government work group came to their villages to destroy the temples, a villager dug

a hole in the mountain and hid the *niangniang*'s litter in it. The members of the work group tortured him into telling them where it was. But just before the work group was going to destroy the litter, another brave man removed the wooden statue of the deity. And this man built a small house, wrapped and hung the statue from the ceiling beam and worshipped the deity secretly. So even in the special period of the anti-superstition campaign, the belief was threatened, but the villagers protected and preserved the statues containing the spirits. Despite the ten-year Cultural Revolution, belief in the *niangniang* survived, albeit in modified form and on a smaller scale. To summarize, Tu folk religion was affected but not eliminated despite threats from the rulers of the new China, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Political power exerted its negative impact on Tu folk religion, but the religion survived.

3.3 The *Nidang* — A Buddhist Guardian

The *nidang* (尼当, also called *nidang fo*) is the third type of local deity in the Tu region. It is particularly popular in the villages of Nianxian and Qiazigou in the county of Huzhu. It is said that the *nidang* was originally a local mountain deity. Unlike the dragon king and the *niangniang*, the *nidang* belief is not found outside of the Tu from Huzhu County. There is a legend about the *nidang*'s origin:

One of Genghis Khan's generals named Gerilite led his troops to the areas near Huzhu County, but stayed at Suobutan (which today is the town of Danma, which, means Mongolia Riverbank), The general died not long after. He then became a deity of unusual strength and settled on the mountain of Guolong Temple (today's Youning Monastery). When Youning Monastery was being constructed, Gerilite showed his divine power by wearing Mongolian clothes when he went to the living Buddha Jiase. He was then appointed as the local earth deity. When the construction of Youning Monastery was complete, Gerilite was nominated as it's *nidang*, the local guardian, and was enshrined in the form of a bronze statue. Later on, people invited Tangka paintings and sculpture of *nidang* to be the guardian deity and worshipped them in their village temples.

An old man, Su Derong from Nianxian village, confirmed this version: "The *nidang* in our village temple was brought in from Youning Monastery. He was originally a

Mongolian general and commander of troops in the Yuan Dynasty. He was the god of war and later became a deity here.” As with other folk beliefs among the Tu, the *nidang* complex utilizes a symbolic sacred spear, and a *shidianzeng* communicating with the spirits uses these sacred spears to help people solve problems.

The range of the *nidang*'s duties is similar to those of the dragon king and the *niangniang*. He offers blessings for favorable weather, for the safety of villagers and livestock, for families and business to thrive, and for healing the sick. Among these, healing is the most significant function of *nidang*. When somebody gets sick, their family members will go to the temple and invite the *shidianzeng* to communicate with the spirits, since the *nidang* is responsible for bestowing blessings and for keeping devils and disasters away. While the *shidianzeng* communicates, the family members burn aromatic plants, light butter lamps and kneel. The *shidianzeng* smokes his body with cypress incense and rinses his mouth, and then holds the sacred divination spear of the *nidang* and asks for spiritual power. Another man asks questions and observes the movement of the sacred spear to understand the instructions from the spirit world. If the divination spear moves up and down, the statement is correct, but if the spear shakes, the statement is wrong.

In the *nidang*'s temple, the healing is carried out during a *xiazhen* (an exorcism ritual, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4). The Tu believe that much sickness is caused by evil spirits but believe that ghosts make people sick by accident. The *xiazhen* is able to drive away certain devils or ghosts. They ask the *shidianzeng* to communicate with the spirits and let them know that they have already hurt people, and during the *xiazhen* ritual they simply ask them to leave; there is no attempt to capture or destroy them. The ritual of *xiazhen* can also be used by sorcerers to make a curse. They use the head and blood of a white dog or wolf and bury a dough figurine on which is written the birth date of the cursed person. This is intended to sicken or kill the victim. This ritual obviously has its historical roots in the shamanism complex.



A



B

Figure 3-9. A. The *nidang* hall in Donggou Village and the statues of *nidang* is covered by yellow cloth; B. Wall painting of *nidang*.

In addition, a *nidiang* is also is one of the guardians of Buddhism in Younging Monastery. At the intersection of the roads to Younging Monastery, a small hall stands like

a guard, and a *nidiang* is enshrined inside. After entering Younging Monastery, besides a variety of Tibetan Buddhism halls sitting on the hillside, there is another *nidiang* hall in the middle part of the mountain. The Lamas in Younging monastery call this the Hall of the Mountain Deity or the Hall of the Guardian for Buddhism. Similar to what is seen in many village temples, the gate of this *nidiang* hall is painted red with a Han-style brick top, but the windows are in typical Tibetan style. Because of the slope of the mountain, it has no courtyards, but only a narrow path in front of the halls, and the walls. Inside the dimly lit hall, a statue with Mongolian clothes sits on the incense table, and a consecrated divination spear covered with red cloth lies next to it. The outside walls of the hall are decorated with plastic flowers, a colorful canopy and, at the edge is a divination spear, which appears to be new and is similar to the spear used in village rituals. A Lama (called Bandi in the Tu language) told me that a *nidiang* is very powerful. People will be helped if they have difficulties or disasters and pray to the *nidiang*. Our conversation was as follows (X is me and B is Bandi.):

- X: "What is the primary duty of this *nidang*?"
- B: "For instance, if there is a disaster or something bad happens in the family, people come here to pray for help."
- X: "So the Foye (Shakyamuni) in the main hall does not take care of them?"
- B: "No. The Mountain Deity takes care of all bad things."
- X: "If some disaster happens in some village, do the villagers come here to invite the *nidang* to help them?"
- B: "Yes. They come here to ask him to drive away the disaster."
- X: "How does he help them?"
- B: "When the statue arrives at the village, someone needs to fashen (establish the communication with the *nidang*) and ask the *nidang* the reason for the disaster and then perform the rituals."
- X: "Is there any specific person to do this?"
- B: "Yes, it must be a certain man. Others cannot do this."

Thus, the *nidiang* in the Tibetan Buddhist monastery has the same characteristics and functions as folk deities in the village, including healing and preventing disaster,

fortune telling, and establishing communication between the supernatural and the natural worlds. Only a *shidianzeng* can communicate with a *nidiang* in the village temple, but in Youning Monastery, some Lamas can do that as well. A Lama who can communicate with spirits is called a *niqiang* (a Tibetan word similar in meaning to *shidianzeng* in the Tu language). It was said that in the past, only one Lama could be selected to be the *niqiang* from the 200 Tibetan Buddhism monks. After becoming the *niqiang*, whenever this Lama communicates with spirits, all living Buddhas and Lamas were required to offer the *hada* scarf to this *niqiang* and head-touch (in Tibetan Buddhism, people touch each other with their heads to show respect), because at that point this person is not a Lama any more but the representative of *nidiang*'s spirit. However, a *niqiang* has not been in the Youning Monastery for years. They bring in a *shidianzeng* for the ritual from the nearby village if they need one. In addition, the Tu believe that when a person is dead, if the family of the deceased can entertain a *nidiang*, then the spirit of the dead will not have to go to the netherworld but will be reincarnated into a new body. After a death, family members go to Youning monastery to donate money and request Lamas to chant scripts for the dead and to entertain the *nidiang*.

We can see from the above that the *nidiang*, a folk deity, was incorporated into the Tibetan Buddhist system. But although the *nidiang* in Youning Monastery is the guardian of Tibetan Buddhism, it still retains characteristics of a folk spirit. In the summer of 2012, I went back to *nidiang* hall in Youning Monastery and found a container of divinatory lots on the incense-burning table. Drawing lots is often done in Daoist and shamanic temples, but rarely in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. I asked the Lama how the divinatory lots were used. He answered that it is very common for people to come here and draw lots for fortunetelling. He advised me not to draw lots unless there is a crisis in my family. Meanwhile, in the Youning monastery, there are sacrificial offerings to *nidiang* and Lamas chant scripts for the *nidiang* on designated days. There are several versions of the scripts, and it usually takes a half hour to finish chanting. The Lamas said that

they chant specific scripts to guardian deities including *nidiang*, and if they meet some difficulties while out of town, they will be followed and blessed by those guardians. Local villagers also often go to Youning monastery to give alms and ask Lamas to chant Ping'an Jing (平安经, peace and safety script) and Duancha Jing (端茶经, serving tea script) for *nidiang* in their village temples. The Lama explained that because of spirits and people are treated in the same way. Moreover, in the ritual of Tiaoguanjing (an annual Tibetan Buddhism Dharma activity with Lamas dancing to entertain spirits) of Youning Monastery, all the guardians attend. Like *niangniang*, sometimes *nidiang* is also carried to Youning Monastery to be ritually "purified." Therefore, there is harmonious relationship between folk belief and Tibetan Buddhism. The close interaction between folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism is the most important feature of Tu religious ecology.

3.4 Ancestral Spirits — Deities of the Family

The family deity is the guardian spirit of the whole family. For most Tu families, especially large ones, no matter how many deities are enshrined in the village temple, the family deity must be in the home. Unlike the situation in the Han majority, family deities and ancestral spirits are separate entities. Different Tu family deities are usually spirits such as dragon kings, black tigers, mule kings and others. The Tu also believe in ancestral spirits, but these are believed to be less powerful than the family deity. Both the family deities and the Tu's ancestral spirits bless their families and children, but a family deity is the guardian spirit and has a relationship with a religious specialist in the family. He protects the safety of the household and its members. Sometimes this deity is the same as the deity of war or of wealth. Unlike the *longwang* or the *niangniang*, who are enshrined in village temples, the family deities are enshrined on the roof of the ancestral home.

3.4.1 *Lemusang* — Mule King

There are many kinds of family deities. In Tu areas, the most popular family deity is a *lemusang*¹⁰, a female deity who brings good luck. She was originally a god in Tibetan Buddhism, responsible for fortune and fate. The *lemusang*, always sits on her mount, a mule with an eye on its left buttock. For that reason she is also called Mule King. The *lemusang* is both a tutelary deity worshipped by the Sakya, Kagyu, Gelug schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Black God in Red-black God System for the Dalai Lama, and Lhasa's patron deity accorded special honors by Gelug School (Younging Monastery).



Figure 3-10. Family deities worshipped on the roof of Tu people's houses.

According to the *Chronicles of Younging Monastery*, the *lemusang* was originally invested as a god of Tibetan Buddhism by Jiase living Buddha, following the request of the fourth Dalai Lama. Later, with the spread of Tibetan Buddhism and the increasing population of Tibetan Buddhists among the Tu, the Mule King was gradually accepted and evolved into the patron deity of village families. From there, the *lemusang* became an unusually powerful deity, the protector of Buddhist sites, villages and families, as

¹⁰ It is also called Pelden Lhamo in Tibetan and translated to Jixiang Tiannv in Mandarin.

well as of fortunetelling and divination. Ordinarily the *lemusang* is portrayed as a female deity of war in Tibetan Buddhist *Tangkas* and has two dharma images: joy and anger. When happy, she represents beauty and good fortune. In that case she is shown with clear white skin, large earrings, braided hair piled high on her head, and a crown of flowers. She has kind eyes and a slight smile. She wears a red dress, white robe and red boots as she sits on a lotus petal. When angry, her hair stands on end and she has fangs. She wears a lion earring in the right ear and a snake earring in the left ear. She is barefoot and her skin is blue. She sits sideways on her mule, which flies through the three realms: heaven, hell and the human world. The background of the *Tangka* portrays strong winds and hellfire.

Although the *lemusang* originated in Tibetan Buddhism, the Tu represent her with a traditional Tu divination spear at home. Since the Tu treat her as a local deity, they also invite a *shidianzeng* to communicate with the *lemusang* for important events such as healing, choosing wedding or funeral dates, using a horoscope to tell if young couples are well matched, naming infants, and judging the *fengshui* of new houses. When disaster strikes, the family invites Lamas to chant scripts of Jixiang Tiannv Jing (“*lemusang* satisfying wishes”) to pray for help. Sometimes, in the village’s ritual for protecting the harvest, the religious masters march with *Tangkas* painted with images of *lemusang* to warn the villagers to be careful when pasturing their livestock. Based on this belief, some Tu call newborn boys *lamu bao* and girls *lamu suo*, both of which are an attempt to ensure that the *lemusang* will protect them. During the spring festival, every family that worships a *lemusang* goes to Younging Monastery and asks the Lamas to chant scripts to their particular family deity.

The belief in *lemusang* is found in many other ethnic groups in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, including in Tibetan and Han communities. This Tu belief has combined elements of Tibetan Buddhist culture and their own folk cultural resources to endow it with its special characteristics. Since Tibetan Buddhist culture permeated the Tu

areas, on the one hand it brought about changes in local Tu culture, including folk religion. On the other hand, Tu folk religion has in turn led to changes in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural model. With the incorporation of Tibetan Buddhism, the deities of folk beliefs have been adapted to local conditions and have been modified to accommodate the new images. At the same time, Tibetan Buddhism in Qinghai has incorporated some folk spirits into its own system as gods, making it somewhat different from Tibetan Buddhism found in other regions. We can see, in this light, that the shared belief in *lemusang* on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is evidence of the profound interaction among Tu, Tibetan and Han cultures. This particular belief also enhances mutual recognition among these ethnic groups (E, 2008). Such inter-religious contacts provide an entry point for understanding patterns of communication between different areas and between different ethnic cultures.

3.4.2 *Jiujian Sanba* (Black Tiger), *Chilie Sang* (Dragon King) and Others

A *jiujian sanba* is another kind of family deity, worshipped in some Tu families in Huzhu. It is said that a *jiujian sanba* was originally a black tiger spirit that belongs to the category of mountain deities. He is now worshipped as a family deity represented by a sacred divination spear. The iconic representation of black tiger spirits located in different family homes is quite similar to the sacred spear used in village temples. The icon of *jiujian sanba* is a 4- or 5-foot-long iron rod tipped with iron spears at each end, tied with religious signs or other objects and covered by red silk cloth. If disease or disaster comes to the family, its members invite a *shidianzeng* to pray to the family deity to teach them how to either avoid or end the misfortunes.

In Huzhu, some families also worship a *longwang*, a dragon king, as their family deity, known in the Tu language as *chilie sang*. The duties of this dragon king are similar to those of dragon kings in local temples; blessing the family and driving away demons and misfortune. However, the duties of the dragon kings in homes are limited to the specific household in which they are enshrined. Few families worship a *chilie sang* in

the form of spiritual litters in houses, but instead utilize divinatory spears as objects of veneration. These sacred spears are similar to those used in village temples.

In a clan or large family, the icon of the family deity is located in just one household. Each morning and evening, the elders burn incense and kneel in prayer to the family deity. Other family members also pray in the deity's room. If the family deity is located in the house of the oldest male, other family members come to this house on the first day of every first lunar month with yak butter and cypress incense in addition to the customary offerings to pay their respect to their family deity and to their ancestors.

For the *shidianzeng*, the ability to communicate with the family deities is a very important skill. The *shidianzeng* may be a member of the kin group that called him, but he must have a different surname. According to the locals, the family deity can ask to be moved to another house. For example, some people may suddenly report weird happenings in their home, and then through the power of the *shidianzeng*'s intervention, they learn that the family deity wants to be moved to another household for a few weeks, months, or up to one or two years. Sometimes the deity wants to be placed in the village temple. According to the villagers, when a *shidianzeng* contacts the deity and the deity makes known this demand, people must acquiesce or face potential disaster. Sometimes the family prays to the family deity for rain. If it has not rained for a long time, some families take their deities to the riverside or put a bottle of water in front of the deities either to bring rain or to protect their crops from harmful weather, such as hail.

In addition, small households worship other kinds of family deities. Among these are Danmenjia (Tibetan Buddhism god); Kailu Jiangjun (a path-finding general); Bahaer Sang (Tibetan Buddhism god), Sanbao Fo and Jiushi Fo (Han Chinese Buddhism god), Lvlian Pusa (green-faced Buddha), Bailian Pusa (white-faced Buddha), Baima Tianjiang (white horse general), Yangtou Hufa (a goat-headed god from Tibetan Buddhism), Niutou Hufa (a bull-headed god from Tibetan Buddhism). But no matter how many different kinds of family deities they have, the symbolic meanings and ritual practices are

quite similar. Most families burn incense, light butter lamps, and put three bowls filled with clear water as they kneel in front of the family deity every day. And from generation to generation, when they repair or reconstruct the house, the room for the deity is always preserved. It is assumed that all family deities worshipped by Tu villagers are responsible for blessing and protecting the family members and for addressing whatever needs are brought to their attention.

According to a Tu saying, the deities of a family are passed down through the generations. The older generation must leave the deities to the younger generation; otherwise it is believed that the family will have bad luck. As long as these family spirits meet people's needs, the Tu worship them.

3.5 Nature Worship

Nature worship, which reflects human curiosity about natural phenomena that they cannot explain, is an important component of Tu folk religion. The Tu do not only worship the sun, moon, stars, sky, earth, mountains, rivers and fire, as is true of other ethnic groups, but also frogs, divine birds, and *maoguishen* (猫鬼神, evil cat spirits). These practices are based on respect for the natural world. According to Tu cosmology, an eternal law governing human life requires all things in nature to live in harmony and to flourish together.

3.5.1 Worship of Mountain Deity

Most of the Tu in the Huzhu area live in the mountains. In the context of this particular environment and the agriculture practiced there, the worship of the mountain deity is central to Tu folk religion. The ancestors of Tu, influenced by polytheistic shamanism, created many mountain deities. As a result the images of the mountain deities have clear regional features. These mountain spirits can be ferocious animals and ghosts. Additionally, ritual structures such as *lashize* and *benkang* have been built on mountaintops or in valleys as sites for worshipping mountain deities.

The Tu worship the mountain deities in hopes of abundant rain and a good harvest. They offer food such as fruit and steamed buns; sometimes they sacrifice goats or other animals. *longwang* Shan (Dragon King Mountain) is the highest mountain in Huzhu, and the birthplace of the local dragon king. When the locals conduct rituals on Dragon King Mountain, eminent Tibetan Buddhist monks are invited to chant scripts and the village religious specialist dances until the rains come. Sometime, villagers will take the litter of a local deity from the village temple to *longwang* Shan to help the mountain deity acquire more power. Because the top of the mountain is a pure and sacred place for the Tu, it cannot be defiled. People are not allowed to urinate or defecate there or at the springs. There are many other taboos related to such nature worship; pointing at the moon, for example, will cause the finger to become infected. Some people in Huzhu still refrain from killing wolves and bears that are considered mountain or family deities. In this sense, the mountain deity complex is quite similar to that of Daoism practiced by other ethnic groups.

3.5.2 Animal Worship

Animal worship, such as frog worship, was originated in Tu culture of the distant past. According to a local origin myth (*Formation of the World*), after a heavenly deity shot a gold frog with a gold spear and put a handful of soil on the abdomen of the frog, the soil formed the Earth. While crying, laughing or jumping, frogs caused clouds to fill the sky with lightning accompanied by peals of thunder, flames burst on the ground, the earth shook and buildings collapsed. It is said that a frog incarnated from a heavenly deity reincarnated as a man in a poor family, and despite his poverty was allowed to marry the third daughter of the local headman because of his intelligence, wisdom and supernatural power. Under the influence of arcane oral traditions, the frog became the symbol of wisdom and bravery for the Tu. It is forbidden to hurt or kill frogs, as the killed frogs will come back to life and punish the people who hurt them. During the spring festival, while deep-frying steamed buns, people form the dough into the shape of a

frog and put it on the top of the kitchen range to prevent accidents. Moreover, on the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, people do not cook and do not carry water from rivers, because frogs urinate in rivers. If people frighten the frogs, the frogs will send bad luck.

The *maoguishen*, and the *sangmenshen* (丧门神, a bird spirit) are two harmful (邪恶) categories of animal spirits. The *maoguishen* is very temperamental. There are many legends about it. A *maoguishen* is located in houses and listens to everything. People with a *maoguishen* in their home have to be careful what they say at home. It is said that the *maoguishen* is excessively protective of the home. A family that has a *maoguishen* does not lend anything to others; if somebody borrows something from a household with a *maoguishen*, the spirit will follow the borrower and cause illness or bad luck or some other trouble until the item is returned. A *maoguishen* can also obtain things that its family needs. Since the *maoguishen* is an evil spirit, villagers keep their distance from families that are rumored to have *maoguishen*. As a result the daughter of a family believed to have a *maoguishen* as a domestic spirit will have difficulty finding a husband from the village. However, nobody dares to offend that family. There are no images of *maoguishen*; it is not known for certain that a *maoguishen* is even a cat. It is said that some people, particularly butchers, are able to see a *maoguishen* and can catch or kill it. Sometimes, when a *maoguishen* is making a family miserable, they ask the village's religious specialist to chant scripts to drive it away.

The evil bird spirit, *sangmenshen*, is half-deity (benevolent) and half-ghost (harmful). According to legend, a Tibetan Buddhist monk and his dog were riding a horse but a crow (or magpie) flew over him and he died. A passerby made paintings of the incident and sold them. Since it was bad luck that a monk had died, people called the bird "*sangmenshen*" (bad luck spirit). Some people bought copies of the painting and made it their family deity. Nowadays in the Tu areas, if people think others have brought misfortune or bad luck to them, they call those people *sangmenshen*.

3.5.3 Kitchen God Worship

The worship of the *zaoshen* (灶神, kitchen deity) is an important part of fire worship in Tu folk religion. As its name implies, the kitchen deity is housed and worshipped in kitchens. The Tu believe that the kitchen deity is their main representative in the court of the Jade Emperor, reporting each year on their behavior. On or around the 23rd day of the last month in the lunar calendar, the kitchen deity returns to the heavenly palace and reports to the Jade Emperor (the highest deity of Daoism) on what the family members have been doing all year. The Jade Emperor decides whether or not to confer blessings on the world based on the report. After the spring festival, the kitchen deity comes back to the world. So two rituals, *song zaoshen* (sending off the kitchen deity) before the spring festival and *ying zaoshen* (welcoming the kitchen deity back to the world), are held every year in hopes that the kitchen deity will send a good report to the Jade Emperor and bring blessings from the heavens. It is a Chinese folk custom for people to make *zaotang* (a kind of sticky candy) in the twelfth lunar month to offer to the kitchen deity. It is hoped that the candy will make his mouth too sticky to send a bad report to the Jade Emperor.

The kitchen deity originated in Daoism; adapting, however, to Tu folk religion, the kitchen deity has become a multi-purpose spirit. The Tu version of the ritual is performed one day later than that of the Han Chinese, and different activities are carried out. There are several taboos associated with worship of the kitchen deity among the Tu. Scratching or drawing on the top of the kitchen range is not allowed; dirty items cannot be thrown into the fire, and others. The kitchen deity will become angry and send bad luck if people offend him. In short, under the influence of Han Daoism, the worship of the kitchen deity has entered Tu culture and is thought to bring the Tu a happy life, protection for their families and livestock, and wealth.

3.6 Conclusion

The pantheon of Tu folk religion has incorporated various spirits from different religions but has also retained many of its own ancestral beliefs and rituals, such as the worship of nature and of animals. The other religions that have contributed rituals and festivals to Tu folk religion are Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism. As a local ethnic variety of Chinese traditional religion, however, Tu folk religion has retained many distinct characteristics.

In the first place, the coexistence in the same pantheon of multiple deities from different religions is a salient feature of the Tu spirit world. The Tu are very tolerant and receptive to the spirits of other religions. Any deity that can potentially bring benefits is worshipped. Furthermore, these distinct spirits can also be placed physically side by side. In Tu village temples, statues from different traditions usually occupy the same general space.

The presence of two kinds of supernatural beings, benevolent deities (神) and harmful spirits (恶灵), endow Tu folk religion with a certain vitality. The harmful spirits cause misfortune or disaster while the benevolent spirits, as the symbols of power and moral rule, meet people's needs, help them solve problems and restore social order when it has been disrupted. But even though these spirits can be classified into good or bad categories, the Tu still worship all of them. The *wanshendian* (万神殿, thousand spirits hall) has been created to accommodate this complex spirit world. In the *wanshendian*, there is a big blank plaque in the middle of the main hall. The local Tu say that, "This is the place for thousands of deities. It is impossible to write down all their names. The plaque is blank so that all of them can find their own places when they come." In short the worship and veneration of different deities is not viewed as being in conflict with an individual's chosen religion. The spirits of Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism are accepted as complementary adjuncts to the spirits that originated among the Tu.

The fact that *wanshendian* is so popular in the Tu areas illustrates the manner in which syncretism is an important feature of Tu folk religion.

Secondly, in addition to its syncretic pantheon, Tu folk religion is characterized by its utilitarian and practical orientation. As previously discussed, the dragon kings, the *niangniang*, or the *nidang* and other spirits in the Tu folk pantheon have similar roles – to protect crops, dispel diseases and exorcise evils, to heal, to perform divination rituals, and even to resolve social conflicts. In other words, those deities are intimately involved in people's real lives. Folk religion not only satisfies people's spiritual needs, but it can also serve practical functions.

In addition, in salvation-based religions, such as Christianity in the West, deities or spirits make strong ethical demands. They reward virtue and punish vice. Communication between human and spirits in these Western traditions is not through shamans, but through worship. If the prayer is not efficacious, it is not believed that the spirits are incompetent, but that the people offering prayers are still sinful. The Tu concepts are quite different in that regard. They believe that the deities who serve people can be controlled. They see deities as unpredictable superpowers that influence people's daily lives at will. If a deity is no longer able to meet people's needs, the Tu usually turn to other deities. There are differences among the deities who work in a single geographical region or functional domain. The spirits face strong competition from other spirits. The Tu therefore pray to different spirits for protection and blessings; if the ritual fails to bring results, they conclude that the spirits lack power and turn to other spirits. Prayer and other rituals among the Tu, in other words, are vehicles for asserting control over the spirit world.

This is so much the case that sometimes people actually punish spirits who do not respond to their petitions. I discovered that the villagers in Huzhu carried their dragon king to another hall where Sakyamuni is enshrined and locked the door. They said that the dragon king was not answering the prayers for rain, so he had to be punished.

They also have another way of punishing a deity called *shailongwang* (晒龙王). They left the dragon king outside under the hot sun to remind him of his responsibility and to coax him to bring much-needed rain. Since the local economy depends on the weather, people assume that the spirits are obliged to help them.

In this sense it is a safer strategy for them to believe in a wide variety of spirits. If one spirit does not help them, they can turn to others. To repeat: folk belief among the Tu is highly utilitarian and practical. Those who practice a monotheistic religion of the West worship a Supreme Being as the only ultimate source of power; invocation of saints and angels in Catholicism, for example, is an effort to get them to intervene with the Supreme Being. They have no power on their own. But in Tu theology there is no “Supreme Being” who is the sole source of power and who created all the other lesser spirits. It is believed instead that the multiple spirits do have an independent origin and independent powers on their own. The same pattern also holds in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist theology. The Jade Emperor, for example, is a high god but he does not have the status as the sole creator and ruler of the world as is the case with the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Thirdly, not only has Tu folk religion been influenced by Buddhism and Daoism, but the converse is also true, at least at the local level. There are many zones of intersection between folk religion and the other religions. We have seen that there is not only competition between folk religion and Tibetan Buddhism, but also connections. Tibetan Buddhism is receptive to the spirits and rituals of folk religion and there is good evidence that, at least locally, it has been influenced by the religion of the Tu. At the same time, mutual compromise is another special feature of their mutual relationship.

There is also evidence, however, that underneath the surface harmony, there is a secret competition between different religious authorities. For instance, for most Tu villagers, the dragon kings, *niangniang* and *nidang* hold higher status in their religious lives and receive more ritual attention than the Buddha of Tibetan Buddhism. He

is viewed as a king in the spirit world, but not a very powerful king. The local Tu acknowledge Tibetan Buddhism as a part of their belief and ritual system, but the Buddha like Sakyamuni does not directly perform healing or fortunetelling. In Tu opinion the Buddha has more majesty and dignity. But local deities have more pragmatic power. Unlike the more useful local deities such as the dragon king, the *niangniang* and the *nidang*, the Buddha is not believed to have the power to solve their practical problems. Local deities can protect people from disease and disaster, bring good luck and wealth and solve other problems. Sakyamuni Buddha and the Jade Emperor in Daoism are too remote to bestow specific blessings on people, although the people worship them.

In sharp contrast, Lamas in Younging Monastery strongly assert that Buddha is higher than all other local deities, so much so that they cannot be worshipped together. In interviews, some Lamas mentioned that the status of Droma (a female deity in Tibetan Buddhism) is much higher than that of *niangniang*, so they cannot be housed in the same room. According to them, Tibetan Buddhism is a superior religion that deserves higher status. The dragon kings, the *niangniang* and the other local Tu spirits should be housed separately. Although Tibetan Buddhism does not reject folk deities, and the Lamas are often invited to attend the folk religious rituals, they still think consider the spirits of the folk religious pantheon to have a lower status.

Fourthly and finally, the Tu's complex religious system is a product of historical changes that have occurred through the centuries, changes that are related to the history and evolving ethnicity of the Tu. The Tu are not a unitary indigenous ethnic group. From the Tuyuhun Kingdom to today, the ethnic composition of the Tu has been affected by war and by contact with other ethnic groups, especially the Tibetans and the Han. In the course of their migrations and their mixture with other ethnic groups, the Tu have come to accepted elements of Daoism, Tibetan Buddhism and of other religions without abandoning their own traditional beliefs. Their religion has evolved in a way that permits the coexistence of multiple traditions. Conversely some mythical figures in Tu

folk culture have even made their way into local Tibetan Buddhism as in the case of the *nidang*, who is now generally thought of as the Guardian of the Tibetan Buddhist monastery.

At the same time, growing ethnic consciousness has itself encouraged the development of folk religions. As the ethnic identity of the Tu has undergone dynamic historical change, religious symbols, religious paraphernalia, and religious beliefs have served as vehicles for the construction, maintenance, and transmission of that ethnic identity.

CHAPTER 4 RITUAL CYCLE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: RELIGIOUS SITES, ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIALISTS

As is true of virtually all religions, in addition to the spirit beliefs discussed earlier, Tu folk religion also has sacred sites, religious organizations, and religious specialists. As for the sacred sites of the Tu, as is true of most religions, they consist of structures built by human hands, whether they be elaborate temples or simple piles of rocks. In the world of the Tu, village temples are the most popular of such sites. The local temple is a socially prominent institution and in addition fills an important administrative function as the center of the annual ritual cycle. In addition to temples, there are also smaller sites referred to as *benkang* and *lashize*. These are sacred places where villagers can ask the spirits to avert bad weather and natural disasters. Tu religious sites protect local people and crops and function as well as centers of religious life.

In terms of organization, there are kin-based associations that unite all the members of a lineage. Lodged in the local temple, this association of villagers is referred to as the *qingmiaohui* and is the most common religious organization found among the Tu. It plays an important role not only in religious rituals but also in law enforcement and local politics.

There is also a wide variety of religious specialists, including the *bo*, the *shidi-anzeng*, the *miaoguan* and *benbenzi*, all of whom will be described in this chapter. These are all male religious specialists who practice divination and sorcery. They also have ceremonial and political roles as village leaders. In addition to these specialists, all elderly men, as well as members of temple organizations, exercise some authority in their village. The present chapter will deal with all three of these phenomena among the Tu: religious sites, religious organizations, and religious specialists.

4.1 Religious Sites

We will begin with a discussion of the sites where rituals are carried out. Temples to house spirits, often represented by statues, are a major feature of the Tu folk religious

landscape. Such sites are scattered in different geographical areas and carry out different functions. Sometimes religious sites serve not only as places of worship, but also as centers of social welfare activity. They can be classified as follows.

4.1.1 Village Temple

Almost every Tu village has its own temple. Each temple has its own particular architectural style and size and contains statues, paintings, or other objects representing various spirits. This physical diversity is an apt reflection of the diversity of the villagers' beliefs. Although different village temples house different spirits, all temples have a similar purpose. They are places for villagers to worship the spirits, to pray for good lives and to solve problems that have arisen. In addition, the temples also serve as venues for civic activities.

Similar to traditional Chinese quadrangles, the village temples of the Tu usually consist of different buildings, halls and shrines. The characteristics of any particular temple will depend on when it was constructed and what level of financial support it received from villagers. The layout and arrangement of a village temple will reflect differences in the status of the different spirits housed there. Generally, the tallest building facing the main gate in each temple is the main hall where the most important village spirit is enshrined. It typically has the width of three huge rooms¹. This combination of three rooms for the main hall symbolizes the ritual importance of the number three² in Tu culture, a matter that was discussed in an earlier chapter.

The dragon king temple in the village of Dazhuang is the largest and most extravagantly decorated and most influential village temple among the Tu, it faces north and has two courtyards, including a newly constructed screen wall, a main gate,

¹ The standard width of a room in an old-style house is 10 Chinese feet, the length of a purlin.

² "Three" has the symbolic meanings of "Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism," "Heaven, Earth and Human-being," and "Happiness, Position and Longevity."

a main hall, and houses in the east wing and the west wing. The main hall, constructed in a traditional wood-and-earth style, has the width of three huge rooms and is entered through four large lattice doors. Moreover, the main hall is richly ornamented with carved beams and painted pillars, and its walls are covered with paintings of flowers, birds, fish, and the Chinese knot that is the symbol of wealth and happiness.

On one side of the main hall, there is a row of shorter houses used to place the spirits of the earth, of oxen, and of horses – all of them considered lesser spirits in comparison to the dragon king. These houses also have some simple woodcarving decorations. On the other side of the main hall, a row of three houses has been provided for the caretakers of the temple. The Lamas (Tibetan Buddhist monks) and the *benbenzi* (a type of village religious specialist) live there on days when religious rituals are performed. These houses are more modern and have fewer woodcarving decorations. The pillars in the main hall are also decorated with dragon woodcarvings or paintings. In a winding corridor around the main hall are 48 prayer wheels, an element clearly borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism. All the elaborate decorations and woodcarvings give symbolic testimony to the majesty of the spirits and to their importance to the people.



A



B



C



D

Figure 4-1. A. Dragon King Temple in Yaoma Village; B. Dragon King Temple in Donggou Village and Miao Guan; C. The *xiazhen* in a village temple; D. Wall painting in a village temple.

The decorations found on the gate of the village temple reflect symbolically the complexity of Tu folk religion. The main gates of the temple are brick-and-wood structures with painted door leaves and two large round bronze door handles that are tied with two strips of cloth, sometimes red, sometimes of many colors. On top of the gate are hollow Tu woodcarvings, whose complexity will depend on the village's financial resources. The simplest style of temple has only one story, whereas the most complex has seven stories. The carvings depict different themes such as dragons,

peonies, continuous cloud patterns and others. Among these themes, the dragon is the most popular motif. For all types of temples – dragon king temples, *niangniang* temples, or *nidang* temples – dragon patterns are indispensable decorative elements. Some temples have dragons engraved on their door beams with the dragonheads in relief. Some temples have paper dragon flags hanging on the door beams. There are also dragon king paintings on the walls of the main hall. In addition, some temples have white screen walls behind the door, and painted on those walls are a pair of dragons and the saying *Feng Tiao Yu Shun* (风调雨顺) – favorable weather and timely wind and rain.

In the dragon king temple of Cha'ergou, for example, golden dragons are painted on the black ceiling beam and on the two thickest pillars. In the main hall there are paintings of dragon kings on the east wall. But on both sides of the shrine are wall paintings of other spirits, including a *miaojiaye* (苗家爷, a spirit in charge of green shoots of grains), a *chumashen*, a *huimashen* and a mountain spirit. At the end of the pillar colonnade, two spirits are painted on the walls: on the right, a red-faced mountain spirit wears a hat, and a spirit with a red robe and dragon-pattern boots sits on a large stone with a long-handled broadax. On the left, an earth spirit wears a Chinese bowler hat. The main gate of this village temple is also decorated with religious figures and good luck symbols. Facing outside, paper dragon flags hang below a Tibetan Buddhist *calachakra* (tenfold powerful) symbol that stands between two white elephants carrying *shankhas* (white conches). Facing inside, the top of the main gate has three large grids painted with colorful flowers. There are several wall paintings on both sides of the main gate. On one side a bare-chested red-skinned military officer in black-and-white-lined boots stands with a *lingpai* (令牌) signaling his status at the waist and a trident in hand. On the other side, a civil service officer in a red robe and a hat stands with a book under his arm, a book at his waist and a writing brush in one of his hands. Because there are so many different spirits depicted by sculptures and paintings in this temple, local people call the main hall “*wanshendian*.”

In addition to the main hall and the main gate, many temples also have courtyards. In the courtyards, small square gardens and braziers for burning aromatic plants serve as important sacrificial spots. A brazier stands between the garden and the main gate in each temple. Some simple village temples have only a brazier with no garden in the center of the courtyard. The Tu believe that the centers of the courtyards are spaces where spirits may live. People therefore usually burn incense and kneel in the center of the courtyard before stepping into the main hall. If there is no garden or brazier at the center of the courtyard, there must at least be a wooden stake with an upside-down tub weighed down by a stone wrapped in red cloth, with small tubs and bottles surrounding it. This is used for the *xiazhen* (exorcism ritual) described in the last chapter, and unclean spirits such as devils and ghosts are kept under them. Some village temples have a large upside-down jar and two iron pots near the brazier, which is also a way of keeping unclean spirits at a distance.

The local temple is the sacred place where important religious activities and events take place. Moreover, the temple is the principal location at which communication between humans and spirits occurs. Worshippers often request advice from the spirit through the voice of a spirit medium. There are many special religious rituals held in the temple, including the *biangbianghui*, *manihui* (嘛呢会) and *rangni* (让尼) rituals, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

But at the same time the local temple is also a venue for activities involving local politics, economy, culture and society. In some villages, temple officers actively solicit governmental funding. Since the government provides special funds for activities promoting folk culture or the welfare of the elderly, temple officers will often apply for funds ostensibly to open cultural activity centers or community entertainment rooms for the elderly. In actual fact the purpose is to renovate the temple. Several of the religious sites which I visited were filled with religious statues and paintings of various spirits. But the signs on the hall read “Villager Activity Center,” “Old People’s Entertainment Room,”

even a “Party Member Activity Room.” These signs are intentionally deceptive. It is an open secret, and the government is aware of the deception.

Under the impact of this government support, however, the local temple among the Tu has become more than a venue for religious activities; it is also a community meeting place and the site of folk festivals. Those temples are a public welfare institution in the eyes of the government and a religious site for the locals. For instance, the locals often hold meetings in the temples to talk about public projects such as irrigation systems, programs for providing assistance for the poor, etc.

This is actually somewhat in line with Tu tradition. There has been among the Tu a longstanding belief that spirit interventions affect material life and villager interactions. When villagers have had the need to settle a disagreement, they have traditionally gathered at the local temple to ask the spirits for assistance in conflict resolution. Children who do not respect their parents may traditionally be sent to the temple to receive punishment from the spirits. For the Tu, it is a disgrace to be punished in the local temple. Thus, the local temple has always had prominent social status and has served important social functions. From times past the village temples have clearly been not only sacred spiritual places, but also are venues where various types of social, communal, and political issues are discussed and resolved, and where various types of social control can be exerted over deviant community members.

4.1.2 The *Benkang*

A *benkang* is a small religious building similar to a squared pavilion and is located at intersections near entrances to villages. The typical *benkang* has eight pillars around an enclosed adobe structure without doors or windows. The Tu believe that a *benkang* attracts spirits to settle near their home to help prevent bad weather and natural disasters. It also serves as a landmark for a village.

When a *benkang* is being constructed, a living Buddha from a Tibetan Buddhist temple as well as local shamans will be invited to chant scriptures at the moment of

consecration. These specialists organize the consecration rituals. The *zhuanzang* (装脏, which means to install viscera into *benkang*) is the most important step in the consecration process. Each family in the village is required to donate something to sacrifice, such as a large number of *caca* (擦擦, one-Chinese-inch-tall Buddha statues made of clay), Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, and consecrated vases for the *zhuanzang*. At the beginning of construction, a rigid framework is first constructed, and people put gold, silver and jewelry, precious medical herbs, the five cereals, tealeaves, five-colored threads, yak butter, and other appliances in the vases. Those vases and the *caca* are placed inside the building. At the final stage, they plaster the entire building with mud. The *zhuanzang* ritual requires five to six days of nonstop work. The workers alternate layers of fine sand and scriptures or *caca*. One village head stated that this ritual requires the participation of everyone in the community and the work must not stop until it is finished; otherwise the spiritual power of the *benkang* would be reduced.

Once the *benkang* is completed, the living Buddha is invited to chant scriptures to soothe the spirits. The local people burn aromatic plants, kneel and chant the sutra of the Six Truest Words, pronounced “Om Mani Padme Hum (嗡嘛呢叭咪吽),” to pray for the success of the consecration ceremony. From that moment on the *benkang* is a legitimate new worship site for villagers. Every day at four or five o’clock in the morning, Tu villagers come to the *benkang* to burn aromatic plants and to say prayers. As in in Buddhist sites, this is the equivalent of their morning religious class. They hold a *mani* (a strand of the Tibetan Buddhist rosary) in one hand and walk clockwise around the *benkang* several times. If anyone in the village gets sick, the family members come to the *benkang* to circle it and to pray for the recovery of the ill person. Unlike village temples, where entry is restricted, anyone can walk around the *benkang* and pray.



A



B



C



D

Figure 4-2. A, B & C: *benkang*; D. *caca*.

The Tu believe that the *benkang*, being the dwelling place of spirits, has great spiritual power. It protects a village from demons. It is therefore the villagers' responsibility not to destroy or damage it; the resident spirits will punish to those who do. According to an often-told story about the *benkang* in the village of Dongjia, several years ago young villagers went to large cities to earn money. Some of them injured their arms or legs. The village elders then called on the help of a living Buddha from Younging Temple to help them. The living Buddha told them that the water channel in the west of the village was too deep and was bringing bad luck to the villagers. People followed his instructions to plant some trees along the channel and to construct a *benkang* near

it. After that the emigrants were not harmed. When an old man told me this story, he stopped, wide-eyed, “Think about it. The *foye* (living Buddha) assured me about the power of the *benkang*.” I could see in his eyes the deep reverence which he felt for the *foye*.

In short, the *benkang* is a common folk religious site in the Tu areas. However, from the initial process of construction to the placing of ritual paraphernalia within the *benkang*, it shows the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the shaman is also deeply involved in the entire process of building a *benkang*, and the pragmatic functions of the *benkang* correspond more to folk religious functions rather than to those of official Tibetan Buddhism, there are clear manifestations of syncretism in the *benkang* complex.

4.1.3 The *Lashize*

A *lashize* is another sacred site, usually located on a mountaintop, for worshipping mountain spirits. It is a very popular type of religious site among the Tibetans, Mongolians, Yugu and Han Chinese in Northwest China. The Mongolians and Han Chinese call it “*ebo*,” but Tibetans and Tu call it “*lashize*” or “*maoji*.”

In contrast to the *benkang*, which is located close to villages, the *lashize* is usually constructed on distant mountains. But occasionally some communities build a *lashize* near their village for a specific reason. But because people think that spirits often choose to travel through mountain passes, the *lashize* is usually located in a mountain pass or on the top of a mountain. While constructing a *lashize*, a *shidianzeng* is invited to discuss with the spirits the location of the structure and the timing of its consecration. Lamas from Tibetan Buddhist temples are invited to officiate at the actual consecration ritual. Before the construction, people dig a deep hole to bury scriptures, animal heads, the five grains, and tealeaves. They then prop up a square wooden frame on the ground, pile stones around it, insert a bow and arrow, and hang colorful prayer flags of *hada* scarfs and satin cloth. After the *lashize* is completed, local people come to burn

aromatic plants. Worship in the *lashize* takes place at fixed times such as the first day of the lunar year.



A

B

Figure 4-3. A. The *lashize* on the mountain top of Dadongshan Village; B. The *lashize* at the entry of Dazhuang Village.

The Tu believe that the smoke produced by burning aromatic plants can link heaven and earth. They also maintain that the scent of burning pine not only soothes people but also gives a pleasant aroma to the hall where the mountain spirit dwells. So they perform an important ritual on the first day of every year in the Chinese lunar calendar. The ritual is called “*weidasang* (煨大桑).”³ The goal of this ritual is to please the mountain spirits and motivate them to send down happiness. After dinner on New Year’s Eve, the entire community walks up the mountain for the *weidasang*; everyone wants to reach the top in hopes of acquiring good luck. However, because there are so many worshippers, there are many accidental fires. Local officials told me, “Mount Dadong is the highest mountain in Huzhu County. Too many people go to the *lashize*

³ The *weidasang* (burning the first round of aromatic plant) is a large-scale ritual performed in the early morning on the first day. They ignite pine branches, *Artemisia argyi* and other leaves to produce strong smoke, and throw on fried highland barley powder, yak butter, tealeaves, sugar and other items.

there to burn sacrificial paper and aromatic plants. As a result, the nearby forest burned down, and even the *lashize* got burnt to the ground. That caused a considerable loss.”

Since the *lashize* is a sacred place filled with mysterious powers, people try to avoid giving offense. For example, it is forbidden to touch the sacrifices that have been offered. If someone takes the fruit and steamed buns back home, it is feared that a calamity will occur. Offending the spirits of a *lashize* can cause serious mental illness. Defecation or urination are also not allowed near *lashize*. An old shaman, Ma Deliang from Yaoma village, told me that a woman who urinated near *lashize* became insane and died. It was said in the town of Hualin that there was a piece of land with seedlings on which a simple *lashize* was constructed with branches. The landowner complained that the *lashize* had taken over his land. He bulldozed it and planted seedlings. Shortly thereafter his son was killed in a car accident on his way to work. Local people assumed that the landowner had enraged the spirits.

After this incident a living Buddha from Younging Temple went to Hualin. The sacred litter of the local spirit preceded the living Buddha and other people as they made their way to the bulldozed *lashize*. Many seedlings were destroyed when the people following the litter trampled them. The landowner complained to his uncle, who was the chief of police. The chief and other policemen arrived to mediate. At the suggestion of the village head, the people carrying the sacred litter were not fined, but the temple custodian had to reimburse the landowner for the market price of the seedlings: 680 Chinese yuan. The money was sent to the landowner’s parents. However, after learning that the indemnity was connected to a local deity, the parents donated the money back to the temple for incense burning and butter lamps. This story illustrates how local people often associate misfortune with angry spirits, and think that violators of sacred places will be punished by the spirits. So local people respect the taboos surrounding the *lashize* and maintain the upkeep of the sacred places.

4.1.4 Marnyi Stones

Another small site for folk religious worship is the *manishi* (嘛呢石, *marnyi* stone) in the mountains near Tu villages. The worship of *marnyi* stones was originally borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism. This practice is also quite popular among other minorities, such as in Yugu and Mongolia. The practice is thought to have been adopted by the Tu along with Tibetan Buddhism. This structure consists of heaps of stones engraved with scripts or icons. Smaller mounds have branches with prayer flags or sacred divination swords inserted into them. The function of the *marnyi* stones is to protect passersby and nearby villages. So while walking by *marnyi* stones, people usually chant the Sutra of the Six Truest Words (Om Mani Padme Hum), and sometimes add additional stones to the pile of *marnyi* stones. Therefore, over time the pile of *marnyi* stones may become higher.

4.2 Folk Religious Organizations

Religions not only have physical sites, such as those described above, but also patterns of organization. Folk religion is deeply embedded in family and personal life, and is stitched into the fabric of Tu society, rather than standing apart as a separate “church.” Village temple associations based on kinship and lineage connections are a common form of folk religious organization among the Tu. The *qingmiaohui* is the most important religious organization among them, affiliated with village temples and playing a crucial role in the evolution and spread of folk religious practices. Its typical responsibilities include appointment of religious leaders, the determination and election of membership, and organization of religious rituals and events. In a sense, the *qingmiaohui* is more powerful than village administrative committees.

The elected members of a *qingmiaohui* are divided into two levels. At the higher level is the head, the *qingmiaotou*. Under the head, at a lower organizational level, are eight *laozhe* and twelve *tuqiu*. All of these officials are male. The *qingmiaohui* at the head is elected by the whole village every year. He is a villager respected for his noble character and high prestige. The *laozhe* and the *tuqiu* also have authority, though

less than that of the *qingmiaohui*. They follow the instructions of the *qingmiaotou*. The *laozhe* are elder males with power who are members of the committee of the *qingmiaohui*. The *tuqiu* (图奇) on the other hand are young males who serve as religious assistants. When voting for the members of *qingmiaohui*, each family takes one position on the *qingmiaohui*, and the position can be either *laozhe* or *tuqiu*. The *laozhe* (老者, elderly men) are known for their high social reputation, religious devotion, and fairness. They tend to be members of temple management groups in charge of burning incense and paper ghost money. They preside over religious activities, formulate the rules to protect green shoots of grains and punish rule-breakers. At the same time, villagers select qualified men between twenty and fifty years of age to take turns serving as *tuqiu*, beginning in May on the lunar calendar. Their job is to assist the temple custodians and the *laozhe*, to call villagers together to discuss religious rituals, to assist the *laozhe* in enforcing decisions and rules, to collect fines, and to resolve disputes between villagers. After the ritual of *xiejiang* (谢将), which is held after the harvest in September, the taboos protecting green shoots are lifted, and the responsibility of the *tuqiu* is terminated.

The *bo* (孛) are male religious specialists who practice divination and sorcery. They are not members of the *qingmiaohui*, but they are affiliated with it and also have other leadership roles in the village. In addition all elderly male villagers of high status and all members of organizations that manage temple affairs have influence in the village. The *miaoguan* (庙官), the village temple custodian, is a particularly important person. The *miaoguan*'s responsibility is to keep the temples ritually safe. It is also his responsibility to burn incense and to worship spirits on behalf of the villagers.

The custodians also accept donations from worshippers. Fifty-six-year-old Ma Zongqing was the *miaoguan* in Hualin village for almost a year. Before being selected, he and his son ran a profitable blacksmith's shop that earned about 30,000 Chinese yuan annually. After he was selected as *miaoguan*, he had to serve in the temple. Since his son did not have enough skills to run the shop, they closed it and the son

went to work in a potassium fertilizer factory in another city. Ma said that he forfeited 30,000 yuan because of the job in the temple. However, he was happy to accept the assignment, since that was the will of the spirits.

He indicated that the work at temple was very difficult; he had to get up at 4:00 every morning to wipe altars and tables, to light the yak-butter lamps, to put out water bowls and to clean the courtyard. These tasks took him an hour and a half each day. He had to wash his hands more than ten times a day for burning incense. He said that that was not a problem during the summer. But in winter his hands got frostbitten. Another *miaoguan* was 53-year-old Ha Zhiyu, from Guan Gong Temple in Dongshan Village. He was uneducated. When I asked him how he had become the temple custodian, he said that the spirits had selected him in the course of a ritual. Ha stated that ten years ago, he prayed for Guan Gong to choose a good day to construct a house, but did not receive any communication. Later he was notified by a *shidianzeng* that Guan Gong had selected him to be the *miaoguan*. He had no way out and by the time of our conversation he had been the temple custodian for ten years. His duties were similar to those of other *miaoguan*: burning aromatic plants and incense, kneeling in daily prayer, and other duties.

The *miaoguan* is allowed have dinner at home if the daily work routine has been completed, but he has to come back. In addition, he is not allowed to touch women's hands, much less have sexual intercourse. Ma said, "it feels like a one-year sentence to be a temple custodian." He was planning to finish his one-year commitment on the Laba Festival (the eighth day of the last lunar month) and did not want to extend his work. But he added: "there is no choice if the spirit selects me." However, he repeatedly expressed his eagerness to see an end to temple duties; he was upset that he had had to close his shop and lose income. According to the village head, "The temple custodians selected by spirits are competent people from prosperous families who are well off financially. "

In some village temples, the *miaoguan* play the role of religious specialists, although they do not have spiritual power. For example, they have to pay close attention to the weather. Once clouds come and hail or heavy rains are expected, they will perform the *anzhi* ritual (安置, setting down). For the *anzhi* they sometimes burn incense, take the divination spears from the temple into the courtyard, and blow *bili* (white conches) to ask the spirits to stop the bad weather. The *majiao*, the four young men selected by the spirits to carry the spiritual litter, are the *miaoguan*'s assistants. Whenever the *miaoguan* blows the white conch, they must rush to the temple to assist him in stopping the rain or hail. Like the *miaoguan*, the *majiao* are chosen by spirits and must stay in their village to protect the crops for at least a year. I asked what would happen if a *majiao* did not arrive. "Impossible. They have to be here. If they are not present and the crops are destroyed, they must take the responsibility for the loss," answered the temple *miaoguan*.

The *miaoguan* is either elected by villagers or appointed by the spirits and is required to live in the temple all year. A *miaoguan* may officiate for an extended period of time, but he can resign and request the election of his replacement. People elect a new *miaoguan* on the seventh day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. On that day villagers communicate with spirits and choose four young men to carry a sacred litter to select the *miaoguan* while others hold flags and beat gongs and drums. They go to the most prominent family in the village to ask a male in this family to be the temple custodian. At this request, the family has to prepare a large round wheat cake and a bag of tea to greet the local deity. They are allowed to beg the deity to let them off the job. In that case these four young men carry the litter to the next family until a family agrees to let a male member be the new temple custodian. After the new *miaoguan* is confirmed on the eighth day of the first lunar month, the old *miaoguan* hands over the keys to the temple. It takes several days to finish this process.



A



B

Figure 4-4. A *miaoguan* and a *laozhe* in the ritual of *biangbianghui*; B. A *miaoguan* in Dongshan Village.

A *miaoguan* chosen by the spirits has the same responsibility as one elected by villagers. However, he does not know how long he has to serve. Usually he serves for at

least one year, or at most three to five years. It is said that once they are selected, they have to take the responsibility; otherwise, misfortune will befall their families. A ritual is held at the end of each year to select the next *miaoguan*, the next *shidianzeng* and the people to do the routine work. All the villagers understand that the people selected by the spirit have to stay in the village in case someone needs to communicate with spirits. Many temple custodians are re-elected if the villagers find them competent, and especially if the local spirits give indications of liking them. Some *miaoguan* however are replaced before one year has elapsed because of their incompetence. If a *miaoguan* is selected twice, people give him a special hat and a *hada* scarf for the honor, but the work of temple custodian is unpaid.

The Tu believe in the spirits and obey the orders of the temple custodians, who are believed to represent the will of the spirits. Conversely, they place little stock in what government officials say. Some villagers told me that they follow the secular village head only when they are in the mood to do so. Especially in temple affairs, government officials cannot intervene in disagreements. But if the head of the temple asks the disagreeing parties to stop, they will.

4.3 Religious Specialists and Mode of Succession

Elected members of the above-discussed religious associations exercise authority by virtue of their organizational roles. The religious specialists in contrast have authority because of their own inherent powers. As mediators between the human and spirit worlds, religious specialists are believed to have supernatural powers. In the Tu area, there are several kinds of specialists – *bo*, *shidianzeng* and *benbenzi*. Villages with temples must have religious specialists who play multiple roles in religious rituals, local religious life and even in local politics.

4.3.1 The *Bo*—Shaman in Huzhu

The *bo* is the shaman in Huzhu. He plays important roles in all folk rituals on behalf of individuals and groups as an intermediary or messenger between the human and

spirit worlds. The term *bo* is also the name of the shamanic dancing or ritual activities that occur in Huzhu areas. With its strong roots in Tu tradition, shamanistic ritual is the soul of the folk religious festival.

In Huzhu, the Tu consider the *bo* to be the principal intermediary between humans and spirits. The *bo* can also be a surrogate stand-in for the spirits. Villagers often invite the *bo* to communicate with spirits in times of crisis, in hopes of receiving some instructions or advice from the spirits, or in hopes of healing the sick or driving disaster away through some ritual. The *bo* has special clothing and ritual paraphernalia. There are two kinds of outfits for the *bo*. One is quite similar to that worn by a Daoist priest – a dark blue robe, a flat hat, and a one-sided sheepskin drum in hand. The other outfit is a long tunic with big red flower patterns and a colorful crown, painted with portraits of dragon kings and *niangniang*. Sometimes the *bo* wears braids of hemp rope and holds a one-sided sheepskin drum. He sometimes fastens a bell at the waist. It is said that the *bo* was originally a female; but they are now all males. In these areas, it is interesting to note that the long tunic and artificial braids are associated with a female spirit. As with other shamans, a one-sided sheepskin drum is the most important piece of ritual equipment. Moreover every *bo* has two small divinatory tools made of ram or ox horns. I discovered that the scriptures and texts used by the *bo* in many village temples were originally Daoist scriptures with slight modifications.

The *bo*'s most important task is to officiate in the annual *biangbianghui*, Huzhu's largest festival. Its purpose is to thank the spirits with gifts and to pray for their continued protection. In the ritual, local people invite and transport all the consecrated statues and litters to a specific place and there offer sacrifices to them. As the intermediary, the *bo* accepts all offerings on behalf of the spirits and in turn transmits information or orders from the spirits. The *tiaobo* (跳傩) is the *bo*'s ceremonial dance during the *biangbianghui*. The *bo* believes that, when he enters a trance state, he is possessed by a spirit. The particular dance which the *bo* performs depends on the spirits that were



Figure 4-5. The *bo* is practicing ritual in Najia Village Temple.

invited, and he wears a different outfit for each spirit who arrives. His colorful crown also represents different spirits.

While chanting texts, the *bo* does not wear any hat or crown. He burns sacrificial paper and kneels in prayer, and only then dons the crown. After that, he stops dancing and answers questions posed to the spirits. While spirits are possessing the body of the *bo*, he shakes and sits on the table at the center of the spot where the ritual is occurring. There he accepts people's prayers, and communicates messages from the spirits as he performs divinatory rituals and dictates oracles to the people. Sometimes, to show the power of spirits, the *bo* offers a blood sacrifice by stabbing himself to drive away evil spirits or ghosts.

In daily life, the *bo* is an ordinary peasant or herdsman; only in folk festivals or important religious rituals do they assume their religious role. In an interview, a *bo*

named Ma Deliang told me that his most common ritual task is divination for the villagers, helping them locate lost livestock, choosing a good day for a wedding or the best day to start building a new house. The *bo* is also a shamanic doctor. The families of people who have had a stroke or suffer mental illness ask the *bo* for diagnosis and treatment since in their opinion these particular ailments may be the result of having offended the spirits. So they ask the shamans to drive away all unclean forces and to placate the spirits. Thus, a third function of the *bo* is to exorcise evil spirits.

As mentioned earlier, the Tu live in different communities across Huzhu, Minhe and Tongren counties in Qinghai Province. There are commonalities in Tu folk religion across these communities, but each has its own characteristics. Parallel to the *bo* in Huzhu, there are different shamans in different Tu communities, such as the *fala* (法拉, shaman) in Minhe and the *lawa* in Tongren. They go into a trance during special rituals and function as a medium between human beings and spirits. Dance and drama are elements in their customary shamanic performances. An important task of theirs is to drive evil spirits away from sacrificial rituals.

Minhe County is the second-largest Tu community in Qinghai Province. As is true in Huzhu, every village has its own temple(s) and *fala*. Every family believes in the power of the *fala*, just as people in Huzhu believe in the *bo*. As the representative of the local deity, the *fala*'s function is to speak for the deity, to perform divination rituals and to collect sacrificial offerings. The *fala* in Minhe decorates himself with a steel sword and short stakes. But the one-sided sheepskin drum is the *fala*'s most important piece of ritual equipment. But unlike the *bo*, the *fala* wears a short red gown with black ripple patterns and a belt around the waist. The outfit looks like something that a martial arts actor would wear.

On special days such as the rituals of the *nadun* festival, each *fala* pierces his cheeks and dances while holding an ancient steel halberd. He foams at the mouth when a spirit possesses him. Then he dances towards the sacrificial offerings, touches them

with his sword, and then destroys the sacrificial money, ceremonial canopy and other offerings with the halberd or sword, finally declaring to the villagers that the spirit has received the offerings and has blessed them for the year. Some *fala* still pierce their mouths with foot-long iron rods in sacrificial rituals. Unlike the *bo*, the *fala* does not run throughout the whole performance. He simply represents the spirit in the last step. Since Daoism has spread in Minhe, local people call the Daoist priests *fashi*, to distinguish them from the *fala*, the Tu shamans.

In the Tongren Tu areas, shamans are called *lawa* (拉瓦) in Tibetan or *fashi* (法师) in Chinese. In contrast to Huzhu and Minhe, the term *lawa* refers to shamans who deal with mountain spirits, not family spirits. In daily life, the *lawa* do farming or leave the village to work. For religious festivals or rituals, the *lawa* return to their villages. In Tongren, there are many festivals related to shamans, such as the June festival in summer and the *wutu* (於菟) festival in winter. During the festivals, people offer sacrifices and thank the spirits for favors received, and the *lawa* performs rituals to communicate with spirits. Blood sacrifice is an important practice by the shamans in Tongren. In this ritual, the *lawa* wears a Tibetan robe and a hat with a painting of five Buddhas and holds a flat drum which he beats with a drumstick of birch branches. The *lawa* strike their own heads until they bleed, and then wipe the blood onto the *Tangka* with its spirit portraits. This is done to show respect to and to communication with the spirits. In my fieldwork, I once saw a certain *lawa* stab his head with nails to draw blood for a sacrifice. During the rituals in Tongren, there are no priests from other religions. The *lawa* are the only organizers and the directors. The spirits talk to villagers through the *lawa* and direct the ceremony.

In short, *bo*, *fala* and *lawa* are part-time Shamans in different Tu areas. The role of shaman is usually passed down from father to son. In Huzhu, the *bo*'s family sets up a shrine to their family spirits such as black tigers, *niangniang* and dragon kings. The inheritance of the role of *bo* is transmitted through the male line, and several rituals

are needed for someone to become a recognized *bo*. Each *bo* transmits to the males in his family and community knowledge about religious tradition and rituals. These are taught even to young boys. Though few people in the Tu areas can read and write, the *bo* teach potential heirs how to officiate at religious rituals and rehearses with them the *biangbianghui* dances. The old *bo*, Ma Deliang, has three sons, all of them trained by the father (Only the youngest, has become a shaman). To be accepted by the community as a *bo*, however, it is not enough for the young person to possess the knowledge in his head; he must demonstrate special talent in his outward behavior to convince people that he is truly a *bo*.

To become a *fala* in Minhe, a person must inherit the role in his family, in addition to demonstrating spiritual power and talent. In my investigation in 2012, a young *fala* described his initiation. His father is a famous shaman and began teaching his son early. Several years ago, there was a religious ritual to which his father did not bring him. But right before the ritual began, the boy suddenly ran to a mountain near their village. His brothers and several young men from the village chased him but could not catch him. When he arrived at the ritual site, his father told everybody that his son was a real *fala*. The villagers thenceforth accepted his status as shaman having witnessed his power.

In Tongren, acquisition of the status of shaman presupposes not only membership in a shaman's family; the prospective shaman also must go through an initiation ceremony strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. That initiation ritual requires the prospective shaman to pass a qualifying exam in the Tibetan Buddhist temple. When the old *lawa* passes away, one of his sons will replace him. But the heir has to be tested by the living Buddha in Longwu monastery in Tongren, and he will be certified only if he passes the test. Otherwise villagers will doubt that he has the spiritual power required of a *lawa*. It is said that as part of this test, the living Buddha asks some strange questions that can be answered only by someone with genuine spiritual power who has been instructed by oracles.

In conclusion, many Tu families have practiced shamanism as described by Schram: “The facts were all gathered during the ten years I lived among the Monguors, and were checked many times by shamans, chiefs and elders of villages, men and women, and children in the schools, all of whom had attended shamanist rites their whole life long.” (Schram, 1957) Moreover, the Tu shamans in the different Tu areas have slightly different procedures, but they are authenticated in strikingly similar ways. For example, besides serving as a trance medium during the harvest celebration, all of them regulate and control community affairs by using the power of folk spirits to facilitate farming and to harmonize interpersonal relationships. When there is conflict among villagers, those shamans intervene to settle it. In local people’s opinion, the spirits always uphold justice, so it is very normal that in a particular ritual, the *bo*, *fala* or *lawa* will give a warning that a spirit can see and hear everything and will punish those who break the rules. The spirits are even believed to punish villagers for wrongdoing in dealing with parents. As distinct from Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism, the shamanic element in folk religion plays a prominent role in the religious lives of the Tu.

4.3.2 The *Shidianzeng*—the Spokesman of the Local Deities

The *shidianzeng* is an important spirit medium in Tu folk religion, and consequently enjoy high religious status. As intermediaries between the spiritual and natural worlds, the most important function of *shidianzeng* is to “*fashen*”(发神) or to “*fashen-jian*”(发神箭)⁴ – to communicate with spirits using sacred divination spears, which are the local representations of the spirits and are placed in village temples. There are no female *shidianzeng* among the Tu; the local assumption appears to be that only males can communicate with spirits.

⁴ The “*fa*” means to hold or shake; the “*shenjian*” is the sacred spear used for divination. When in communication with spirits, *shidianzeng* shake the sacred spear for the messages from the deities.



Figure 4-6. The *fashenjian* ritual by *shidianzeng*.

The local people believe that it is hard for ordinary people to communicate with spirits; only the *shidianzeng* can summon them. Therefore, almost every Tu village temple has its own *shidianzeng*. For the few temples that do not, the villagers invite *shidianzeng* from the neighboring villages to officiate at rituals. In daily life, the *shidianzeng* is an ordinary peasant who does not necessarily know how to sing or dance. But in religious rituals or important festivals, the *shidianzeng* are called in to communicate with the spirits. The villagers ask some questions of the spirit and *shidianzeng* shakes the sacred divination spear to answer yes or no. There are no requirements of special clothes or costumes for the *shidianzeng*. As they communicate with a spirit, they simply hold and shake or vibrate the divination spear, and the *miaoguan* or the *bo* interpret the instructions from the way the spear shakes.

If the communication of a *shidianzeng* is successful, he shakes the spear. It is said that this indicates loss of control. I once saw a *shidianzeng* walk in different directions led by a divination spear. He stopped walking at the place where the *xiazhen* was to occur, where somebody had buried something. It was unclear whether he was directed by some spiritual power or was acting on his own. I interviewed several *shidianzeng* and asked them what it was like to talk to spirits. They said that they were not always successful; but when they were, they could tell that spirits had possessed them. For example, sometimes they heard bees buzzing. Sometimes their bodies became overheated and started to shake. They emphasized that it was exhausting to “*fashen*,” and sometimes they had to give up. While possessed by spirits, they forget who they are. After “*fashen*” they return to normal and do not remember what has just happened. The local people believe that *shidianzeng* are genuinely possessed and have been chosen by a particular spirit for the communication of messages.

The role of the *shidianzeng* is not identical with that of the *bo*. The *bo* is a class of shaman capable of controlling forces in the spirit world, and a *bo* must be trained to learn how to become possessed. However, the *shidianzeng* appears to be entirely under the control of forces in the spirit world. For example, on one occasion a certain person saw a strange thing during a ritual. He suddenly started babbling, gesticulating, and acting strangely. He then declared himself to be possessed by a spirit.

In addition, the *bo* has knowledge of local religious dynamics and of the religious condition of other people. The status of a *bo* is hereditary. He is trained by family members and eventually initiated. In contrast, the process of becoming a *shidianzeng* is surrounded with more ambiguity and mystery. Becoming a *shidianzeng* is not a matter of family inheritance but occurs randomly. Local people think that the spirits themselves are the ones who choose which men will be their spokesmen.

Just as the role of *shidianzeng* is not inherited from the family, so also no family is required to provide a successor to the *shidianzeng*. After a *shidianzeng* has died, the

spirits may choose another one from a different family. Most men who are chosen to be *shidianzeng* are known to have special abilities or have recovered from a serious illness. In a word, something unpredictable and mysterious will have happened before a person becomes a *shidianzeng*. Su Derong, a 74-year-old villager, told me that the word “*shidian*” refers to local spirits, and that “*zeng*” is a Tibetan word⁵ that means to be grabbed. The *shidianzeng* are thus people who have been “grabbed” by a spirit. He mentioned that in the past, there had been no *shidianzeng* in Hualin, but that later, the local female *niangniang* chose a man to be the new *shidianzeng*. After an initiation ritual, the members of his community will believe that that man is speaking the words of that particular spirit.

In 2011, I saw a ritual in which a *shidianzeng* was to be chosen, but the ritual was unsuccessful. At that time, the *shidianzeng* started communicating with spirits and was holding a wooden spear. He drew a circle and asked the young people to line up. The *shidianzeng* suddenly stopped moving and everyone was dismissed. We were told that some villagers had protested that this ritual was unfair to the young people who were working outside of the village. They said that if a new *shidianzeng* were chosen without all young males present, the one chosen would not have full spiritual power. It seems in other words that there is human intervention in the selection, though it was not known who had objected. I suspected that the protesters were the families of the young people who had emigrated to work elsewhere.

The organizers of the ritual were suspected of wanting their own relatives to be chosen. There is a logic to the suspicion. Because of the mystery that surrounds them, *shidianzeng* enjoy certain privileges in a local community. For instance, when inviting a *shidianzeng* to communicate with spirits, people always send him tealeaves, food or other gifts. Thus, for simple material reasons people might want one of their relatives

⁵ I later confirmed that “*zeng*” does have the meaning of “grabbing” in the Tibetan language.

to be the local *shidianzeng*. But despite their privileges *shidianzeng* also have to take extra precautions. They must avoid funerals, hospitals and families with neonates to avoid harm to themselves and offenses to the spirits. Moreover, *shidianzeng* must have enough public credibility to instruct people how to tell right from wrong, to resolve disagreements, and head off future trouble by receiving instructions from a spirit..

In short, the process of becoming a *bo* or a *shidianzeng* can be summed up as follows. First, he breaks with his everyday life. Second, he has a near-death experience. Third, he acquires a sense of connectedness to the spirit world. During an illness, he makes a spiritual journey and communicates with a spirit, and after he recovers he receives power from all the spirits or ancestors. These specialists must prove their preternatural power to the public through a ritual or by passing the qualifying exam in the Tibetan Buddhist temple. Thereafter, the *bo* and the *shidianzeng* use their preternatural powers to solve problems. As a diviner, the *shidianzeng* can determine whether witchcraft or sorcery is responsible for an affliction. The *bo* helps people to drive off evil spirits, to protect agriculture, and to recover from sickness.

4.3.3 The *Benbenzi*

In addition to the *bo* and the *shidianzeng* who communicate with the spirits, Tu folk religion also assigns specialists referred to as *benbenzi* to work in village temples as organizers of the rituals directed toward the spirits. They play different roles in these rituals and in general facilitate the smooth operation of the local folk religious system.

The last kind of religious specialist that we will discuss in Tu villages are the *benbenzi*. They can be identified as spiritual adepts who have studied Tibetan Buddhism and have enough knowledge to take charge of chanting Buddhist scriptures during folk rituals. The *benbenzi* are thus religious semi-professionals but not full-fledged monks. They spend a short time studying scriptures in a Tibetan Buddhist temple and acquire basic learning about the rituals and ceremonial procedures of Tibetan Buddhism. In their religious role, the *benbenzi* wear a habit similar to those of monks. That includes the



Figure 4-7. A *benbenzi* chanting scriptures in the village temple with his assistant.

kasaya (a patchwork outer vestment) and use religious paraphernalia similar to those of monks, but they do not undergo the tonsure ritual. Unlike most villagers, the *benbenzi* can read, write, and knowledgeably chant scriptures. Most of them can tell fortunes and engage in divination as well. In daily life, however, the *benbenzi* are ordinary farmers.

The Tu preserve the custom of inviting Tibetan Buddhist monks to chant scriptures for special occasions such as weddings and funerals. However, if this would be unacceptably expensive or if villagers live a great distance from Tibetan Buddhist temples, an acceptable alternative is to invite a village *benbenzi* to chant the scriptures or to officiate at the rituals. In a sense, the *benbenzi* are alternatives to monks. Unlike the *bo* and the *shidianzeng*, however, the *benbenzi* role has no mysterious aura surrounding it. They are not intermediaries between spirits and humans, nor does their initiation confer on them any special supernatural power or authority.

To sum up and conclude this chapter, we have shown how religious sites, religious specialists and religious organizations fill significant functions in the lives of the Tu. The folk belief and ritual system of the Tu constitutes a stabilizing influence within the Tu community. The architectural elements of the village temples, along with their decorative dragon patterns, are ingeniously combined with other religious patterns. Their diverse origins reflect the harmony that exists between the folk religion of the Tu and other religions. If a village is strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, the village temple will have the characteristic red walls, white decorations and trapezoidal windows found in the Tibetan style, etc. Even if in a particular village there is little influence from Tibetan Buddhism, at minimum there will be large curtains made of five-colored prayer flags as well as Buddhist prayer wheels surrounding the village temples. At the same time, it is common for dragon king temples to display a pair of dragons on the top of the main hall with a *kalasha* or some other Buddhist artifact between them. Daoist symbols are also present, be they woodcarvings or colorful paintings of the Eight Immortals of Daoist legend or a Tai Chi diagram (diagram of the universe). Such items demonstrate an influence from Daoism. Such syncretic blending of elements from different religions is, from an anthropological perspective, perhaps the most salient feature of the Tu folk religion.

A folk religion not only has its physical structures but its specialists as well. There is an impressive variety of Tu religious specialists who are in charge of maintaining, interpreting and disseminating the Tu folk religion. Tu religious specialists are viewed as having power, both supernatural and personal. The authority which they therefore enjoy permits them to preserve local religious traditions and to transmit these beliefs and rituals across generations. The segmented organization of Tu societies is well reflected in the multitude of higher deities, lesser nature spirits and ancestral spirits. The different rituals performed at shrines or in other public places to communicate with deities and lesser spirits helps preserve social harmony among the Tu. Unlike Daoist

and Buddhist temples, the local Tu temples are established and entirely administered by village communities. The only type of professional clergy that function among the Tu are Tibetan Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. The *fala*, the *shidianzeng*, the *benbenzi*, and other folk specialists are in charge of most rituals in or near village temples. Because these folk specialists are ordinary villagers, they enjoy the local credibility to shape – as they themselves are in turn shaped – by local tradition.

We have also discussed the unintended impact of State support for local Tu temples. On the one hand the State attempts to exert some control over religion. On the other hand people develop strategies to manipulate the State. The size of a local temple will reflect the level of economic well-being in the community. The larger the temple, the more worshippers it will attract. A larger number of worshippers will bring in more money and sacrificial offerings and cause the temple to flourish. This self-reinforcing cycle creates a positive correlation between the power attributed to spirits and the prosperity of temples. It is the financial support of the State which often allows some temples to prosper more than others.

Smaller temples, in contrast, have fewer worshippers and donors and are thus considered to have less spiritual power. In interviews, some people complained about the temple in Dazhuang. “They are rich and supported generously by the government. So they are more developed. It is logical that the spirits will give them better protection. Our village is small and poor, so the spirits are reluctant to stay here.” Interestingly, they anthropomorphize the spirits as despising the poor and favoring the rich.

We have also seen how folk religious organizations such as *qingmiaohui* not only play an important role in folk religious activities and rituals, but also take responsibility for the enforcement of laws and for implementation of the instructions emanating from the political sector. The village government committees are the official organizations. The *qingmiaohui* in contrast are non-governmental organizations. However, because of their local religious power, those in charge of *qingmiaohui* are more influential than

local government bureaucrats. For example, if a villager fails to provide for his parents, or is guilty of gambling or vandalism, the *qingmiaohui* committee can impose a fine or even impose physical punishment in the name of the spirits. In contrast, official government organizations at village level usually restrict themselves more to the economic development of the community and to promulgating government policies, delivering government welfare, building roads and public facilities and the like. It is the unofficial folk religious committee, the village *qingmiaohui*, whose members have the informal power to intervene in interactions not only between village families but even within a single family.

CHAPTER 5 FOLK RELIGION AND ECOLOGY IN COMMUNITY LIFE

The anthropology of religion has often centered on sociocultural phenomena that are widely identified by ordinary people as being “religious” in character: myths, rituals, magic, beliefs about gods and divine beings, taboos, and symbols. These elements are all woven into Tu familial and social life, and their folk-religion can thus be characterized as being woven deeply into the fabric of their social organization. Religion also enters into the realm of conflict resolution among the Tu. Because of adverse natural conditions and the shortage of cultivable land and water resources in the Tu areas, conflicts often arise among villages. This ecological stress provokes the mobilization, at least among the Tu, of religious dynamics that in the end create dialogue and collaboration. Religious ritual and organization have become closely related to ecological concerns pertaining to such matters as irrigation and deforestation. The involvement of Tu folk-religion in these matters endows it with an important role in preventing conflicts and in resolving them when they occur.

In this chapter, I will explore the daily religious life of the Tu and examine some specific rituals such as *biangbianhui*, *zhuanshanjing*, *xiejiang* and healing ceremonies. In those rituals all villagers are reminded of the need to abide by village regulations and are encouraged to maintain harmonious family and community relationships. These rituals also strengthen the internal interaction among the Tu and intensify their consciousness of their status as a distinct ethnic groups. We shall examine the manner in which Tu religious belief and practice promote reverence for nature and enhance people’s commitment to protecting the natural environment. In doing this it also enhances the harmony of the relationships among local people.

5.1 Daily Religious Life of the Tu

Daily religious rituals give external expression to internal beliefs that are rooted in the hearts of the Tu. Those religious practices, three types of which I will describe,

enable people not only to maintain their inner psychological equilibrium but also to maintain a stable external social order.

5.1.1 Chanting *Mani* Scriptures

Chanting *mani* is an obligatory morning and evening religious practice for Tu elders. The term “*mani*” is also used for the Sanskrit Sutra of the Six Truest Words, pronounced “Om Mani Padme Hum,” taken from Tibetan Buddhism. There is a belief that each of the six words from this Tibetan Buddhist Mantra helps people to overpower one of the six deleterious emotions and brings them closer to bodhi prajna, the highest stage of enlightenment. It is further required to pray for help from Avalokitesvara (the goddess of mercy) by chanting the Six Words. “In Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, people believe these words (*mani*) have the spiritual ability of summoning and embodiment in an almost automatic way to actualize as long as they chant devoutly and continuously with appropriate deep meditation and mindful training” (Zhai, 2003b). However, for the Tu, chanting *mani* is not only a prayer to the Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism; more importantly, they pray to the local spirits in order to connect with them through *mani*.

They also use this prayer to quiet the mind. After waking up in the early morning, it is customary to burn aromatic plants in the courtyards, offer clear water to the shrines, and worship the spirits. The chanting of the *mani* will occur after that. When the day ends, facing the aromatic plant brazier, they kneel and chant *mani* to offer prayers and give thanks for their safety and peace.

The Tu village elders often carry with them small spinning prayer wheels in their daily rounds. This permits them to constantly chant *mani* scripture and to devote their bodies, words and actions to the Buddha. Sometimes they go to the local temple, spin all the prayer wheels, and chant the *mani*. Some families hold *manihui* (*mani meetings*), following the oracles of spirits housed in village temples, in which they invite other elders to chant scriptures together for several days and to distribute money or food to the villagers. During the *manihui*, besides *mani* scriptures, they also chant other short

scriptures. Village temples also regularly hold *manihui* and invite elders to the session. The Tu believe that the frequency with which *mani* is read gives proof of their devotion to the local spirits and to the Buddha. This devotion, it is believed, will lead to greater peace and happiness and to even greater blessings.

5.1.2 The *Zhuanguola* Ritual (Walking around *Guola*)

The Tibetan word “*guola*” means “spinning” and during *zhuanjing* (转经, spinning scriptures) rituals, people walk clockwise around sacred places in prayer. One of the most important daily religious activities, it is held at the earlier described *benkang* shrines or in village temples, as well as in Tibetan Buddhist temples nearby. People performing the *zhuanguola* ritual are almost always elders, but young people may also attend after completing their housework tasks. There is no specified time of day or number of rounds for this ritual are not limited, so on the country roads of Tu areas, people are often seen walking around *benkang*.



A



B

Figure 5-1. A. An old man chanting Mani Scriptures; B. Tu women being *zhuanguola* in a village temple.

The local people think that scriptures can be either chanted while walking around or by spinning the scriptures. For that reason people wrap scriptures¹ into prayer wheels of different sizes. It is said that when the prayer wheel spins around one time, the person is considered to have chanted the scriptures inside once. Chanting the scriptures and spinning them are believed to be equal in their value. Additionally, the Tu believe that holy mountains, lakes and Buddhist temples are also sources of blessing and protection. They believe that the blessings will come if they walk a whole round. At a designated time, they carry food and water as they walk around those sacred places while spinning the *mani* prayer wheels and chanting *mani* scriptures. People are free to walk as long as they want to walk. For several days, even several months, the people prostrate themselves to measure the length of the sacred places with their bodies. It is obvious that the rituals of chanting *mani* and performing the *zhuanguola* ritual among the Tu were originally from Tibetan Buddhism, but the objects of *zhuang* (walking around) are not only Tibetan Buddhist temples, but also village temples and *benkang*. We thus can see that the general practice by the Tu of incorporating elements from other religions is done in a manner, which endows the exogenous elements with Tu characteristics.

5.1.3 Zuo Rangni (Practicing Rangni)

The *rangni* is a group fast. The people who perform *rangni* are for the most part elders, but sometimes include young women who want to have children and people with chronic illness. To prepare a *rangni*, the village temple custodian and some capable villagers collect donations, purchase necessities, invite Lamas, recruit women to cook in the temples and invite people to the *rangni*. On the day of the ritual, participants gather at village temples at the specified time and fast for several days in order to pray for answers to their requests. The *rangni* is usually about two weeks long. During the ritual, the participants eat only one meal per day, and the food is provided by the villagers. It is

¹ Usually they are Tibetan Buddhism scriptures.

said that participants can accumulate merit and happiness for their families every time they perform *rangni*.

Interestingly, a local spirit such as a dragon king or a *niangniang* sets the date of *rangni*, but the ritual is carried out and the script is chanted by Lamas. In the *rangni*, Lamas from nearby Buddhist temples are invited to the local temple to take charge of the chanting ritual. A week before *rangni*, participants begin to avoid meat and spicy foods such as garlic and green onions. On the eve of *rangni*, people bring simple bedclothes to the main hall of the village temple where the *rangni* will be held. When the *rangni* begins, the participants eat a breakfast provided in the village temple, then kneel or sit to listen to the Lamas teaching scriptures, chant mani and kowtow. Everyone chants scriptures silently and meditates. From that moment on, lunch is the only permitted meal and the participants continue to listen to scriptures until the ritual ends. The *rangni* usually begins in the fifth and sixth months of the lunar calendar. An entire *rangni* takes 16 days divided into periods of two days each. Not all participants are hardy enough to last for the entire 16 days and quit after completing several periods. On the early morning of the 16th day, a closing ceremony, the *daohuotan* (倒火坛), is held. A *huotan* (火坛) is a type of square earthen platform that holds wheat, highland barley, rapeseeds, sesame seeds, barley, peas and other local crops. Lamas sprinkle melted yak butter on the crops, then burn them and pray. Participants in *rangni* kneel on the ground and chant mani. The end of the *daohuotan* signals the completion of that year's *rangni*. The leader of the next year's *rangni* is also elected in this ceremony.

We thus see that religious activities are an integral part of Tu daily life. From morning to night, they engage in a variety of religious behaviors. Turner defined ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers” (Turner, 1967, 19). Through activities such as *zhuanguola* and *rangni* fasting, people examine their words and behaviors and their relationships with spirits to bring tranquility to their minds and to structure their daily



Figure 5-2. *Zuo rangni*.

life. These daily religious rituals give external expression to inner religious beliefs rooted in the hearts of the Tu.

This traditional Tu cultural mechanism, however, with folk belief as its spiritual core and with ritual life as the transmitter of its inherited culture, also sets other bounds on Tu daily life. A symbol is the smallest unit of ritual that still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is a “storage unit” filled with a vast amount of information (Turner, 1968, 1-2). Thus folk religions imperceptibly influence people’s moral values, ideology and their measures of value and of their own accomplishments. Such consciousness on the one hand embodies a special historical and cultural meaning. On the other hand it also relates to contemporary issues in local life and makes it possible to construct an ecological ethic that affects other non-religious areas of life. Moreover, these religious events give us insight into the permeation and participation of Tibetan Buddhism in local folk rituals. The *rangni* ritual is an indication of the high level of mutual adaptation between the two religions.

5.2 Religious Festivals and Agricultural Ecological System

In an indigenous society, there is often a complex relationship between the environment and traditional religion. Such interactions have attracted the scholarly attention of geographers, ecologists and anthropologists. As an important component of a large annual festival, individual rituals give expression to specific concerns within the larger picture. This section examines Tu folk festivals and rituals and argues that the ritual cycle parallels the regularities and the repetitive annual cycles found in nature. Moreover, the cosmology of the Tu folk religion pursues a harmonious interaction between human beings and nature.

The folk festivals of the Tu start on the lunar New Year's Eve and last through the end of the year, which constitutes a complete farming cycle. With their strong vitality, the rich and colorful festivals, with their component rituals, help preserve the inner order of Tu society and give shape to the cultural models of the community. There are local ecological and geographical particularities which affect farming and animal husbandry among the Tu of Huzhu. Tu folk religion addresses these cultural domains of crops and livestock, and indeed many festivals and rituals are timed to mesh with the farming cycle.

During Tu festivals the most important rituals are those of *weidasang*, *biang-bianghui*, *zhuanshanjing* and *xiejiang*. These are a set of celebrations and special rituals performed in honor of different spirits. The *biangbianghui* is a prayer to ward off calamity, to bring down blessings, and to entertain the local spirits through the shaman's dance performance. The *zhuanshanjing* is the God Pageant Ceremony, a procession that publicly demarcates the territory under the tutelage of every local dragon king. The *xiazhen* and *chapai* are rituals in which people ask local spirits for protection against damage by hail. And the *xiejiang* is the ritual at end of the year to thank the spirits and to request from them protection of the crops.

5.2.1 *Weidasang*: Welcome Deities and Celebrate the Lunar New Year

The *weidasang* (煨桑/煨大桑) is a common ritual among Tibetan Buddhists. The word *sang* (桑), of Tibetan origin, alludes to purification via cleansing, elimination and expulsion. At the time of the *weisang* (*wei* means “to burn,” and *sang* means “aromatic plants”), people burn dry cedar branches and sweet grass incense, and sprinkle food such as *zanba* (糌粑, roasted barley flour), tealeaves, crops and water. The dual meaning of *weisang* is thus purification and worship. As described in the Buddhist scriptures, spirits are immaterial and are thus not to eat or drink things from the human world. But they do enjoy, as it were, the banquets while smelling the incense of *sang*, which is called *zhisa* in Tibetan and *shiwei* (食味) in Chinese. So monks and people worship spirits in the *weisang* ritual by burning aromatic plants in temples and on mountaintops. It is said that the smoke and incense from the *sang* not only bring pleasure to humans, but more importantly, please the spirits. In the Tu areas, a *sang* burning altar can be found in almost every household, monastery and village temple. On the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month and on all other auspicious days, people rise early to perform the *weisang* ritual to worship the spirits.



A



B

Figure 5-3. A & B. The *weisang* (burning aromatic plant)

The *weidasang*, a Tu ritual for worshipping heaven and mountain spirits, is different from and more important than the *weisang* ritual. It is associated with worship of the god of heaven, Tenggeer (腾格尔)². According to the Tu, Tenggeer is not the sky itself, but rather a spirit associated with the sky. So in the early morning on the first day of every lunar year, people bring offerings and meet at the top of the highest mountain near their village to perform the *weidasang* ritual. It is thought that the highest place is the best location for the *weidasang*, and the first person to arrive is considered the most fortunate. After arriving at the top, people burn a pile of *sang* (cypress and cedar branches) near a *lashize* (a mountain shrine described earlier) and rush to sprinkle food and wine on the *sang* pile. Kneeling on the ground and throwing *fengma* (风马)³ into the sky, people chant scriptures to pray for happiness and for protection from disasters while the smoke of burning *sang* rises into the sky. Since it is difficult for people to climb high mountains, young men usually represent their families at a *weidasang*, but some devout women also wear traditional outfits and attend. Moreover, the *weidasang* is a puberty ritual for young people since it is also a physical and psychological test. After the ritual, people bring sacrifices to village temples and to their own family spirit halls to pay a New Year's call on both spirits and ancestors. At the *lashize* and *benkang* shrines near their villages, people hang new Buddhist sutra streamers, put more mani stones, perform *weisang*, and then walk clockwise around the shrines. Along with the *weidasang* ritual, a series of other rituals and events in the New Year not only express the Tu's respect for and worship of the sky, the earth and nature, but also show gratitude to the local spirits.

On the lunar New Year's Day the Tu hold a grand ritual to welcome the sky god. On New Year's Eve, the Tu rise very early in the morning to clean their houses and

² In the Tu language, this means the sky.

³ This is a small colorful square piece of paper with the image of a horse printed on it. Since it is very light and can rise up in the air with the breeze, local people throw them into the air in the ritual for sacrifice.

courtyards, to affix *qianma* (钱马, papers with sacred symbols for good fortune) as well as Spring Festival couplets. Later they prepare a family reunion dinner and at dusk they offer sacrifices at ancestral graves. In order to welcome the Kitchen God, housewives smear mud on the shrines of the Kitchen God and draw triangular dots with flour, light the god's lanterns, offer steamed breads, and sprinkle flour on the house beams. In the evening, people perform the ritual of *dacutan* (打醋坛) to drive away demons. In this ritual vinegar, cypress incense and the five cereals are mixed with half a basin of boiled water. Burning red lime rocks are added to imbue the water vapor with acid incense. People carry the hot basin around all the corners of their houses and livestock pens and then dump the water outside. This is said to expel demons and ghosts, heal diseases and bring good fortune and health to the family that performs the ritual. Later, in family shrines, the older people light yak butter lamps, offer clean water and food, burn incense and pray to all the spirits for the protection of their families. After dinner they open the gates to welcome and worship the spirits. With fire burning at the centers of the courtyards, people close and open the main gates three times, spread milk tea in all directions, set off firecrackers and get down on their knees to pray. At this time, all the households in the villages are ablaze with lights and resound with the noise of firecrackers as the smoke from the *sang* swirls about.

The next morning, people tie *hada* scarves to their livestock for good luck. After feeding them, people set off firecrackers to drive the animals away and to observe where they run. It is believed that the direction in which they run will lead to a place with abundant water and lush grass, a belief that reflects the Tu's nomadic past. The Tu traditionally take good care of their livestock and have a strong oral tradition of epic narrative poems, stories and folk songs about horses, cattle and sheep.

The second and third days of the first lunar month are the days on which the Tu worship the local spirits that protect their villages. On those days, they bring offerings

to their village temples under the direction of temple custodians. In addition the *shid-ianzeng* uses sacred divination *shidianzeng* to listen respectfully to the spirits for instructions for the coming year. At that time, while the crowd prays and chants Buddhist scriptures and the six-syllable Sanskrit mantra (Om mani padme hum), the *shidianzeng* shakes the spears to reveal the spirit's message. A venerable old man offers *hada* and red silk, and then asks important questions about the coming year. The intensity of the spear shaking indicates the answer. The answer is positive if it shakes violently, but negative if it shakes only slightly. Then people blow white conches, beat drums and gongs, set off firecrackers and welcome the spirits.

After this ritual, the families who have prayed to spirits take turns offering New Year banquets to everyone in their village to celebrate the festival. On the evening of the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, every household lights an odd number of bonfires in front of the main gate of their house for everybody to jump over in order to drive away bad luck and demons. The fire must be lit and carried from the kitchen. According to legend, Tenggeer (the god of heaven) was once angry and sent the Fire Deity, Galepurihan, to burn all Tu villages on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. The Kitchen God became anxious. He secretly asked all Tu to light fires in front of their houses and then to jump over the fires. When Galepurihan came to set fires, he saw all the villages burning and people struggling in the fires. He then reported back to Tenggeer that he had already punished the Tu with fire. The Tu escaped from the disaster and continued the custom of jumping over fires. After this day, Tu take back their offerings and finish celebrating the Lunar New Year.

From these rituals, we see that Tu have retained traditional rituals that reflect their animal husbandry past. Many religious themes are derived from an animism focused on nature worship and belief in spirits and ghosts associated with nature. All of this is closely intermingled with other local customs and with daily life in the village.

5.2.2 The *Biangbianghui*: Entertaining the Deities

The *biangbianghui* (梆梆会) is a traditional festival in the Huzhu area, usually held in the second and third months of the lunar calendar, which is the planting season for several crops. The high point of the festival is the *tiaobiangbiang* (跳梆梆, sorcery dance) to praise and thank the spirits and to pray for the continued protection of their crops and their lives. The *bo*, the shamanic specialist discussed in an earlier chapter, dances in this ritual at which he is the officiant.

The villages tend to hold the *biangbianghui* in the months following the Lunar Spring Festival. The main activities of the *biangbianghui* consist of erecting prayer flags, setting up altars, and inviting, entertaining and installing the spirits. A *biangbianghui* lasts three days and has two important events: *xiaobo* (小亭) and *dabo* (大亭). The day of preparation that precedes the festival is *xiaobo* (small *bo*). On that day, Tu families take some food to the village temple and have a small recreational meeting. On the next day, the climax of the *biangbianghui* is the *dabo* (big *bo*). On that day everyone goes to the temple to watch the shamanic dance of the *bo*.

In the preparatory phase, the members of the temple fair committee (*qingmiaohui*) set up tents and tables on which incense is burned. The sacred divination spears and the litters of the dragon kings and *niangniang* are placed in the tents. Then the *bo* instructs people to hoist prayer flags and set up altars. They then build a *fangan* (幡杆) – a big wooden pole, on top of which are two large pieces of bread, symbolizing the sun and moon. People hang *liangdan* ((粮蛋), bags of croup, candy, peanut and walnut seed) on the *fangan*. When the *biangbianghui* is finished, the *bo* throw those *liangdan* into the sky, and people compete to pick them up since it is believed that the person who can pick up the largest number of *liangdan* will be rewarded with good luck in the future.



A



B

Figure 5-4. The ritual of *biangbianghui*.

The posts of the prayer flags are thirty four *chi* (尺) and eight *cun* (寸) tall⁴. Thirty three *chi* protrude above the ground while one *chi* and eight *cun* remain under the ground; this symbolizes that heaven has thirty three floors and hell has eighteen. The posts are held in place by several long ropes from which hang colorful paper flags and sacrificial offerings. On the top of each post, a two-pronged fork is placed, with one steamed bun pierced by each prong and a loop around the fork. This represents Nan Tian Men (南天门), the southern gate of heaven. Down below the gate, a paper flag called *wanshentai* (万神台) serves as the altar for thousands of spirits and is used to attract them. When the preparations are done, the *bo* faces the posts and sprinkles clear water with cypress branches as an invitation to the spirits to come and enjoy the offerings. Then the ritual dancers begin dancing and beating drums to entertain the spirits. The purpose is to create an atmosphere in which both humans and spirits enjoy themselves.

⁴ *zhang*, *chi* and *cun* are units in Chinese lineal measurement. 1 *zhang* (丈) = 10 *chi* = 100 *cun*, and 1 *cun* = 10/3 centimeters.

There are between three and nine ritual dancers; the number is decided ahead of time by divination. If a spirit designates more than the maximum number that the village can provide, then additional dancers will be invited from other villages. During the performance, the *bo* wears a colorful gown and holds a single-sided sheepskin drum to dance. Moving to the rhythm of the drum, the *bo* performs many complex stunts with several phases. During the intermissions, the *bo* tells jokes and is rewarded with hearty laughs from the audience, who enjoy the amusement as much as the spirits do. Besides the dance performance, the *bo* performs diagnostic and healing rituals for local people. In addition, the *bo* summons the spirits via a procedure in which he puts a small porcelain bottle on the handle of a square container, an object shaped like a cup or dipper that contains grain. He then inserts seven sticks of incense to summon the spirit of a little boy to entertain the spirits. It is known that a spirit has been successfully summoned if the bottle falls down. So during the *biangbianghui*, all families supply their male children with red sacks filled with garlic, five grains and five strips of colored cloth to prevent their spirits from being lost when the spirits are being summoned.

The night before the *biangbianghui* ends, the *bo* takes down the posts with the prayer flags and burns all the paper prayer flags and dragon flags. People scramble to get the offerings on the posts to pray for safety and happiness. It is said that the family that takes the steamed buns on the top will have a newborn son, so people without sons are eager to compete for the top buns. When all the rituals are finished, all those who have participated send the sacred litters and spears back to their village temples. The atmosphere at this point is quite joyful and upbeat.

Besides the offering of sacrifices, a *biangbianghui* includes other social activities such as fund-raising before the festival (for which the *bo* and the older males are responsible) and the “egg game.” In the egg game two people take two eggs and rub the eggs against each other; whoever’s egg breaks loses the game, and the winner finds the next person, with whom he will again compete in the game. When the game is

over, the ground is filled with broken eggshells. The Tu believe that the broken eggshells are like hailstones, so the game has symbolic meaning for keeping evil out of their lives and for protecting their crop against damaging hail. Therefore, in some villages the *biangbianghui* also is called the “egg meeting.”

In short, the annual festivals of the Tu are elements in their broader religious culture. The festivals involve temples, masks, dramas, symbols and customs. Not only do they contain all the classic elements of festivals elsewhere, but these Tu festivals place particular emphasis on the religious elements. From the *biangbianghui* we can see not only that folk religious rituals function to invite, entertain and thank spirits, but also are directly related to agricultural production. Religious concepts are intricately entwined with ideas about nature and interaction with local ecological systems.

In the final analysis the purpose of the *biangbianghui* is to create harmony between humans and spirits. The participants use religious dances and rituals to motivate the spirits to ward off calamities and to send blessings. The energies of spirits are unleashed and harnessed for the benefit of specific locations and social groups. Following the *biangbianghui*, other rituals take place at designated points in the agricultural cycle from planting to harvest. The purpose of all such rituals is to mobilize the power of spirits to protect crops. These ritual measures are viewed as essential to the success of local agriculture.

5.2.3 The *Zhuanshanjing*: Make Harmony among Spirits, Nature and Human Beings

The *zhuanshanjing* ritual is held in the fifth and sixth months of the lunar calendar, months which are crucial for the growth of crops. Weather, of course, plays an important role in guaranteeing a good harvest. Therefore, because it entails praying to the rain gods and mountain gods for good weather, the *zhuanshanjing* is a major event for those Tu who practice agriculture in the Huzhu area. During a *zhuanshanjing*, two important rituals reflect the interconnectedness of the natural, human and spirit worlds: *xiazhen*

(下镇, the ritual against the damage from hail) and *chapai* (插牌, a ritual for guaranteeing harmony in the family and community). The Tu believe that wheat sprouts need the most protection at this vulnerable time, so every village holds a series of folk religious activities to protect the green shoots. The ritual unfolds in the following stages.

The first stage begins with a chanting of the scriptures for the protection of green shoots. In the fourth lunar month, the organizers of the *qingmiaohui* in each village choose an auspicious day to worship in the village temple, inviting village specialists like the *benbenzi* or the Lamas from Tibetan Buddhist temples to chant scriptures for the growing crops. All villagers attend the ritual carrying sacred litters, spears and scriptures around the mountains while beating gongs and drums. During the ritual, people identify the territory under the tutelage of each local spirit. Villagers transport the statues of their spirits and the Buddhist scriptures to the top of the mountains near the village. They then march in a procession while beating gongs and drums and chanting scriptures. The purpose of the procession is to pray to the spirits for favorable weather and to fend off wind, hail and frost.

The precise date of the *zhuanshanjing* is set by an oracle from the spirits but is always carried out sometime in the fifth and sixth lunar months. In the early morning of *zhuanshanjing*, each household has to designate at least one male to carry the scriptures; the more cultivated lands it owns, the more males it has to designate. If the head of a household is out of the village or absent for other reasons, his sons have to assume the responsibility. If there is only one son who is too young to attend or if all the sons are absent, the household has to ask a relative to substitute or pay the organizing committee of the *qingmiaohui* for a waiver. Generally males are not allowed to refuse to participate in *zhuanshanjing*. When people take part in this ritual, they are letting the community know that they are responsible for the ritual, thus satisfying social expectations. However, there are taboos on married women who cannot attend, though young girls are allowed.



Figure 5-5. The team of *zhuanshanjing*.

On the day of the ritual, a team of four males carrying the litter of a dragon king or a *niangniang* walk in front, followed by a group of people carrying the sacred flags of their village temple. Another large group of people follow, each of whom carries a volume of scriptures. The Buddhist scriptures are written in Tibetan on long narrow paper, put between two lathes, and wrapped in a yellow *hada* scarf. Those scriptures are venerated and stored in the village temple, but they are brought out for the procession during the *zhuanshanjing*. The route of the *zhuanshanjing* is along the mountain ridges close to the village and makes one full round of the boundary of the village. The team stops at each important mountain pass and peak to chant scriptures and to have the *shidianzeng* communicate with the spirits in hopes of keeping devils and misfortune away from the village. The procession then continues until it has made a complete round of the village.

Since the lands of a village are scattered among the mountains, it takes about five or six hours to complete the ritual. Those in the procession stop to have lunch on a mountain peak in the middle of the ritual. It is village women who prepare the food and hot tea for their families for the lunch break of the *zhuanshanjing*. This provides women a rare opportunity to become involved in a ritual. In daily life, women are prohibited from entering their village temple and cannot look at representations of spirits. However, on the day of the *zhuanshanjing* they are allowed to participate. For this they dress up in traditional outfits and participate solemnly in this short-term activity. As soon as the procession arrives at the place designated for lunch, the women hand the food to their family members and then kneel to worship the sacred litter and scriptures. After the lunch break, the procession moves on and the women return home. Because of its physical and mental demands, the ritual is also considered a rite of passage for Tu youth.

Since Tu areas in Huzhu are at high elevations of cold temperature, the crops are vulnerable to drought, flood, hail, frost, and pests. Of these, hail is the worst danger. The Tu have two folk-religious strategies for preventing hailstorms. One is to build a *benkang* near the entrances to the village or on higher ground. They will walk clockwise around the *benkang* every day asking the spirits to protect the green shoots of grain and to make their lives safe and happy. Sometimes religious specialists retrieve the sacred divination spears and rush to the *benkang* to chant if they sense that a hailstorm is approaching.

The other way to prevent hail is through performance of the *chapai* and *xiazhen* rituals during the *zhuanshanjing* in the fifth or sixth month of the lunar calendar. In the *chapai* ritual a *shidianzeng* identifies five spots in the four cardinal directions and the middle point. He then inserts wood posts into the ground at those spots. The *benbenzi* are then invited to chant scriptures as a prayer to the thunder god to stop the hail. The posts are tied with Daoist flags or other symbols are drawn on them; it is said that the

posts and symbols keep hailstorms away and ensure healthy crops. Like *chapai*, the purpose of *xiazhen* is to prevent hail. However, the locations for *xiazhen* rituals are always in or close to village temples. A pit is dug in the ground, and then *zhenwu* (镇物, spiritual items to block the action of evil forces) such as black bowls, cypress pieces and knives are buried in the pit for protection from disasters.

At the same time, a series of activities to protect growing crops is initiated. Many rules must be followed during the course of the *zhuanshanjing* ritual. The locals use the ritual to in part to prevent harm to the local ecology. For instances it is forbidden to pasture animals in or near fields, to trample growing crops, to cut down trees, or to raze buildings. In addition, during this sensitive time people must not quarrel or fight, especially married couples, lest the growth of the crops be weakened. Any villager who violates these rules will be reprimanded in accordance with the seriousness of the infraction. Village elders or the *qingmiaotou* (青苗头, the head of the village's ritual committee) will issue a warning to the person or oblige him or her to do community service or even to pay a fine to the village temple. These taboos have long existed as unwritten regulations for the protection of growing crops among the Tu. All villagers must comply and thus protect harmony with the environment at both family and community levels. Punishment will be issued to villagers whose misbehavior could bring disaster to the harvest. Some scholars have compared the *zhuanshanjing* ritual to a similar ritual among Tibetans, the *ongkor* (Bumper Harvest) festival, in terms of their religious content, form and meaning (Zhai, 2003c).

From the above we can see that folk mechanisms exist to maintain balance between the human community and the non-human environment through religious regulatory measures, including the *zhuanshanjing* ritual. This ritual is performed within and along the village boundaries, reinforcing solidarity in the village and giving validation to unwritten village law. The carrying of scriptures in the procession along the mountains is a cultural phenomenon in which a religious activity is tailored to the Tu's agricultural



Figure 5-6. The *xiazhen*

mode of production. Traditionally, society has a strong hand in marking transitions via rites of passages, ensuring that its members know their identity, their place and their responsibilities. Platvoet (1995) spoke of “... ritual behavior, in particular of groups with a distinctive religious, ethnic or other identity which use rituals to pursue strategic ends ad intra and ad extra.” Group representation in the form of religious ideas shows the adaptation of Tu to their fragile natural environment. Tu folk religion maintains social order in the village, coordinates production (such as water use sequence in fields), and organizes and implements festival activities. Thus, those religious rituals and religious regulations, under the external theme of supplicating the spirits for abundant harvests and the like, serve several latent material functions. One is the social function of enhancing community stability and harmony; another is the concrete material function

of temporarily protecting trees during the growing season and thus preventing or at least slowing down environmental degradation.

5.2.4 The *Xiejiang*: Thanking the Spirits and Hosting a Reception for Crop Protection

The *xiejiang* ritual occurs as the last folk religious ritual in the agricultural year. On the ninth day of the ninth month of the lunar calendar, after all crops have been harvested and all agricultural activities have ended, villagers get ready to thank the spirits via the *xiejiang*.

In the early morning of that day, villagers carry sacred litters and sacred divination spears to the crests of the nearby mountains. A lama or a *benbenzi* is invited to chant scriptures, and a *bo* or a *shidianzeng* are called in to communicate with and thank the spirits. The temple custodians and village elders kneel and offer food to thank the spirits for protecting the crops. As soon as the prayers have been completed, villagers pull out all the wood posts that had been inserted into the ground during the earlier *chapai* ritual and store them in the village temples. All rituals related to the crops have by now been completed and the behavioral taboos that were followed to protect the crops during their vulnerable growing periods are lifted. From that moment on, people are allowed to graze sheep and cattle on farmland, to fell trees and to tear down houses.

After the sacred litters and divination spears have been returned to the village temple, villagers terminate the *xiejiang* ritual by sacrificing at least one sheep to the spirits. Villagers who need additional help or who are particularly intent on thanking the spirits will offer the sacrificial sheep. On the day of the *xiejiang*, the temple custodian recites a brief prayer, butchers the sheep, and distributes the meat to the villagers. The locals elect a new committee to organize next year's temple fair. The new committee accepts the responsibility of carefully carrying out the responsibilities of the committee until the ninth lunar month of the next year. Thus we see that behavioral performance during rituals, which is that ritual is usually regarded as a mode of communication

associated with the concerns and practice of religion, and ritual is defined as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers (Rappaport, 1992, 249). This description of ritual and analysis of its social and material functions help us to avoid succumbing to the misleading tendency to place sole emphasis on describing spirit beliefs when we discuss religion. And in the case of the Tu, the yearly ritual round of petitions and sacrificial offerings to the spirits is closely linked to local farming and livestock raising.



A

B

Figure 5-7. A & B. The *xiejiang* ritual of the Dragon King Temple in Dazhuang Village.

To conclude this section, the Tu of Huzhu live in a fragile ecosystem characterized by high altitude, low precipitation and scarcity of natural resources. In times past they made their living by animal husbandry and only later turned to farming. In this evolutionary shift, the Tu had to establish a new type of harmony with nature. However, it is difficult to prevent excessive human exploitation of the natural environment only through moral injunctions. Thus a series of measures utilizing local spirit beliefs and rituals arose to deter people, out of fear of offending the spirits, against engaging in certain ecologically harmful behaviors. The annual agricultural cycle has been the guiding framework. The annual sequence of rituals is thus linked to the annual agricultural cycle, as religious rituals and other traditional cultural practices align

themselves with the seasonal cycle of crops and livestock. Reverence for spirits is thus harnessed to the task of protecting crops through mandatory collective rituals such as those described here.

As a result of this linkage between religion and the material environment, not only is there a sense of “ecological ethics” being fostered. This submissive reverence for the environment, because it is expressed in collective rituals, also functions to maintain social order. For individuals within an ethnic community such as that of the Tu, rituals give expression as well to sentiments of ethnic solidarity which can persist throughout centuries. As Kuutma has pointed out, a festival prepares the communicative scenery for manifestations of ethnicity and cultural solidarity with the special objective of fostering a particular group identity (Kuutma, 1998, 12). Thus, the abovementioned festivals closely link individuals to their ethnic identity. As a shaper of collective consciousness, the festival rituals of the Tu are also in part shaped by historical and exogenous cultural factors. Most importantly, once a distinct ethnic group has emerged, it will tend to take on the appearance of something “natural.” Ethnic sentiments begin to function as an autonomous force and as a “principle” that can at least in part have an impact on the course of social life (Comaroff, 1987). The various taboos that function as unwritten laws enhance the solidarity of families, neighborhood harmony and social stability. That is, at the same time that they satisfy the spiritual needs of a human group, divination rituals, healing rituals, and other rituals also serve multiple social functions.

5.3 Healing, Divination and Taboo

In ancient China, the figure of the *wu* (巫, a male or female spirit healer) was associated with issues of life, death, natural and human disasters, exorcisms, healing and similar activities. Before the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 BC – c. 1046 BC), healing arts resided in the hands of *wuyi* (巫医). Though the literature sometimes refers to them as “witch doctors,” this pejorative term has been replaced in most anthropological writings by the term “spirit healer.” The *wu* communicates with spirits through rituals. In China’s

minority ethnic groups, folk religion has long been related to the healing practices of the *wu*.

In Tu folk religion, much power is attributed to folks specialists, such as repelling evil and retrieving souls in rituals involving illness and healing. The *wu* healers claim to be the representatives of spirits and to communicate with them to diagnose and heal their patients. Whereas modern medicine bases diagnosis and treatment on pathological agents that affect the human body, the Tu see illness as the result of the breakdown of harmony between humans and nature or among humans. In this light they often turn to the spirits for healing. The procedures of *wu* healing consist of praying, conjuring up the presence of spirits, being possessed by spirits and sending the spirits off once healing has taken place. In this section, I explain how folk religion in the Tu areas functions in the domain of healing, how the Tu act with respect to *wu* healing, and how these practices have changed over time.

5.3.1 Opinions on Souls and Soul Retrieval

The Tu believe that every person has a soul. If the soul leaves the body the person faces illness or death, the Tu therefore want to avoid temporarily “losing” their souls. When a person is depressed and has no appetite, he or she thought to have lost his or her soul. In such cases the soul must be called back and retrieved. When someone is frightened, someone else must grab a handful of soil immediately and place it on the chest of the frightened person in order to keep the soul in the body. It is most important for adults to protect children’s souls, because children are too young to protect themselves. Therefore, when a child is sick, the parents believe that the soul of the child may have left the body and they try to call it back.

There are a variety of soul retrieval methods in Tu society. The mother is the person most qualified to call back her child’s soul. To do this, she uses a bowl of clear water to make three circles over the child’s head while chanting, and then dumps the water outside before coming back and calling the child by his or her nickname. If the

child answers, it means the soul has returned and the child will recover. In this ritual, sometimes the water can be replaced with a Chinese steamed bun. If an adult's soul is lost, the religious specialist in the village will be invited to call the soul back using a series of complex rituals.

The Tu also believe that souls, unlike bodies, are immortal. After death, the soul must find another body through reincarnation; otherwise, the soul becomes an evil or harmful spirit. Evil spirits lurking in a village are believed to bring sickness and death. People who have been sick for a long time or have developed a mental illness are believed to have lost their souls or to be under the influence of specific spirits.

There are many ways to drive away evil spirits. For example, under the supervision of the shaman, people offer bowls filled with wheat or steamed bread to the spirits to induce them to leave. People can also issue symbolic punishments to dangerous spirits by burying water jars, millstones, or animal heads at the locations haunted by the spirits. In another symbolic gesture, they may crack whips to frighten the spirits away.

5.3.2 Evil Spirits and Diseases

The Tu believe that people may get sick when some harmonious natural relation has been broken. There are two agents that cause disease: (1) evil spirits or other unclean things and (2) ruptures in the interpersonal relationships of the sick person. The Tu emphasize the need for harmony between human beings and nature. This emphasis derives their belief in animism and nature worship. They treat nature with reverence and believe that it is sacred. If the natural environment has been somehow polluted, the spirits abiding there will leave, opening the way for evil spirits to threaten people's health. In addition, depending on the strength of an individual's belief, people give religious meaning to harmonious social relations and sentiments of solidarity with other Tu. If somebody violates moral norms, hurts other members of the community, or disrupts social harmony, he or she must be punished. Otherwise there is a risk of disease or

something even worse. In this sense, violation of social harmony causes harm through the subsequent intervention of hostile spirits.

Many evil spirits are believed by the Tu to be the souls of people who have died unnatural deaths. There is also belief in the harmful effects of specific spirits, such as *maoguishen* (猫鬼神, cat-ghost spirits) that act with evil intent. According to the Tu, offending such evil spirits can cause misfortune. Furthermore, it is dangerous to stay in burial grounds or in places where unusual deaths have occurred. Such places are haunted by evil spirits, and it is easy to be “grabbed by evils.” The possessed people often talk in a nonsensical or strange way. However, after being successfully treated by a spirit healer, they do not remember what they said while possessed. At other times an evil spirit can bring misfortune to a family or kill livestock.

The Tu have their own special methods for treating possessed people and for expelling evil spirits. If the illness is not serious, family members can call the souls back on their own. Otherwise it is necessary to recruit the help of religious specialists such as a *bo* or a *shidianzeng*.

While diagnosing and healing, the *bo* changes into clean clothes before kneeling and praying to his family deity as he burns incense. Each *bo* has his own ancestral book for divination. He chants the specific scriptures and tosses ox-horn *gua* (卦, divinatory lots) three times, and then looks for the proper ritual words in the book that will solve the problems. The *bo* informs the family as to why the evil spirit has possessed the person. He also informs them of the rituals which they must perform or the herbal medicines which they must buy for the person. If the healing ritual works, the family must come back to thank the *bo*.

Sometimes people suffer from diseases because they have offended the local spirits. Local spirits can cure sick people and make healthy people sick. If treated with indifference, the spirits can inflict a serious illness on a person such as a total loss of consciousness. At this time, affected persons need to have a sacred divination

spear or even sacred litter with spirits brought to their home. They must also request a *shidianzeng* to communicate with spirits to provide suggestions for healing.

In the summer of 2012, an elderly man told me that the wife of a judiciary officer from a neighboring village suffered from a strange disease that no one had been able to cure. She was surprisingly healed by a folk prescription consisting of three items given by a spirit in the Dongjia Temple. “The husband is a judicial officer,” said this elderly man, “but he is always the first one to donate money, burn incense and pray in the early morning of the Laba Festival (the eighth day of the twelfth month of lunar calendar).” This illustrates that even government officials believe that diseases can be caused by hostile or neglected spirits. Such spirit-caused diseases cannot always be treated by modern medicine.

At the same time beliefs in the harmful potential of ghosts and hostile spirits are linked to the moral norms of Tu secular society. Tu shamanistic healing is not only linked to arcane spirit beliefs on the part of individuals; it is also linked to patients’ interpersonal relationships. People often blame diseases on the social behavior of the patients or their family. In an interview, I learned that a woman who had urinated at a religious site, a *lashize*, was afflicted with a serious mental disease and died. A *bo* explained that she violated the taboo against polluting sacred space where spirits dwell and was possessed by a *maoguishen*. In another case, one of my friends allowed me to accompany him on a visit to the *bo* for his backache. At our request, the *bo* burned incense, divined with his special tools, and then told us that the disease was the result of my friend having cheated on his wife, since the verdict that came from the *bo*’s ancestral book was that “a turtledove has occupied the nest of the phoenix.” My friend was astounded by the correct divination and hurriedly paid the shaman 300 yuan RMB. This example clearly illustrates that the Tu have their own understanding of disease, especially the ones related to the breaking of social rules. Tu folk religion pursues harmony, not

only between humans and the spirit world, but also between humans and nature, and between humans within the same community.

5.3.3 Shaman Made by Diseases

The pathogenic theories of Tu popular belief attribute diseases, especially persistent physical or mental diseases, to invisible supernatural powers. As part of their diagnostic and healing interventions, shamans become proficient in massage therapy and acupuncture, writing out herbal prescriptions using their knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine. Such documents written out by shamans may prescribe fire cures or the sprinkling of water boiled with highland barley, which is believed to have the power to wash diseases away (E, 2009).

To become a shaman, one has to have recovered from some unusual disease and to have received as well some other indications from the spirits that he is being called to be a shaman. Many shamans took up their craft after recovering from an illness. The recovery endowed them with the spiritual power required of a shaman.

In that light, I have a 60-year-old relative names Jiang who lives in Datong County. She nearly died from a serious disease. After recovering she announced that she is the representative of *Jiutian Niangniang*, a local spirit. From then on she began diagnosing and healing sick people, and became well known in her area for her healing skills. Her husband, Yang, told me how she became a shaman:

That was more than some twenty years ago. In the afternoon of that day, while chatting with us in the room, she suddenly became mentally deranged and lost control of herself. She announced that she was going to kill our two daughters. Then for three days in a row, she began shouting early in the morning. Something like black rust appeared on her mouth and teeth. It would reappear even after we wiped it off with a cloth. Her body was as stiff as a corpse.

I took her to the hospital in town with about 3000 Yuan in my pocket. First a doctor told me that it was not a big deal and invited me to bring her inside. But she began yelling at everyone and I thought she was dying. Then the doctor suggested that I find a shaman to heal her. I was too angry to shout

at the doctors, “You did nothing but almost kill her.” Finally I paid 15 Yuan in total, and brought her back home by carriage.

On the way back home, we ran into a villager with the surname Ji. He helped me find a shaman for my wife. I also requested help from a brother of my wife’s grandfather, who is a Daoist. At that time, she took off all her clothes, lay down on a bed, and began shouting nonsensical words to the effect that a blue ghost was inside her. The shaman, invited by Ji from Wushigou village, pulled her down on the ground from the bed, put a big kitchen knife on her stomach and stepped on the knife to expel the ghost.

These things continued happening for several years before she got back to normal. An elderly man said that my wife had been possessed by a niangniang during a ritual that had been held that year. In that ritual which began in the village temple, four young men carried the sacred litter, intending to go to the mountaintop. But the litter instead led them directly to my house.

A rich and politically powerful village elder with the surname Liu did not believe my wife was possessed by a niangniang. He claimed instead that he was actually the representative of the niangniang and forcibly took the tablet of niangniang from our house to his own family home. And guess what happened: his son died the following year and a series of accidents happened to his family in the year following that. Then all the villagers realized that he was a fake representative and they sent the tablet back to our house. It has been enshrined and venerated there since then.

I asked Jiang what she was feeling during all this time. She said that she did not remember anything about that year, though even now she sometimes started to cry as soon as she felt a burning sensation in her heart and had a premonition that something bad was going to happen. She could not prevent herself from crying. At first, the sacred tablet of the *niangniang* had been housed in the room next to the pigsty. Jiang furiously objected that it would make the *niangniang* dirty. Her husband had to build a new room facing the central room to enshrine the *niangniang*. After that she prayed and burned incense on the first and the fifth days of each month of the Chinese lunar calendar.

By now she has recovered from the mental disorder and has a more prosperous life, since many people now come to ask for help and bring her gifts. On one occasion she allowed me to take a look inside the shrine room because we were relatives. I observed

that the room was taller than other rooms to reflect the *niangniang*'s higher status. In the middle of the room, against the wall, stood a ritual table with a small red-painted cabinet. That is the "seat" or sacred litter of the *niangniang*. In the cabinet were satin cloths, an embroidered hat and a pair of embroidered shoes. She told me that ordinarily nobody is allowed to look inside the shrine, but she allowed me the privilege. She also showed me some small embroidered green satin shoes for three-inch lotus feet and a number of sachets offered by people who had requested her help. On the table stood a sacred bronze mirror that had the power to expose and expel evil spirits. On that same table was a small *shenjian*, the spear used for divination, wrapped in cloth and tied with bells and sachets, which she brings out when she is healing patients.

People often bring cooking oil, incense, tealeaves and money when they come to ask Jiang to diagnose and heal an illness. She has earned the reputation of being a powerful healer. So many people come to her home from far and near that she often has no time even for meals. Two examples of Jiang's healing are still talked about by locals:

- 1 A female college student suffered from a strange disease. She cried whenever somebody was with her, and ran around because nobody could soothe her. Then Jiang healed her. She now visits to wish Jiang well every Chinese New Year festival. I asked how she was got healed. Jiang answered, "I just drove the dirty evil spirits away."
- 2 A male neighbor, a student with the surname Qi who was a student at the Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, suffered from a medically inexplicable disease. He would lock himself in a room with all the curtains closed and refused contact with anyone. Jiang healed him after he was suspended from school for a year. He recovered and graduated with a good job offer.

From these cases, we see that people prefer to turn to the spirits when modern medicine cannot cure a disease. It has been observed that, for shamanic healing, a variety of treatments are used and different spirits are called on for help. Among these spirits are the shaman's family spirit, the dragon kings of local village temples,

the *niangniang*, the *lemusang*, and the *danjiansang*. Jiang has now become old and provides treatment only in her home.

Another shaman with the surname Wang told me that he believes that there are three types of religious specialist or “three hierarchs.” The first is the lama and the *benbenzi* associated with Tibetan Buddhism. The second is the Daoist priest. The third is the *sanxiao niangniang*, associated with Tu folk religion. This latter works with folk religious spirits to heal diseases. Wang also mentioned an ancestral fourth-generation divination book that had been handed down to him and that he used for healing and fortunetelling. He stopped healing patients and passing down his divination and healing skills to younger generations after his ancestral book was burned during the Cultural Revolution.

With the central government’s improved program for providing modern medical services, the Tu have begun visiting physicians rather than shamans when ill. Since the 1990s, rural people have been enrolled in a new system of health insurance. They need to pay only twenty or thirty yuan and have the right to be reimbursed for the majority of their additional bills, especially for serious diseases. While I was conducting an investigation in Donggou, a town of Huzhu County, in 2004, a village official told me that his job at that time was to implement the rural cooperative medical service. The annual per-person enrollment fee was only 10 yuan, and the program would reimburse up to 90% of all medical bills.

When the program was first launched, however, many people were unfamiliar with modern medicine and mistrusted the program. Those that were in good health and had no medical problems were unwilling to pay the 10 yuan. Because of this mistrust and lack of cooperation, the official was unable to successfully implement the program. He would often argue with the villagers to no effect. But when I revisited this town in 2013, the same official told me that by now people realized that, thanks to the health

insurance program, they would not suffer financial pressure if they saw doctors. The annual enrollment fee is now 40 yuan, but people pay this fee promptly and voluntarily.

Under these circumstances, the Tu now have a different attitude towards modern medicine. In the past, most Tu lived in remote mountainous areas. They had little income; and transportation facilities were remote and inconvenient. It was logistically difficult and financially burdensome to visit doctors in town. The Tu therefore preferred to visit a local shaman to diagnose and heal their illnesses. In the wake of economic development, however, the Tu now have access to modern technology and improved education. Their eyes have been opened to new options. With an expanded road system, modern transportation now offers easy access to hospitals. Local governments have set up local clinics for rapid diagnosis and treatment. Consequently, more people now seek medical treatment in clinics or hospitals.

In 2013, I asked a villager if they continue to ask a *niangniang* for help when sick. He laughed and said, “Now more people trust modern science and technology. If a patient is dying, it is too late to invoke the help of a *niangniang*.” The Tu have gradually accepted the new medical program and will visit doctors in hospitals. They now understand the advantages of the nationwide health insurance system. Modern medicine has gradually replaced shamanic treatment in Tu areas. Many Tu, however, at the same time that they pay for modern medicinal services, will continue to pray to the spirits for help in their illnesses. Shamans continue to transmit messages from the spirits and tell patients and their family members that their illness has occurred because they have violated social norms or disrupted community harmony. They are still told that, if they wish to be fully cured, they must correct their mistakes and follow the instructions given by the spirits.

My fieldwork data indicates that many shamans have ceased their healing activities. They restrict their shamanic activities to other local rituals not associated with healing. In the past, the shamans derived income principally from healing patients: the patients

would offer something to the shaman in return for his services. These offerings were the main source of the shaman's income. Moreover, many old shamans learned healing skills when they were very young and started to treat patients when they were only 17 or 18 years old. However, during the Cultural Revolution, shamanic healing was regarded as a feudalistic superstition and was outlawed; and shamans were severely persecuted. Today, though the persecution has ceased, most people are economically better off and prefer to see doctors in hospitals. Younger people therefore see no point in learning shamanic healing, and it is no longer transmitted intergenerationally. As a result, there are now fewer shamans in Tu villages.

5.3.4 Taboos

A taboo is a prohibition against certain types of behavior generated by religious fears. In Tu culture, there are taboos associated with religious sites and taboos associated with daily social life. Rooted in the Tu's traditional reverence for nature, folk religious belief helps to imbue human relationships with kindness and etiquette. It contributes to the maintenance of ethnic solidarity by concepts of reward for good social behavior and preternatural punishment for inappropriate social behavior.

The Tu believe in purity and pollution. There are many taboos that surround village temples, shrines and other sacred places. The spaces, objects and representations of benevolent spirits must be kept pure; in addition, the spaces, objects and representations of harmful spirits are viewed as unclean and should be avoided. Touching an unclean space can cause contamination and misfortune. If unclean spirits enter a pure space, it will be polluted. So there are taboos specifically aimed at preventing evil spirits from contaminating pure spaces.

In conformity with this belief in the contaminating power of unclean spirits, a number of places are identified as polluted by evil spirits and therefore dangerous. Among the dangerous places are hospitals, places where *maoguishen* (hostile cat spirits) are worshipped, burial grounds, and households that have had funerals. There is a local

people believe that women stand at the gate of death while giving birth. A room where a child has been delivered is therefore thought to be polluted and the blood associated with childbirth is viewed as highly polluted. People who have recently visited such places are forbidden to enter folk religious sites to participate in rituals there. Because they fear that evil spirits often stalk and possess people, the Tu are careful to keep evil spirits at a distance.

Durkheim categorized all societies as sacred or profane, or as pure or polluted (Émile Durkheim & Swain, 1954). It is believed that purity can maintain the material and spiritual order and can dispense life and health to human beings and all of their reverend characters; on the other hand, pollution is the profane enchanter with the evil and unclean power to produce chaos and cause disease and deaths. Mary Douglas is also concerned with the moral order and centers on the social control system as the presence of symbols (Douglas, 1966). In this light the Tu also distinguish the pure from the polluted and have created protective religious taboos. The Tu's religious taboos for religious sites include no alcohol or smoking, and no building, climbing, urinating or defecating at these sites. Turner stated that symbols instigate social action and are "determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action" (Turner, 1967, 36). For the Tu, purity and pollution have specific meanings, and "those rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community" (Turner, 1968, 2).

In addition to taboos regarding sacred places, the Tu also have many taboos regarding daily life, most of which are related to the belief in and worship of nature spirits. These taboos serve to protect the harmony between humans and nature as well as harmony within a community. For example, because of beliefs surrounding the spirits of nature, the fire spirit, and the water spirit, it is prohibited to point at the sun and the moon with one's fingers, to burn dirty things such as bones, fur, garlic skins, and plastics, to put feet into stoves, and to urinate or defecate in rivers or

springs. In agricultural production and construction, the Tu are careful in their use of natural resources, since they are convinced of the value of establishing and preserving harmony with nature. Moreover, in the past the Tu were nomads who relied on horses for transportation. They therefore surround livestock with taboos. For example, it is not allowed to urinate and defecate in the livestock pens, or to eat horses, donkeys, mules and other odd-toed ungulates. Several taboos in Tu areas stop people from excessive lumber extraction and land reclamation, thereby warding off some potentially harmful impacts of rapid economic development.

To maintain harmonious interpersonal relations, the Tu are urged not to quarrel or to beat children in front of guests, or to enter young women's bedrooms without permission, or to serve guests tea or wine in cracked cups or glasses, or to sing *hua'er* (花儿, love songs) at home, in the village, or in front of family members. When something special is occurring in a family, the Tu put a pine branch or insert a square piece of red paper above the main gate to stop guests from entering. Such special events include a birth, the completion of a Buddhist activity, or the occurrence of an infectious disease. If anybody violates these taboos, misfortune or even death could be the result. All of these taboos center on preserving harmony as the core value of Tu culture.

To conclude this chapter: Many scholars characterize Chinese folk religion as practical and utilitarian. C. K Yang pointed out that the biggest difference between Chinese and Western religion is that Western religion combines comprehensive moral norms and supernatural belief in a single system, while, in Chinese religion there is a quite a large gap between the system of moral norms and the system of supernatural belief (Yang, 1961). The ethnography of the Tu, however, forces us to be cautious with such a generalization. In Tu folk culture, spirits (through the voices of shamans) do deal with moral behavior. They often blame diseases on improper social behavior or on some violation of the harmony between humans and nature. Such folk regulations

have a strong social control function – which does by definition entail moral norms – and villagers must obey conventional customs. We see therefore that Tu folk religions does in fact influence people’s moral values and the behavioral standards that derive from such values.

CHAPTER 6 WOMEN AND FOLK RELIGION

As feminist theory became an influential force in the field of anthropology, a new interest in exploring gender, as it relates to ethnicity, religion, and other life domains, from a cross-cultural perspective has generated many important questions. Susan Moller Okin asked the provocative question of whether “multiculturalism is bad for women” (Okin, 1999, 2005; Shachar, 2001); a feminist approach to multiculturalism has accordingly been developed along with research on “minorities within minorities” (Eisenberg & Spinner–Halev, 2005). Some scholars have studied China’s ethnic minorities (Shih, 2010; Du, 2007) touching on the issue of women’s roles in the religions of those ethnic groups. In the process they have constructed new and more comprehensive frameworks for understanding interactions between gender and religion.

While conducting my fieldwork, I found that males and females have different roles in their folk religion, and that Tu women, especially married ones, have a lower religious status and are hence excluded from many religious rituals. Similarly, in daily life men appear to have more privileges and a higher social status than women. However, is this really true? Is the religious status of women related to their general social status? Do gender norms and prohibitions determine what is and is not taboo in women’s religious activities? What causal factors determine the general status of women in Tu life – inside and outside the religious domain? This chapter will explore the issue of the status of Tu women and the manner in which that status is affected by different social factors. It will also examine Tu women’s reflections on their experiences, their religious traditions, and the effect of gender on their perspectives.

6.1 Gender Roles among the Tu

More so perhaps than women in most other rural areas in China, the Tu have a deeply held dualistic (and internally somewhat contradictory) ideology concerning gender. The role of Tu women in actual everyday practice contrasts dramatically with

their role in religious activities. As for the general place of women, under the influence of religion, economics and other factors, the Tu have created a *sui generis* notion of the female. In order to understand what factors determine Tu women's social status, and how women help to shape, create, and change the private and public worlds in which they live, in this section I will discuss the gender system in traditional Tu society. I will focus on gender as it relates to three life domains: daily life, rites of passage, and oral tradition.

6.1.1 Gender in Daily Life

Like most women in rural China, Tu women occupy a subordinate social position and have more restricted rights of speech and less decision-making power in family matters than men do. Moreover, particularly in religious matters, the status of unmarried girls is different from that of married women.

As is true of most communities in Western China, Tu villages are close-knit communities made up of extended families. The Tu's principal economic activity is agriculture; they are involved to a much a lesser extent in animal husbandry. Many villagers depend exclusively on agriculture for their livelihood. Because traditional villagers such as the Tu have no access to modern agricultural equipment, much of the heavier farm work surpasses the physical capacities of most women. Therefore, as head of the household, the husband is the principal source of income.

This economic division of labor exerts a heavy impact on social status. The husband and father, who does most of the heavy agricultural labor, is the head of the family and wives and daughters are subordinate. Married women in particular are restricted when it comes to certain kinds of interpersonal relations. Men can furthermore earn income through employment in small cities or as part-time factory workers. Husbands among the Tu may leave the village to earn money during the summer, which is the off season with respect to agricultural labor. Those who emigrate seasonally will return home for planting or harvesting.

While the men are absent, most of the women stay at home performing domestic chores. In the morning, a Tu wife is expected to clean the floor and the furniture and to prepare breakfast. Afterwards, depending on the season, she may weed the wheat field, cook lunch and dinner and feed the animals. As Kerader has pointed out, the Tu are "...patrilineal in organization, as are all Monguor consanguineal institutions. Marriage is patrilocal, and the levirate is practiced" (Kerader, 1955, 887). (Levirate rules oblige a widow to marry a brother of her deceased husband.) Though the male does the heavy agricultural labor, Tu wives have traditionally assisted with the farm work, in addition to their role of taking care of the home, raising the children, and making clothes and shoes for the family members. They have less freedom than men when it comes to making decisions about marriage and schooling.

Like other forms of ornamentation, clothing "speaks" to a group and is an important symbol of traditional social status. Tu women display their marital status in two ways: hairstyle and clothing. Tysick pointed out that hairstyle may have originated as a symbol of fertility; both husbands and wives still use hairstyles to convey their marital status (Tysick, 2007). At marriage there is a complicated and solemn changing of female hairstyle in the context of a religious ceremony to mark the transition from an unmarried girl to a wife. All Tu brides must change their hairstyles on the occasion of their wedding, a change which has important symbolic meaning. In traditional Tu society, there were seven or eight alternative hairstyles for married women. There were also several types of special hats which indicated the married status of a woman.

As Tu society has begun to modernize, the more complicated hairstyles have disappeared. However, the ritual of hairstyle changing has survived; married women can now sport a simple hairstyle underneath a brocaded felt hat. The ritual is performed in two phases: before the bride leaves her parental home, and then upon arrival at the groom's. In the first phase, the bride must sit in the presence of scriptures. The table in the central room of her house is decorated with nine objects believed to bring

good fortune: scriptures, a cypress branch, a butter lamp, milk, a pair of red chopsticks, tea, grain, and wool. The *nashijin*¹ (纳什金) sings the song of *yjje*² (依姐) in the front section of the central room and waves brown cloths. The mother of the bride and some older women help the bride arrange her new hairstyle. Once the bride has arrived at the groom's home, her new husband will help his wife comb her hair three times. This signifies her new status as a married woman, and a union has been established between the two families.

The groom then has to proceed to the shrine of the kitchen god. A woman who has been appointed in advance will once again change the bride's hairstyle, dress the bride in her wedding clothes and conduct a ritual involving the bride's mouth. The woman who assists the bride waves a rolling pin in front of the bride, symbolically warning the bride to keep quiet and avoid causing trouble in her new family. In this ritual, the bride must keep silent until a female relative of the groom once more changes her hairstyle. This custom reminds the bride of the importance of thinking before speaking to her groom's family.

The color of her clothing is also used to indicate the marital status of a Tu female. The most common colors (red, black, and white) symbolize three bodily excretions: blood, excrement, and milk (Tysick, 2007). In Tu area, unmarried women usually wear red trousers, but married women's trousers must be black or brown. Young women tie a brightly colored sash around the waist, and the sleeves of their robes are rainbows of black, green, yellow, white, blue, orange and red. In contrast, older women do not wear brightly colored jackets or embroidered waistbands. The change in clothing signals the change from single to married, which constitutes an important change in a woman's social and familial status.

¹ In Tu society, the *nashijin* is the person who sings and dances for the bride's family.

² There are nearly twenty kinds of songs performed at Tu weddings, one of which is the *yjje*.

After they have changed their clothing and hairstyle, Tu women must abide by new rules of family etiquette. For example, at dinner, wives (unless they are quite elderly) are not allowed to sit on the *kang* (炕), the hard surface of a bed which is also used as a seat. Wives are expected to serve their husbands and his family members; they stand in front of the *kang* and refill plates throughout the meal. Some wives eat alone in the kitchen. In general, the husband's mother is the highest-ranking woman in the family, followed by her unmarried daughter. The daughter-in-law is at the bottom of this female status hierarchy. Daughters-in-law in rural areas almost always find themselves isolated in an unfamiliar environment.

In short, the Tu identify marital status and give external reminders of this status in a variety of ways. At the same time that they indicate marital status, these mandatory hairstyles and clothing colors also subtly signify the value placed on fertility and the role of mother.

As noted above, the wedding rituals in Tu folk religion give symbolic expression to the bride's new identity and to the new set of rules by which she must abide as a wife. In the first ritual, the bride is required to sit at a table on which a variety of religious items have been placed. This signifies that as a wife she enjoys a new kind of spiritual power. The second ritual is held in the kitchen; the bride has to worship the kitchen god of her new home. She is allowed to talk as soon as she has been given her new hairstyle. These rituals indicate that her new marital status has been approved by the spirits and that her new female identity has received religious ratification. In daily life the status of the bride will be subordinate to that of her husband and to other males and she will have little say in economic decision-making, education, or other family matters. However in the marriage rite of passage itself, her role as a woman has been ritually elevated and validated.

6.1.2 Women in Rites of Passage

In some rituals, particularly rites of passage, the role of women is central. Tu women are the ones who sing folk songs at wedding ceremonies and who wail and cry to accompany the music played at funerals. If the rituals celebrating life transitions can be seen a kind of performance, in those moments women play the star role, while men are supporting actors.

6.1.2.1 The crying marriage and wedding

The wedding customs of the Tu have a long history. As is true among the Han Chinese in general, the Tu traditional wedding ceremony is divided into several steps. The steps include the marriage proposal, the engagement, the exchange of betrothal gifts, and the concluding steps, the wedding ceremony itself with its banquet. As is also true among the Han, after marriage the bride goes to live in the groom's house and becomes a new member of his family. However, the wedding traditions of the Tu also have some unique features entailing a series of religious rituals and performances of song and dance.

In the first place, a matchmaker is required, even if the young couple chose each other for romantic reasons instead of having their marriage arranged by their parents. It is the groom's parents who usually invite a matchmaker to go to the bride's family to offer the marriage proposal. After the bride's family agrees, they will invite the household heads of their own clan as well as the groom's uncles to an engagement banquet. The groom's family is expected to prepare gifts for the banquet such as tea, alcoholic beverages, *hadas*, steamed buns, and part of the betrothal gift. Then the matchmaker and groom's uncle send betrothal gifts to the bride's family in batches. Usually these betrothal gifts include money, fabrics, and jewelry. The bulk of the betrothal gift is given three months before the wedding. After that, the groom's family will ask a Daoist priest or shaman to choose an auspicious day for the wedding ceremony. Obviously, in the

ceremonies of betrothal, an important formality is the exchange of goods, which is regarded as compensation to the bride's kin group for the loss of the bride.

The day before the wedding ceremony, the bride's family hosts the banquet for "marrying a daughter" at their home. They call it the "maze" (麻泽, the ritual at the bride's home). The households in the bride's clans, as well as other, relatives, friends, and neighbors will send gifts and attend this banquet. At the outset, the Tu wedding begins with women's ritual songs and dances. The most popular songs are "Crying about Getting Married," "Questioning and Answering," and "Complaining to the Matchmaker." The songs themselves, as well as the way in which they are performed, depict the Tu woman's economic and social obligations.

In the evening, the groom's family sends two eloquent "*nashijin*" as their representatives to help them acquire a wife for their son. They will go with gifts to the bride's family to ask for the bride's hand in marriage. The gifts include apparel, jewelry for the bride, and one white ewe³. The bride's family feigns reluctance to open the door to the *nashijin*. When the *nashijin* arrive outside the bride's house, young girls (the Tu call them *agu*⁴) from the bride's village sing traditional songs and pour water on the *nashijin* from above the door as a good luck token.

The groom then offers *hada* to the bride's parents and worships the local god and Buddha. He is then entertained with tea and dinner on the kang. On the same day, there are ritualistic "crying" and "singing" performances by both mother and daughter. Accompanied by female relatives, the bride and her mother "cry over getting married" to reaffirm the bond between the bride and her family and to express the bride's apprehension about her new life. The lyrics indicate that the mother is reminiscing about past good times with her daughter. She tells her how to play a successful role as

³ In opinion of the Tu, white is the luckiest color, as white is a symbol of purity and wealth.

⁴ The word *agu* (阿姑) is a form of address for a female in the Tu areas.

a wife when she arrives at her new home. The daughter then sings a plaintive song to her mother about how she does not want to leave her family and is so worried about her new life. Here again, women are central to the wedding ritual.

After that, the *agu* girls gather at the window and sing the wedding melody. As soon as the *nashijin* have taken their seats, the bride's adult female relatives gather outside of the house and sing "Complaining to the Matchmaker," making fun of the *nashijin*. They then pull him out into the courtyard and tease him. They then rush into the house and drag the *nashijin* to the courtyard or thrashing floor to dance "*anzhao*" in the courtyard until dawn the next day. This interaction between the *agu* and *nashijin* symbolizes conflict; it gives ritual expression to feelings of hostility between the two kin groups through socially sanctioned channels. The groom's family takes this in good spirits. All these activities are playful, but the dominant role which the bride's family plays in these events reflects women's special status at the time of marriage.

On the second day, after dressing and putting on her makeup the bride will go to the groom's family, accompanied by the *nashijin* and her family members. Before she sets off on the journey, which is traditionally made on horseback, the bride's relatives scatter a bundle of red chopsticks in the courtyard. Then the bride's brothers carry the bride, dressed in her wedding garments, on a white or a red blanket around the courtyard in three circles; her mother also accompanies her. After that the bride mounts her horse. When the party leaves, the bride's mother throws clothes that the bride used to wear over the wall, signifying that her daughter is now married. When the bride arrives at the door of the groom's house, the groom welcomes her with alcoholic beverages and white *hada* scarves and helps her down off the horse. The groom's relatives carry dolls made of red cloth into the courtyard, and the new couple follows them into the home. This latter custom gives expression to essential elements in married life: pregnancy and childbirth.

The next morning a formal wedding ceremony is held at the groom's house. On the day preceding the ceremony, the groom's family holds a farewell ritual to which all of the bride's relatives and friends are invited. Aromatic plants are burned at the center of the courtyard. Inside various ritual offerings, lighted butter lamps, and clear water are offered to the family's spirits in the room which houses the family's domestic shrine. All the relatives, friends and neighbors of the groom's family will send gifts and attend a banquet. Meanwhile, the bride's family members, who will have come to the groom's home, display the betrothal gifts, the clothes made for the wedding, and the dowry. This ritual at the home of the groom's family is the moment at which the bride is formally admitted into her new role. The rituals performed before the wedding was simple preparations for this transition.

Anthropologists consider an engagement as a time of transition that is of special importance for women, particularly in societies with patrilineal clans such as are found in most of China. An engaged woman learns acceptable behavior for the new stage that she is about to enter, learning about how to live as a married person. The rite of "crying" relieves the stress associated with a life change and provides instruction in how to succeed in the new role. The expression of family emotion can be seen as the primary function of ritual "crying." The wedding ceremony of the Tu marks a woman's entry into a new stage of life in which motherhood will be the principal goal.

6.1.2.2 Pregnancy and fertility

When this goal is reached, in the form of pregnancy, various rituals occur. From an anthropological perspective, childbirth rituals can be considered as a symbolic expression of the invisible bonds between parents and children. These rituals also stress the relationship between the husband and the wife and her kin, which is strengthened when the child is born. The perinatal practices of the Tu give expression to an ambivalent attitude towards childbirth. On the one hand, a birth is to be celebrated because it brings a new life and a member of a new generation into the family. On the

other hand, birth is considered inauspicious because the blood that spills out during childbirth is believed to be polluted.

The ambivalence warrants discussion. At the same time that they value fertility, the Tu believe that menstrual blood is also unclean. It is for this reason that married women are barred from many Tu temples. In many villages, it is believed that women can see evil and can tell when a restless spirit is troubling a family. Upon marriage and especially after giving birth, women are considered to be dangerous and potentially destructive. They are consequently restricted and relegated to a low social position.

Since unmarried girls, on the other hand, are defined as pure, they enjoy a relatively high status. In my fieldwork, many people told me that “unmarried girls can take part in the traditional ritual of *zhuanshanjing* (the mountain ritual described in an earlier chapter), but once they get married, they can no longer join in the procession because the god of the mountain would be displeased.” The Tu also fear that pregnancy can be potentially harmful to those around the pregnant woman and that the blood that flows during childbirth is inherently harmful. For this reason, pregnant women are not allowed to participate in religious rituals, to approach the statue of a god, or to attend weddings.

If a pregnant woman dies, her corpse is also viewed as particularly dangerous by the Tu. If that woman dies during childbirth, she must be cremated. If such women were buried in family graves, it is feared that their ghosts could bring disease to the family and, indeed, to the entire village. In some areas, if a woman who dies in childbirth already had children, her body will be buried, but never in the ancestral graveyard. If a childless woman dies in childbirth, instead of cremation, the corpse may instead be placed into a simple coffin and pushed into the Yellow River or the body will be disposed of in the wilderness. Pregnant women therefore live under an ominous cloud; pregnancy among the Tu is not a joyful period.

The Tu have amulets to protect a neonate in the period immediately following birth. Only women are invited to the postpartum meal that is traditionally held. Male relatives

are not allowed to go into the neonate's room. Usually, a piece of red cloth is hung on the door to the delivery room in order to keep strangers out. All of these transitions are ritually marked. Women's dangerous power is expressed by these ritual practices, and this dangerous power is ultimately constrained by religious laws that place women under the control of men.

6.1.2.3 Long-life ceremonies and crying funerals

Besides the marriage and childbirth rituals which we have discussed, death is a period also marked by rituals in most human cultures. A funeral is a ritual for mourning and disposal of remains; these customs vary widely by religion and by culture. There are different funeral customs in different Tu areas, but certain core procedures are followed by most. The disposal of remains may be done by inhumation, cremation, or water burial. Inhumation prevails in Datong and Minhe, but in Huzhu cremation is more common than burial. Water burial is usually practiced only in the event of an unnatural death.

Tu burial customs vary by the type of death, on the one hand, and on the other by the status of the defunct during his or her life. The elderly who die of natural causes have formal funerals, but the Tu take a different approach to those who die of unnatural causes. Generally, the body of a dead child who has died a natural death will be taken to a remote area and left in the open to be eaten by birds. Small children who die an unnatural death are thrown into the Yellow River. In the case of an unmarried young person who dies, and a pregnant women who has died, the corpse is also tossed into the Yellow River or burned with virtually no ceremony.



A



B

Figure 6-1. Daoists presiding the Tu funeral rituals.

However, there are funeral ceremonies for people who die of natural causes, especially the elderly. Most Tu funerals are conducted with a combination of Buddhist rites, Daoist rites, and folk religious rituals. A “*yinyang*” (阴阳, Daoist priest) is often

invited to choose the “auspicious day and hour” and the ideal place for burial. The deceased’s offspring will invite Tibetan Buddhist monks, Daoist priests and *fashi* (法师, specialists of the folk religion) to chant different scriptures for several days to release the soul of the deceased from purgatory. The formal funeral ceremony consists of the *heshoucai* (贺寿材, “celebration for the coffin”) and *kusang* (哭丧, wailing). The *heshoucai* is the pre-ritual for preparing the coffin and celebrating someone’s long life and is preferably held while the person is still alive, while *kusang* is a ritual of crying/wailing at the actual funeral. In both rituals, the female Tu have a prominent role.

In Tu beliefs, a person is thought to need a house to live in after death. For this reason, the Tu who have passed 60 years of age are expected to prepare coffins for themselves and their spouse. The coffin, called *zuo'er* (座儿, the chair), is a mandatory gift given at the long-life ceremony for the elderly Tu in Huzhu. The *zuo'er* coffin is different from the type of coffin in Han areas; it resembles a two-floor wooden hollow building with carved doors, windows, and a roof. On the back of a *zuo'er*, a wooden board can be drawn out and re-inserted so that the family can bind the person that passed away in a sitting posture and put him or her into the coffin. At the burial ground, the person in the coffin is carried out and put on the pyre, the coffin is chopped up, and the dead person and coffin are burned together.

Once such a coffin has been prepared, its owner knows that he or she has a home in the other world. When a *zuo'er* is completely built, a magnificent long-life ceremony is held in the home of the owner. All of the relatives of the elderly couple will go to their house to celebrate with them and offer gifts of tea, liquor, steamed bread, *hada*, and clothes. Daughters prepare the burial clothes, or *shouyi*⁵ (寿衣). On the day of the ceremony, a daughter (*agu*), brings the *shouyi* to the home of her parents and uses the red cloth to decorate the inside of the coffin. The daughter nails the red cloth to

⁵ *Shouyi*, literally translated as long-life dresses.

the inside surfaces, similar to decorating the walls of a room, and then puts walnuts, Chinese dates and other small items into the coffin. This ritual is called *biaocai* (表材, decoration for coffin). After the *biaocai* ritual, the family serves a banquet to the guests. The *benbenzi* and lamas are invited to chant scriptures.

Elderly Tu attach great importance to their long-life ceremonies. Devout Tu women in particular regard the ceremony as the most significant sign of a successful life, since the ceremonies not only acknowledge their contribution to their families, but also assist them in preparing for the transition to the next world with peace of mind. It is a matter of great regret for someone not to have a daughter to decorate the *zuo'er* coffin. In this case the elderly person may ask their nieces to take charge of the decoration.

After an elderly person dies, a family member of the deceased must inform the maternal uncle of the dead person, because the maternal uncle is the most respected figure among the Tu. Without his approval, weddings and funerals cannot be held. After informing the maternal uncle, his or her family will hold a formal funeral. During the funeral, before offering the banquet to the relatives, adult daughters cry and wail to express their sorrow. The way in which they sing and cry is not only an emotional expression, but also a type of performance.

This crying by females demonstrates the ritual power that is attributed to women. By singing and crying, a woman can add her personal touch to the traditional performance to attract attention, vent her emotions, and even to complain about her own family and that of her husband. In that sense the women are not only crying for the deceased. They are also taking advantage of a socially sanctioned moment for expressing their own suffering. The family members of the deceased cannot stop the women from crying. Van Gennep said that death rituals emphasize liminality more than other rites of passage and suggests that this is because death is the most powerful and mysterious of the changes of state that punctuate the human life cycle (van Gennep, 1960). On these special occasions, the customs of the Tu demonstrate their willingness to yield to female

power. This performance, which is enacted only by women, is passed down from mother to daughter by word of mouth.

Unlike the Han Chinese, the Tu do not wear white as a symbol of death; all married females will wear a blue robe instead as a symbol of the deceased during a funeral ceremony. Blue is the symbolic color of mystery, and blue clothes are used traditionally to dress the body of the deceased. Moreover, all female family members are required to address the deceased as their parents. They call the male deceased “my father” (*A-Ba*) and call the female deceased “my mother” (*A-Ma*). Thus, through their crying during funerals, female family members of the same generation who may have very different relations to the deceased become daughters. In addition, all married women wear special blue robes for crying at weddings and funerals. With this kind of performance behavior, the Tu women express their emotions by ritual “crying.” “For Tu women, the narrative content plays an important role in two specific occasions of their lives and will be constrained, diverted and regulated by the spiritual resources” (Zhai & Bai, 2010).

In short, funerary customs comprise the complex of beliefs and practices used by a culture to remember the dead, from interment itself to monuments, prayers, and rituals in their honor. Each culture marks these rites in its own way. For the Tu, crying songs at weddings and funerals are a crucial way of emphasizing the greater social significance of the matrilineal relatives in the kinship system at certain moments in the life cycle. Although in ordinary daily life Tu women have a position in the family subordinate to that of men, in these ritual moments the Tu women are accorded more important roles than Tu men. And, when we examine Tu oral tradition, we see that in oral narratives Tu women play a different role even in daily life, enjoying a higher status than that of Tu men even in certain non-ritual contexts. The currently subordinate position of Tu women, in short, may be a recent development, not necessarily a feature of Tu culture at its origins.

6.2 Gender in Oral Tradition

A useful strategy which anthropologists have used to understand the cultural assumptions and understandings of non-literate people is the study of their mythology, religious beliefs, and the ceremonies which give expression to these beliefs. All of these are linked to the oral traditions of a group. The analysis of such oral traditions is also a gateway to understanding the ethnic identity of the group. In the previous section, I described the subordinate role of the Tu female vis a vis the Tu male, at least in daily life. If we examine the oral traditions of the Tu, however, we gain insight into another picture, one in which we can detect domains in which females, at least in the past, exercised greater power.

6.2.1 Female Heroes in Legend and Folklore

Tu oral tradition is embodied in proverbs, riddles, tales, myths, legends and epics; it is the repository of the community's core values, philosophies, mysteries, rituals and, most importantly, collective memory. Tu oral traditions have been preserved in a variety of styles. In most cases, the women are the preservers of these oral traditions, an indication of the power which they subtly continue to exercise.

The fairy tales that are recounted in the oral traditions of China's ethnic minorities often feature mighty male heroes. But the folklore of the Tu is replete with the deeds of strong and ingenious heroines. Folk stories and fairy tales about women make up a large proportion of the Tu oral tradition; most notable among these are the tales of heroines. Quite beyond accounts of their skills in the traditional female arts of embroidery and performing, the heroines of Tu folklore are often wise and fearless in situations in which other traditions attribute power to male figures. In many Tu stories, women defeat devils that are tormenting innocent villagers; the women in such accounts receive assistance from one or another invisible supernatural power. Such stories often depict women as more powerful and more resourceful than men. For example, in the story "Nayinde A Gu," a chieftain kidnaps and imprisons the heroine, Sister A-Li, and

kills her brother. All the males in the village are helpless in the face of this murder, but with the help of a three-legged horse's magic power, Sister A-Li is able to escape.

Older women in particular are favorably depicted in Tu oral tradition. In this tradition, post-menopausal women commonly give birth. For instance, in "Frog Son-in-Law" (青蛙女婿), an old woman was eager to give birth. She prayed day and night. One day, a child came out of one of her fingers. In "Black Horse" or "Zhang San Ge" (黑马张三哥), the sons and daughters of an old woman with the last name Zhang are eaten by a devil. The woman's black horse gives birth to a boy called Zhang San Ge, who then kills the devil for her and rescues her children. In another type of folk story a beleaguered heroine overcomes her difficulties with assistance from the spirits, in a recurring theme in Tu folklore about women being able to count on divine help. Women who are past childbearing age have the supernatural power to acquire what they desire with support of forces in the natural world.

The traditional songs of the Tu also provide evidence of women's mysterious power. From this song, *Anani Moyang* (阿娜尼模样, Mothers' Appearance), we can see the relationship between mothers and the female goddess *niangniang*:

Anani Moyang
What does mother look like?
Mother is beautiful,
Mother is as beautiful as niangniang.
Beautiful, beautiful,
Mother is as beautiful as niangniang.

Oral traditions and expressions are used to share knowledge, cultural and social values, and collective memory. Contrary to the rigid gender hierarchy of contemporary Tu society, Tu oral tradition grants the female high cosmological status. There is much evidence in the oral tradition that illustrates the power of Tu women vis-à-vis the religious world and its spirits, despite their paradoxical lower status and vulnerability in society.

There is a similar theme that appears in Mongolian stories: "There is an old woman in heaven who has a skin sack containing the wind. If she is angry, she opens her sack

and the wind blows on the earth. If she is truly furious, she opens the sack wider and wider and the wind becomes stronger. When she is in good spirits, she closes the sack and the wind stop. Thus, people should be careful not to willfully offend the old woman” (Nassen-Bayer & Stuart, 1992, 329). There is abundant evidence in such oral traditions that in the past Tu women were always portrayed as having power to influence the spirits or as having been endowed with different types of preternatural power.

Beliefs about female fertility have also had a psychological impact on the Tu. It is clear in many accounts that the structural centrality of the role of the mother has influenced the group’s collective consciousness. One can almost see a type of “collective schizophrenia” which causes the Tu to view females in contradictory ways. The powerful images of women in oral tradition are completely different from the reality of women’s subordinate position in day to day social life.

6.2.2 Kinship Terminology and the Role of the Maternal Uncle

Oral tradition is a powerful force for the intergenerational transmission of culturally shaped understandings. As an embodiment of living oral tradition, kinship terminology in particular reveals the operation of familial norms that govern traditional Tu culture. Kinship terminology among the Tu consistently emphasizes the importance of female links. For example, used in the broadest sense, the term of address *A-Gu*, which as a term of reference means aunt on the father’s side, is also used generically as a friendly term of address to all young girls and even to female strangers. *A-Yi* is another such term. As a kin term of reference it refers to the wife of an uncle, but it is also used more broadly to address sisters of the wife of the uncle, or the mother of brothers-in-law. All female cousins are addressed as *Gu-jiu A-ji*. These forms of address in which a single term is applied to a large variety of females are connected to the structure of the heavily patriarchal clan system in Tu society. The broad application of a single term to multiple categories of females reflects the broad roles of women within families. The wide usage of *A-Gu* lumps all females of the same generation or even of different generations within

the same term. There is no such generic form of address for an equally wide variety of male kin.

The *jiujiu* is a particularly important figure in Tu life. He must give permission for weddings and funerals. At the wedding, the brother of the bride's mother (her *jiujiu*) is the most honored guest and takes precedence over all other relatives of his generation on the groom's side. He is accorded a ritual role that is even more important than that of the bride's father and of her patrilineal uncles (the brothers of the bride's father). In funerals the *jiujiu* of the deceased represents the widow's side of the family. When someone dies, a family member of the deceased must inform the maternal uncle as the most respected family member and as the *guzhu* (骨主, the origin of family genes). According to the Tu, "the soul of the deceased person cannot be released from purgatory without the permission of the *guzhu*."

In groups following a matrilineal post marital residence system, husbands live with the families of their wives. The *jiujiu*, who were the heads of such families, were the authority figures that raised their sisters' children. Under the influence of this cultural legacy, even today the *jiujiu*'s words continue to enjoy special authority, and he is the person who makes the funeral arrangements and advises the bereaved. If the *jiujiu* has passed away, then a member of his family takes on the responsibility.

In that light the traditional funeral songs such as "Meeting *A-Jiu* [the term of address for *jiujiu*] to Mourn the Death" are sung in honor of the *jiujiu*. The Tu to this very day still sing "The Legend of Young Men who Marry Out (嫁男儿的传说)" and "The Story of A Colorful Case (花箱子的传说)" in which women marry their sons-in-law. It is not a slip of the tongue to say, "marry in a son-in-law and marry out a daughter. "

Tu marriage is now patrilineal, with the bride going to live with the family of the groom. But these oral traditions suggest that it may have originated as a matrilineal system in which males lived with the families of their wives and in which relatives of one's mother consequently exercised greater power. The traditional respect that one

continues to see today for one's maternal *jiujiu*, especially in certain rituals, reflects this respect for the maternal line of descent. Tu oral tradition has thus preserved an element of matricentric social structure through the generations.

To conclude, in ancient times, the Tu were nomads and the gender division of labor was less sharp than in today's agricultural setting. The high regard for the procreative role of women elevated their social status. Over time, however, as the Tu became agriculturalists and interacted with other ethnic groups, particularly the Han, absorbing many of their customs, gender differences became more pronounced. The social status of women declined when the Tu accepted Confucian culture from the Han. They now perform a series of wedding rituals to identify the married woman's new social status as subordinate to that of her husband. Customs such as distinctive hairstyles, dress, and garments stress the social bonds between husband and wife and their kin groups and the incorporation of the bride into the family of her husband. Therefore, a starker awareness now exists among the Tu of male-female role differences in which the woman is generally subordinate. Tu women thus have conflicting images of their status in their real-life world and in the world of the spirits. Such duality emerges in the difference between the role of the submissive and weak wife figure and the role of the dangerous mother figure particularly during pregnancy.

6.3 Females in Folk Religion

Each culture develops its own views of similarities and differences between the two genders. The Tu are no exception. They have constructed a culture-specific model of male-female differences. In this chapter we will examine how Tu women express the different roles that have been culturally assigned to them in the anthropological domains of family life and religious ritual. We shall see that, though women occupy a subordinate status in contemporary village life, this may be a recent development. Within the mythological realm, the female figure of the goddess is fully recognized in Tu ritual

practices, even in Buddhist monasteries located in Tu areas. The structural centrality of the maternal role has influenced their cosmology.

6.3.1 Religious Lives and the Socialization of Tu Women

The Tu women are active in the religious life of their community. “The religious life of the Monguors is very intensive, and not a superficial veneer that scales off easily. Indeed, it has not only a private and a family characteristic, but a social and compulsory aspect as well” (Schram, 1957, 163). But the religious status of a Tu women changes at different phases of her life cycle. As soon as a baby is born, the family invites lamas or other religious specialists to name the baby and to hold a ritual to thank the spirits.

Though greeted ritually, however, young children, whether male or female, have few rights and obligations in terms of their religious practice. As they enter their teens, the absence of gender distinctions continues. Unmarried young men and women enjoy the same status in the categories of Tu folk religion. Young girls are allowed to participate in religious activities with the male elders of their families, cleaning sacred objects, going to the village temples for traditional shamanic treatment, or attending grand worship rituals such as the earlier mentioned *zhuanshanjing* and the *weisang*. They are even allowed to stand in for and complete the tasks of the male elders who are absent because of their work outside of the village.

However, as Tu females mature, they become the object of more religious taboos. The first taboos accompany the onset of menarche; menstruating girls and women cannot enter temples or other religious sites. On her wedding day, a woman’s religious status plummets even further. Barred from many places of worship, a married woman has few opportunities to worship the local spirits, except for rituals such as *biang-bianghui* that are open to all. In daily life, they only kowtow and pray at a substantial difference from village temples. They cannot even enter their family’s shrine room, lest they offend the spirits and bring misfortune. The only thing that they can do is *zhuanguola*, to walk clockwise around the *benkang* as he chants scriptural texts and

manipulates prayer beads. However, most married women are too busy with housework to participate in the *zhuanguola* ritual. And as stated earlier, pregnant Tu women are completely excluded from religious activities.

The Tu consider that children are gifts from the spirits. If there are no births within three years of a wedding, a wife will intensify her worship of the spirits. Some women might embroider religious decorations and donate the embroidery to their village temples or to Buddhist monasteries in the hope of becoming pregnant. They might also complete a *rangni* (fasting) ritual and confess to their mistakes or negligence. Women who have had miscarriages pray to the spirits for blessings. Even though they are prohibited from entering religious sites, they remain quite adamant in their religious practices.

The religious status of Tu women improves later in life, as they become grandmothers. The Chinese scholar Zhai Cunming has noted that the arrival of grandchildren signals a new stage in a woman's life. By then she understands religious doctrine and etiquette, may participate in and organize religious activities, and can model appropriate religious behavior (Zhai, 2003a). The Tu believe that menstrual blood is unclean, so there are many taboos for women at this phase. But when women experience menopause, far fewer religious taboos apply to them – especially when they have grandchildren. Freed from housework the older women's main tasks are to take care of their grandchildren and to chant mani, *zhuanguola* and to practice the *rangni* fast.

As for the *zhuanguola*, when women perform this ritual, as soon as they finish one round, they mark off one prayer bead. One *yuanman* (圓滿, a full circuit) consists of 2,700 rounds, and the completion of 108 *yuanman* is believed to release the soul of the person who finished the *yuanman* from purgatory and guarantees being reincarnated into a happy life. Women are more enthusiastic about chanting mani scriptures and practicing the *rangni* fast. A *manihui* is held annually. During this ritual, all elderly women go to their village temple where they fast from dawn to dusk, chant scriptures

and pray for blessings. When there is a disaster in their village such as an earthquake or landslide, elderly Tu women gather in the village temple to recite the *manijing* (嘛呢经). Through *rangni* fasting and *manihui*, Tu women also seek comfort in the spiritual world. So daily religious practice is an important part of the lives of older women, as they enjoy a relatively higher status in both religious and family life.

6.3.2 Rituals and Taboo

Although Tu women are ordinarily barred from temples, there are special days when the taboo against viewing the spirits is lifted and Tu women are allowed to see the spiritual litters, divination spears, and statues of local spirits outside the village temples. The earlier described *zhuanshanjing* in the fifth month of the lunar calendar, the procession which circles the village and the surrounding mountain regions, provides an opportunity for Tu women to be involved in community religious events. Married women are prohibited from attending most phases of the ritual but can still venerate the consecrated litters and divination spears at one specific point during the performance. Because the *zhuanshanjing*, the village procession, begins early in the morning and lasts until 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening, it tires out the men who must carry litters and spears and chant scriptures all day. When the men take their lunch break on a mountaintop, women have an opportunity to gaze upon the spirits.

In 2012 I joined a group of women who were bringing lunch and I was able to observe them. Qiao, a 38-year-old woman from the village of Danma in Huzhu County, was married to 42-year-old from the village of Donggou. They now have a daughter and a son. The daughter of Qiao and Su had just graduated from middle school and had passed the high school entrance test for minorities, and their son was in the fifth grade. Su was working outside the town, so their children were among those involved in the procession of *zhuanshanjing*. Qiao prepared and delivered the food for the children and then she herself was able to venerate the spirits at noon.

Early that morning, Qiao put on a beautiful traditional costume and selected appropriate garments for me. She told me that she had not had many chances to see the *foye* (spirits), and since this was an important day, we had to dress up and be on time. She carried two traditional costumes wrapped in a pink scarf, as well as a thermos of hot tea and a small two-sided embroidered bag. One side of the bag was filled with cypress incense to burn for the spirits, and the other side contained stir-fried highland barley flour. The *zhuanshanjing* ritual itself is not too elaborate, considering that only three villages are involved, but the procession lasted seven or eight hours to pass all five mountains. The team departed from the village temple at nine o'clock in the morning and arrived at the mountaintop behind the village around two o'clock in the afternoon. By then, women were burning aromatic plants to attract the spirits and were serving lunch and tea to their family members.

It was a sunny and hot day. We climbed to the mountaintop. Because the mountain slope was so steep, it was difficult for us to carry all of our food and offerings. So we had to stop several times. Qiao kept trying to rush us along, since the spirit was lodged close to the mountaintop. It took us about one hour to arrive there, but we were not disappointed. The beauty of the landscape was spectacular, covered by colorful blossoms and green grass. I felt as though I was looking at an oil painting, with rolling mountains, golden rape flowers and highland fields of barley. At the top of the mountain was a small flat open area with mounds of different sizes; a mound near the center of the area was the largest. These mounds are erected as sites to petition the mountain spirits to prevent hail and protect the growing crops.

By then women from the villages were arriving. All were wearing traditional costumes and carrying aromatic plants for burning, as well as thermoses of hot tea. As Qiao did, some of them changed their clothes before the procession of village men arrived there; they had kept their ritual costumes clean by carrying them. The costumes, being made partly of leather or fur, were heavy and too hot to wear during the climb. I



Figure 6-2. Women changing into traditional costumes to attend *zhuanshanjing*.

conversed with Qiao and the other women. They were excited, telling me that they were allowed to approach the spirits in this manner only twice a year.

After half an hour, when we could hear the distant sound of drums and gongs, Qiao and I put on the traditional clothing. When the team appeared, the women took their hats off and knelt in deference to the spirits. I noticed that, besides the three *shidianzeng* holding the sacred spears that represented the spirits, several men were carrying gold-rimmed black sacred flags printed with Tibetan characters or with portraits of the guardian spirits in the village temples. Other people on the team were beating drums, gongs, and small cymbals. Once arrived, while the team was walking around the *lashize* rock shrine and the mounds, the women dared not raise their heads or look

at the spirits but instead kept kowtowing (touching their foreheads to the ground in a prostrate position) and chanting *mani* scriptures. After making two rounds of the site, the procession of men inserted the swords into the biggest mound and placed scriptures upon the other smaller mounds.

The men and children then looked for their mothers or other female relatives and took a lunch break. Now it was the time for the women to worship the spirits' litters, spears, and scriptures. I asked Qiao how long the break would be, and she said that it depended on indications that the spirit would give. Sometimes the break was one hour long, sometimes two. After about half an hour, when the white conch was sounded, Qiao told me that the spirit was leaving. All the people from the procession got together. The women hurried to take off their hats and chant scriptures and to kneel in prayer. As the team headed to the next mountaintop, the women all stayed behind. They were glad that their hopes of gazing on the spirit had been realized.

Another opportunity for female involvement in ritual is during the *biangbianghui*, when the statues of the spirits are carried from the temple halls to be worshipped in big tents erected in the middle of the temple courtyards. If the shamans, or *bo*, are dancing, the sacred litters and spears are placed on tables at the center of the courtyards, to permit the spirits to observe their performance. At those times, women are permitted to worship in front of the tents and tables.

In short, although there are religious taboos restricting the participation of Tu women in rituals, local folk religious tradition does not completely bar them. Besides the above mentioned rituals, in times of calamity, elder Tu women are considered to have special spiritual power and are allowed to recite the *manijing*. And when the Tu offer sacrifices to the Kitchen God in their family homes, only married women with children are allowed to officiate in the family ritual. The maternal role at this moment is seen as being powerful and symbolic. Such rituals give the Tu women a venue in which they are

involved in religious events and are allowed to approach the local spirits. Women on the whole highly value such moments.

6.3.3 Female Gods, The *Maoguishen* and Women

Within the Tu folk pantheon, female spirits are accorded an important place and are publicly venerated in all Tu rituals. “Woman as a symbol is often associated with some of the deepest, most compelling and most tenacious theological and mythological structures in a religion, and these structures imprint the lives of women in that religion” (Sered, 2007, 194). In Tu folk religion, the *niangniang* stands out as the most important female spirit with many important practical contributions to Tu life. She enjoys the same stature as male spirits in the folk pantheon. These female spirits enjoy such prominence in religious rituals because they are viewed as having power to control many events that occur in the world. In some religious rituals, the Tu shamans don colorful dresses and long artificial hair plaits when they carry out ritual dances, because they are impersonating female spirits. If we compare Tu belief with folk religious beliefs in Han areas, it is interesting to note that Tu female spirits are viewed as much more powerful than their female counterparts in the folk pantheons of the Han.

In addition, the cult of the *maoguishen* can be seen as an indication that some Tu women seek aggressive power in the spirit world in revenge for being treated unfairly at home. As mentioned earlier, the *maoguishen* is an evil cat spirit that is secretly worshipped in Tu areas, particularly by women. The Tu population at large does not worship *maoguishen* in their homes, but some women secretly do. My investigation revealed that these *maoguishen* worshippers tend to be women who are mistreated at home or who resent their mothers-in-law. But their husbands usually keep silent about the dealings of their wife with this dangerous spirit; the husbands simply pretend not to know.

It is said that a woman can recruit a *maoguishen* into her service by killing an old cat and then hanging its head on the house beam for forty-nine days. The *maoguishen* may have little spiritual power when it is first created. . But as a woman devotee makes more offerings to her *maoguishen*, it increasingly acquires the power to steal household objects or small amounts of money and offer these items to the worshipper as compensation for her veneration. It is important for the devotee to appease her *maoguishen* by offering the same meals eaten by family members before the family dinner; a *maoguishen* who is slighted in this matter might bring sickness or other troubles.

It is rare for A *maoguishen* voluntarily to leave the home in which it is venerated. On rare occasions it might decide to move in with another family or to be reincarnated in a future generation. If the worshipper dies, another woman in the family must continue to make the offerings. If there are no other women in the family, one of the surviving men has to take on the responsibility. It is believed that a disaster could occur if a *maoguishen* learns that its host family wants it to leave.

One of the Tu villagers told me that *maoguishen* really do exist; they take the form of a cat that sleeps during the day but turns into a human person at night. It has the same voice as invisible forces such as the wind. People know that a *maoguishen* is walking about in the village looking a for body to possess if weird things begin to happen, such as an unexplained decrease in the amount of grain or firewood or the unexplained disappearance of meat. The interviewees said that a *maoguishen* is able to eavesdrop on all the conversations within the family, and that a more powerful *maoguishen* can hear even hear what everyone in the village is saying.

“I remember that the family of one of my relatives worshipped a *maoguishen*, though few people knew,” said one interviewee. “One day a villager visited a relative and knocked on the door repeatedly, until finally a beautiful child opened the door and led him into the courtyard. The female relative stepped out of the house and explained that

she did not hear the knock. The villager said, 'I have been knocking for quite a while. I was finally invited in by your child.' The relative just replied, 'Oh really?' After a short conversation, the villager returned home and suddenly remembered that the woman whom he visited had no children at all. Some days later, he visited the relative again and tried to see the room that the cute child slept in and found that the room was a clean storage area without any bed. From then on, villagers were afraid of the *maoguishen* and kept their distance from this family. After a period of time, on one snowy night the family moved out of the village."

Here is a conversation about *maoguishen*:

Q: What kind of disaster is caused by a *maoguishen*? Is it a disease?

A: It could be a disease, or a car accident, or something else.

Q: Is it possible for a *maoguishen* to leave the worshipper and lodge with some other family while the worshipper is still making offerings? Is the woman's family status higher if she worships *maoguishen*? Is her husband afraid of her?

A: It depends on how other family members treat that woman. A *maoguishen* considers itself a member of the family and does not hurt other people in that household. However, if it feels that it has been mistreated, it may switch to another woman who wants to worship it.

Q: Is the status of a woman in her family higher if she worships a *maoguishen*?

A: Not really. The woman is more tolerant and conciliatory while worshipping a *maoguishen*, because her worship must remain secret. However, once she is under a *maoguishen*'s protection, a woman will no longer be bullied, nor does she have to worry about her daily needs.

Q: Well, do other villagers realize that a woman is worshipping a *maoguishen*?

A: Her worship is always done in secret to prevent it from being discovered. If it is discovered, the family would be harassed and driven off by other villagers, since it is regarded as being in communication with evil spirits, and this destroys the reputation of the family.

Q: What would happen to a family if the presence of a *maoguishen* is discovered?

- A: All the relatives and friends will break off their relationships with the family. And the family will have to move to a place where they are not known.
- Q: But there seems to be no reason for a woman to want to hurt other people in her family. Do many women worship *maoguishen*?
- A: There are a few people making offerings to *maoguishen*; say, at most one family in each village. Actually many families are framed as being *maoguishen* worshippers and are forced to move out of the villages. Calling somebody a *maoguishen* worshipper is an insult that implies that a person is sinister, cunning and dishonest. It is very difficult for young women to find a husband if they are known as worshippers of *maoguishen*. Especially in times past, when the social status of women was very low, such young women had to marry men from far away.

From this, we can see that though it is viewed as an evil spirit, women worship a *maoguishen* to gain more control over their lives. It is difficult for Tu women to achieve equal treatment with men. Especially in traditional Chinese society, women had no alternative but to remain in a subordinate position. Therefore, many women resorted to magic and sorcery as a form of resistance and revenge. Those who resorted to the worship of a *maoguishen* did so in order to obtain material advantages. Nowadays, Tu males are much more tolerant in their general treatment of women and the status of Tu women even in folk-religious practice has changed. However, many of the customary taboos restricting the behavior of women in Tu society remain in place.

6.4 Changes in Tu Women's Social Status

In early anthropological studies concerning gender, much attention was directed to the procreative and economic capacities of women – their sexuality (or lack of it), their fertility, and their physical fitness to work outside the home. Some social theorists studied women's roles in society; Edwin Ardener and Mary Douglas posited “dominant” and “muted” models to interpret the hostility that women have encountered and to modify the focus on males that was found in much of the literature.

Such gender analysis is important to the understanding of social life in China. With the development of the market economy and tourism in China, improvement in the

status of Tu women has been driven by several factors. In the traditional patrilineal kin groups of the Tu, status is influenced by one's position among one's consanguineal kin rather than one's marital status. If a man violates prevailing virilocal residence norms and lives instead with his wife's family, his status is no better than that of a daughter-in-law living with her husband's family. He is required to do arduous housework and has fewer privileges than males born into his wife's family. Similarly, the family status of daughters is higher than that of daughters-in-law. This traditional attitude towards the low status of daughters-in-law has been a feature of kinship not only among the Tu but among the Han Chinese as well. Although the social status of Tu women is now improving because of better educational and employment opportunities, older generations are concerned that Tu women will lose their traditional virtue. In the following conversation, D is an old man, C is the mayor of the village, and I am X.

X: Compared to the past, is there any change in the social status of women among the Tu?

D: Much higher!

X: Any examples?

D: Teacher Zhang of Wangjia Village told me, for example, that a daughter-in-law was watching TV without getting up to offer her seat to her father-in-law when he came in the room. This never happened in the past.

C: In the past, a daughter-in-law was not allowed to sit in the same room with her father-in-law. The women were not allowed to sit on the kang, not even the edge of a kang.

D: In the past, it was not possible for my daughter-in-law to sit on the sofa while there were guests in the home. She needed to take care of the kitchen, prepare the meal, and serve the guests. In the past, she stayed in the kitchen and ate the leftovers or cooked something else to eat. But now she sits with guests. Totally different!

I asked if these changes were the consequence of girls being better educated, and D acknowledged that girls now know more about the world. In the old days, girls only did farm work, but girls of the present generation either go to college or seek jobs in cities. He told me, "Now many young women seek jobs in cities. Their parents cannot get even

a bag of tea⁶ . Some girls work outside the home and get married without any traditional Tu rituals, and their parents no longer receive betrothal gifts. Besides preparing for marriages, brides' families still have savings. However, today more women have jobs and they choose their own husbands. Some of them get married without engagement ceremonies or weddings, so their parents have no opportunity to require betrothal gifts or money.”

D complained, “If a girl has been away from home for a couple of years and brings a child back, is it possible to throw her and the child out of the house? It is no longer acceptable to criticize such behavior. One girl in our village went to Xinjiang with a young man at the age of seventeen. After eight years, the girl came back home with the man and their child. What are the parents supposed to do? How can they ask for gifts or money?” He paused, “However, it is still better to have daughters now. My neighbor only has a girl and had adopted a son-in-law to marry into and live with their family. That is great for them since the man does not drink any wine and works hard on the farm. Now they have a car.”

I asked him if sons-in-law who marry in and live with their wife's family have lower status than sons. He answered brusquely, “Yes, they do. The adopted sons-in-law cannot consider themselves equal to the sons. Just as with daughters-in-law, they have to finish all the housework and farm work in time without playing mahjong or drinking wine.” (D's two sons do not help their parents with housework.) “It would be best if I had a daughter to help my wife,” said D. He added that a daughter would assist parents with housework, but he did not expect sons, much less himself, to do any of the work. This strict and clear gender division of labor reflects the belief in men's higher status. At the end of the interview, I asked him if the old idea about having sons had changed. He

⁶ Tea is one of the most important engagement gifts.

laughed. “Now it’s better to have two daughters. One can bring in a son-in-law to live with us, and the other can go off to marry a very rich man.”

From the above interview, it is clear that the change of women’s status within the family has been influenced by several factors. Firstly, the structure of the labor force among the Tu has changed. In traditional Tu society, household income was produced from farming, and the male-female division of labor was clear. Due to the mountainous environment, most of the land was heavily sloped, so people were unable to use farm machinery even if they had access to it. Traditional farm work depended on animal traction from horses or oxen and required a large labor force. Under these conditions, males had a physical advantage over females. Males did most of the farm work and females took care of the cooking, housework, children, and older members of the family.

However, over the past twenty years the economic underpinnings of Tu life have changed. In order to protect the natural environment of the highlands, the central government of China implemented a new policy, “Reconverting Land from Farming to Forestry,” in Qinghai and neighboring provinces. After farm work was prohibited on their steep fields, villagers were made to plant trees in return for grain and money. Since trees require little labor while they are growing, the result was a large pool of surplus labor. Since both men and women can easily find work in the city now, the gender division of labor that prevailed in the agricultural economy is becoming a thing of the past.

Urban emigration is now strong. With the growing demand for temporary labor to keep pace with the growing market economy in urban areas, many males who formerly worked on farms emigrated and easily found jobs as construction workers and janitors in the nearby city of Xining. Some older adults with children who are old enough to care for themselves also look for work in larger cities. Young migrant workers bring news about jobs back to the village and persuade their friends to free themselves from the economic restrictions of life in the mountains and to work in cities where they can earn several times the amount that they can earn by working the land. Even though they

own more productive plots on the plains, a few villagers have rented out their lands and sought jobs in cities. Consequently, many Tu homes have become empty nests for unattended elderly people and children. Women also can easily find jobs serving tables in restaurants and other such jobs. Therefore, more women are now financially independent, which permits them to enhance their own sense of independence and personal achievement and in the process move up in terms of their social status and their position in their own families.

Improvement in the quality of education has also made it easier for Tu women to find jobs. In traditional Tu society, girls received less education than their brothers. Parents assumed that their daughters did not need an education because they were expected to marry; it was more important for them to stay at home and learn needlework. Moreover, schooling could be expensive, which further disinclined many parents from educating their daughters. However, from the 1990s onward the central government of China began enacting mandatory nationwide nine-year compulsory education for all school-aged boys and girls. In the words of Deng Xiaoping, "Education should be geared to modernization, the world and the future."

Parents who failed to send their children to school were excluded from preferential policies and subsidies in support of agriculture. This nine-year compulsory education is free of charge. And a middle school diploma is now the minimum requirement for city employment. With the support and encouragement of the Chinese State, parents now send their daughters to school, at least through middle school. Many of these girls are successful in their studies and pass high school and even college entrance exams. Despite research showing that gender-based educational inequality persists in China's rural areas ([Feng, 2005](#); [Qian, 1999](#); [ye, 2007](#)), more Tu girls than ever are attending school. Most Tu families now aspire for their daughters to leave the village and to go to the city to attend college or university and eventually to lead a better life than their parents. Meanwhile, because of their willingness to work for low wages, there is a great

demand for girls in the urban catering industry, household service, and other service industries. Such enhanced job opportunities in cities have increased the income of many young women and enhanced their ability to speak their mind at home.

Another factor driving changes in the social status of Tu women is the development of rural tourism by urban Chinese tourists. It is now much easier for Tu women to find temporary jobs such as cooking for a “Joyous Farmer’s House⁷” (农家乐) near their village or as waitresses in rural restaurants that cater to tourists. To escape urban pollution, many Chinese vacation in the countryside, where they can also enjoy observing folk customs. Tourism in rural areas, including the Tu areas, has become popular and has produced more jobs and income.

The growth of tourism also allows Tu women to display their talent for embroidery, which has become widely admired for its bright colors, beautiful patterns, and delicate workmanship. In the past, embroidery was performed by girls simply as part of their marital dowry. But now this embroidery has become very popular in the local tourist market. In order to promote local business, local municipal governments have encouraged and organized villagers to produce traditional embroidery objects, such as sachets and handbags.

Some Tu families have also turned their homes into inns catering to tourists seeking a rural experience. The inns offer local organic food, as well as traditional games and performances. In the village of Xiaozhuang in Huzhu County, an entire “traditional village” has been constructed for tourists. Because of their involvement in this new tourism, many Tu women are now earning more than men; some women even run the family business. These changes have radically altered the traditional domestic arrangement in which men were the principal or sole income-earners in a family. And this has of course also enhanced the status of women within their own families.

⁷ This is farm-based tourism that includes family activities such as corn mazes and haunted hay rides.

New information communication technologies such as television and the Internet have also stimulated changes in the role of Tu women in society. Every household has a television, and every individual now has a cell phone; Tu villagers are thus able to obtain up-to-date information. Having been exposed to ideas brought home by their children who attend college or who work in cities, Tu mothers have learned more about the outside world and have been able to compare their lives to those of women in other places. At a fieldwork site in an old Tu village, I watched a group of women rehearse a performance for the New Year Festival. My fieldwork assistant was a dance teacher at the Qinghai Provincial Art College. As soon as the women discovered this, they asked him to perform a short dance routine. When I asked them what kind of dance they wanted him to do, they unanimously said “Gangnam Style by Psy,” a totally modern and currently popular non-traditional urban dance. It was the last answer that I had expected to hear from the residents of a remote Tu village at more than 3,000 meters of altitude. Modern culture, including Western culture, has infiltrated Tu society. Though many traditional core values have survived, the overall cultural milieu of Tu communities is in the process of rapid change.

At the same time, the Chinese State has enacted a series of welfare policies for elderly people in rural areas, such as an old-age insurance system that has taken effect in most villages. At a certain point in the life cycle, a person does not have to pay for any insurance premium, but instead receives 85 Chinese yuan every month. If they had previously paid for an insurance premium, they are compensated even more. An elderly Tu woman told me that more villagers were willing to pay an insurance policy, since it is difficult for old people (especially old women) to support themselves, especially if their children do not pitch in. She also said that 85 yuan per month could cover living expenses, since the grain that they still grow will feed them and the new health insurance policy will cover their medical costs.

In the past, parents always lived with one of their married sons. The custom was for all income to be handed over to the oldest man in the household, usually the father. The oldest man would then distribute the money to his children for daily expenses or tuition fees. According to Chinese traditional values, the son is in turn responsible for taking care of his parents and eventually giving them a proper burial. However, along with all the above mentioned social changes, some young people no longer want to live with their parents or even to take care of them. Elderly Tu cite such examples to lament the decline of society and the loss of traditional virtues. They complain that as young people earn more money, they also come under the influence of a new culture that fails to teach deference to elders. After working or studying in cities, many young Tu also believe that becoming modern entails abandoning the Tu language and respect for Tu traditions. The customary formalities between young people and elders have been broken, as seen in the elevation of the domestic status of daughters-in-law, no longer under the control of their mothers-in-law. My research indicates clearly that the mobility of the population and modern information technology have transformed Tu society. Not only have the personal attitudes of young Tu changed, but so also has their attitude to traditional Tu culture and to relations within the family.

Obviously, all of this has brought about an improvement of the status of Tu women in their families and in society. However, in their religious life, and in most public rituals, they still occupy a lower status than that of men. As a female researcher, I experienced this in my fieldwork. For example, doctors and teachers enjoy preferential treatment in Tu communities, since doctors save lives and teachers impart knowledge and wisdom. As a university scholar, I received preferential treatment from villagers; I was allowed to eat meals and drink tea with village elders during my fieldwork. As a married woman, however, I was not allowed to enter most of the village temples. Religious taboos restricting the behavior of females continue to operate despite all other changes.

To conclude this chapter: Okin argues that “a concern for the preservation of cultural diversity should not overshadow the discriminatory nature of gender roles in many traditional minority cultures, that, at the very least, ‘culture’ should not be used as an excuse for rolling back the women’s rights movement” (Okin, 2005). Chinese women were guaranteed equal social, economic, and political rights as men in 1950. Some Chinese male experts have even claimed, “Chinese women have achieved complete liberation and, therefore, they have no problems at all.” However, in minority ethnic groups like the Tu, my research clearly suggest that the leveling of gender distinctions that has occurred in many other domains has not yet occurred in the domain of folk religion.

CHAPTER 7 FOLK RELIGION AND THE STATE

The relationship between religion and the State in China has been characterized by dramatic change. This chapter will look at the shifting relationship between Tu folk religion and the Chinese State. It will examine in particular the manner in which the State has utilized religion as a vehicle for shaping political attitudes by justifying political power, establishing administrative authority, and maintaining social order.

7.1 The Communist Party of China's Policy toward Ethnicity and Religion

The State In traditional China developed strong links with the religion that prevailed at a particular time. For centuries, Chinese politics were embedded in religion. During the early period of Chinese history, the king was considered to be the intermediary between the human and heavenly realms. The considerable expenditures of time and resources devoted to sacrificial rituals and divination in the Shang (c. 1600 BC – c. 1046 BC) court suggest that the authority of the king depended in part on this role as intermediary (Jones, 2005). The early Zhou (1046-256 BCE) elites were chiefly concerned with their aristocratic ancestors, the powerful ruling gods, who involved themselves in political matters, while the common people were more concerned with lesser spirit, demons, and ghosts that were believed to inhabit the world and to specialize in causing trouble for humans.

As the centuries passed, governmental policy began encouraging a greater variety of religious practices to support the State. During China's Middle Ages, after Confucianism had fallen out of political favor, Buddhism replaced it as the discourse that framed international relations. By the late Qing period (1644 – 1912), "the major religious traditions were in a state of decay and thorough dilution in local forms of religious practice and a process of renewal ushered in by state policies and local elite" (Goossaert, 2005, 19). However, as pointed out by DuBois, "Religion was part of the

government – it was never intended to be independent. Religions that were not tethered to state control were banned by law, and persecuted without mercy” (DuBois, 2011).

7.1.1 Maoist China

After the founding of the New China (1949), the religious policy of the State became particularly unstable. The government didn't directly prohibit any particular religions before 1949, aside from occasional anti-religious activity motivated by domestic political concerns. Because the goals and belief systems of communism and religion are different, however, and because the Chinese communists are atheists, the communists were anti-religious to the core. From 1949 on, in addition to changing the economic structure of rural areas, the communist government launched a series of anti-feudalism campaigns. Religion was viewed as emblematic of feudalism and foreign colonialism in the initial post-liberation period.

During the 10 years Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), controlled by radical Maoists, adopted a rigorous anti-religious policy. Religious belief and practice were banned as backwards and superstitious. Many monasteries, temples, and mosques were destroyed; traditional religious practices such as fortunetelling and *fengshui*¹ (风水) were weakened. The Cultural Revolution, as noted by Thurston, “led to loss of culture, and of spiritual values; loss of hope and ideals; loss of time, truth and of life...” (Thurston, 1988, 605-606). The Cultural Revolution had a direct negative effect on traditional religious culture in China. Of course, Tu folk religion was not immune to this disaster; many Tu still remember how religious specialists were denounced at Red Guard rallies.

In the late 1970s, the policy was relaxed, especially after the death of Mao in 1976, when the State began to permit religious activities. “Traditional religious practices resurfaced, particularly in the countryside” (Morrison, 1984, 244). Since the 1980s,

¹ It is a Chinese philosophical system of harmonizing everyone with the surrounding environment.

the Constitution of the People's Republic of China guaranteed freedom of religion, and tolerance of religious expression has been permitted. In 1982, the state official attitude towards religion was enshrined in *Document 19*². This document gave more consideration to the historical background of religion in China, and acknowledged the existence of religion and its role in "the development of human society." Moreover, the Chinese Communist Party now allows religious practice and belief and thus a new space has appeared for religion of all sorts to blossom.

However, as Morrison has pointed out, "the CCP nevertheless still views religion from a dogmatic Marxist perspective and constructs its religious policy on traditional Marxist stereotypes" (Morrison, 1984, 246). The government's understanding of religion and its ultimate goals of denying or suppressing religion "are basically identical to earlier communist goals; only the timetable and the methodology differ" (Morrison, 1984, 246). Thus, in the post-Mao era, state policies toward religion in Mao's China have traversed three periods: cooperation, vacillation, and prohibition (Lai, 2006). The events of this period (the 1980s) revived the historical conflict between State authorities and religious movements.

7.1.2 Post-Mao Era

The new atmosphere introduced by the reform policies created fertile ground for the revival of religion in post-modern China. Central and local governments were encouraged to restore temples and to promote the restoration of local festivals and folk rituals to attract foreign visitors and thus bring in much-needed tourist revenue. In December 2004, the Chinese government announced a new set of rules that guaranteed religious belief as a human right. It is no exaggeration to affirm that religion

² **Document 19:** In Concerning our Country's Basic Standpoint and Policy on Religious Questions During the Socialist Period.

now enjoys more freedom and in fact now receives strong active support from the Chinese government.

In this process, “the Chinese government has openly acknowledged that religion has existed and will continue to exist as part of human civilization” (Chan, 2004, 344). But the “government’s policy does not address the thorny and embarrassing issue of religion because such a discussion would challenge the party’s fundamental interpretation of religion” (Chan, 2004, 344). Moreover, the government has repeatedly emphasized that “religion must be mutually compatible with socialist society,” meaning that religion must adapt to the Chinese socialist society in which it exists, and Chinese socialist society must adjust to the presence of religion. Guided by such assumptions, therefore, the government allows the public expression of religious beliefs and the public practice of religious rituals only as long as religion remains under State control.

China’s communist leaders have become aware of the influence that religion exerts in international affairs and its importance in people’s personal lives, They have therefore permitted religion but have sought to bring it under their system of control. The Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) is charged with the detailed supervision of religious activities and is under the control of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Committee (CCPCC). This department is also responsible for relations with ethnic minorities and for the integration of all minorities into the new Chinese society. These organizations closely resemble the “central and local agencies in the imperial government for control of the Buddhists and Daoists” (Dillon, 2001, 11).

In order to maintain a hand in the normal operation of religious activities, the government has also established many Islamic, Buddhist, and Daoist associations. By controlling the leadership of these officially recognized religions, the Communist Party in effect controls the organization of religion. As part of this strategy, some religious leaders are elected as deputies to the National People’s Congress and are even members of the CPPCC; others are appointed to senior posts in central or

local governments and participate in the running of national affairs. This method of cooptation establishes a strong link between central and local authorities and local religious authorities. In addition, the government officially recognizes patriotic religious organizations, which are themselves crucial to the CCP's control over religious believers.

Thus, from the above, we can see that official State policy toward religion has been in a state of flux, especially for the past thirty years. During the radical phase of Communist control (the Cultural Revolution), anti-religious policy was rigorous, and religious belief and practices were banned because they were regarded as backward and superstitious. But in the more lenient period of the late 1970s, the policy was relaxed, leading to a greater tolerance of religious expression which began 1980s. There has been a massive governmentally funded program to rebuild Buddhist and Daoist temples since the mid-1980s.

In general, after the reform and opening up, the Chinese State has intervened less in daily life, as long as people do not threaten the authority of the government. Cox argues "China's religious policy continues to uphold the Marxist goal of the eventual demise of religion while embracing a more pragmatic and tolerant approach to freedom of religion" (Cox, 2007, 374). Some scholars believe that the policy can be compared to the proverbial half-glass of water. Most would likely agree that given the almost complete absence of religious freedom twenty years ago, to have the glass half full today demonstrates remarkable progress. Perhaps more importantly, the glass continues to fill (Chen, 2003, 465).

In a word, the modern Chinese state has radically altered its official policy towards the public expression of religion. Since 1978, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China has guaranteed freedom of religion. Today's more tolerant religious policy in China can be seen as reflecting and extending a historical pattern inherited from previous regimes and dynasties (Chen, 2003, 466). As I mentioned above, during the Cultural Revolution religion was banned as "feudal superstition," and Tu folk religious

temples were confiscated, religious images destroyed, and the activities religious specialists prohibited. However, the Tu did their best to protect the statues of their spirits and continued to practice their religion in secret. The government has since then ceased in their efforts to micromanage popular life and consciousness. The popularity of a female folk goddess today – the *niangniang* – illustrates the remarkable rebirth of local folk religion in Tu areas since the Cultural Revolution. As an integral part of Chinese culture, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and Islam receive legal and financial support from the government, although the freedom they enjoy is limited. Even folk religious traditions, such as those of the Tu, also enjoy a new freedom under the official guise of supporting the folk traditions of ethnic minorities. Such folk religions do not enjoy the prestige of the officially recognized religions. But on the other hand neither are they subject to the same degree of monitoring by government officials.

7.1.3 Ethnic Policy

Quite apart from the regulation of religion, the Chinese State has also regulated the status of ethnic minorities. These ethnic policies of the CPP, though not explicitly dealing with religion, have had a significant influence on folk religion in China's minority areas. China is a politically unified but ethnically diverse nation. Ethnic issues have therefore always affected the long-term peace and stability of the country and the wellbeing of the people.

In an effort to mitigate tensions with ethnic minorities, the CPC undertook a lengthy process of designing a system of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities. After the New China was founded (1949), the CPC enacted policies toward ethnic minorities. The phrase "self-determination of ethnic minorities" appears in many official documents. Though the international community remains skeptical, it must be clearly stated that the CPPCC has implemented several of the Party's progressive ethnic and religious policies and energetically promoted ethnic unity and religious harmony.

As a politically expedient marriage between economic and political considerations, both domains are taken into consideration in the formulation of China's ethnic policy. The establishment of ethnic regional autonomy in China has allowed for great flexibility in terms both of local economic development and of the promotion of local ethnic culture. There are three levels of regional autonomy given to ethnic minorities: provincial, municipal and county. These levels have contributed to the remarkable recent development of ethnic minority groups, especially in terms of economy and education. CPP ethnic policy is based on the assumption that the customs of all national minorities should be respected. This assertion provides de-facto protection for folk religion, since almost all of folk religious rituals can be (and have been) defined by Chinese authorities as part of ethnic culture. Local governments view the development of a creative tourism industry in ethnic areas as a vehicle for simultaneous improvements in economic, cultural and social domains. "Ethnic tourism" has become a high priority in the formulation of local development policy. The promotion of visits by Chinese tourists, mostly Han, to ethnic minority villages has become a focal point of local developmental planning.

In the past, economic development in Tu areas was consistently slow; in recent years, however, the central and local governments have designed a variety of preferential policies to support ethnic minority groups in order to encourage the development of the local economy and Tu society. In addition to the priority given to the development of local industry and agriculture, the government also has taken steps to enhance the tourism sector. An important element in this effort is the encouragement of local ethnic groups to market their ethnic culture and customs as a vehicle for attracting tourists. Toward this end, local governments have increased investment in facilities related to indigenous folk culture in hopes of attracting tourists; this investment indirectly promotes the development of local folk religion.

In 2012, I met Mayor Shi in the village of Dongjia, who was born in the 1980s. As the representative of the local government, he gave me detailed information about the folk culture project in Dongjia. He told me that a series of folk tourist projects have been gradually developed in Huzhu County to improve the local economy. In Dongjia, the local government issued an interest-free loan of 200,000 Chinese Yuan to each family and has trained seven families to promote folk tourist culture. In addition, as iconic public symbols of local culture, two *benkang* (the earlier-discussed small outdoor shrines) and one field for *lunziqiu*³ (轮子秋) competitions had been under construction in the newly constructed plaza. He explained that the villagers had chosen these elements as their landmarks, but that the local government provided the funding.

My conversation with Mayor Shi revealed several interesting elements in the interaction between the local government and the indigenous population. (X is me and S is Mayor Shi.)

- X: From your point of view, with your special status as a government official, do you feel any tensions associated with ethnic and religious relations in local communities?
- S: No. It is on the whole quite harmonious. We do not have any ethnic tensions locally, since the local Tu and Han are very inclusive and tolerant. Also, the number of intermarriages between Han and Tu is large. The Han spouses generally follow the customs of the Tu, particularly when there is a large population of Tu in a village. Some Han do not share the Tu's religious beliefs, but, as members of the same community, they participate in religious activities.
- X: Being a Han cadre, how do you deal with affairs related to Tu religion?
- S: It doesn't matter that I am Han. They organize their own activities and do not prevent me from observing. Since I do not share their religious beliefs, they also do not mind if I do not kowtow, burn incense, or donate money.
- X: But in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, religious policy remained strict, and many government officials dismissed Tu

³ *lunziqiu* is a traditional sport with distinct Tu characteristics. It involves the wheels of a carriage.

religious belief as a form of feudal superstition. How about the situation now?

- S: Now that attitude is a matter of the past. But we still try to provide appropriate guidance concerning effective medical treatment. For example, we provide information on disease prevention and on the implementation of health insurance policies. We try to encourage sick villagers not to go to the temple, but to see the doctor instead, since it is quite possible for some patients to delay medical treatment if they ask for healing in temples. At this point, people have on the whole accepted the government's advice and visit doctors if they are sick. Now people will go to the village temples for other purposes – to divine the best direction of a gate before construction, to pray to find lost objects, to choose a date for marriage. In other words, we have seen that the use of village temples for medical purposes is getting weaker and weaker.

When I asked about the relationship between government officials and local people, he said that relations were satisfactory but that it would be difficult for a local person to request an appointment with a higher level official to appeal for some kind of help. I then asked why people would ask for such an appointment. He answered that the central government has enacted many policies to benefit rural people, but that there are often problems with the implementation. These policies include financial aid for single-parent families, preferential treatment for military families, and five forms of guaranteed assistance (food, housing, medical care, clothing, and burial expenses) for elderly persons who childless and infirm, in addition to assistance for the disabled and orphans. Local governments single out poor households to receive poverty alleviation funds.

But some of the recipient households are viewed locally as being poor only because of the laziness of the family members. This angers people who consider themselves hardworking but do not receive assistance. They ask, "Sluggards can get money from the governments. Why can't we?" Such disputes are not easy to settle.

In addition, current policy requires the village government to choose one low-income household to receive the minimum living guarantee from the government each year. The choice, however, is inevitably very difficult. In fact, the living standard of some

villages is already adequate, but even in such well-off villages one household must be selected as the low-income beneficiary. In contrast, some villages have many very poor households from which only one is chosen to receive benefits. This policy generates much dissatisfaction and many conflicts.

Moreover, regional governments provide different types of funds to local villagers for living expenses either after disasters or during periods of housing construction. The disaster relief policy allows local disaster survivors to declare their losses and apply for compensation from the government. At the present time, the compensation is sent directly to the village committees and distributed by village cadres. In distributing the compensation, some village cadres show partiality to their own relatives. Regional governments also provide monetary incentives for local people to buy construction materials for their houses. However, some village cadres distribute the money irresponsibly without rational planning. There are many conflicts between government officials and villagers that are generated by such irregularities in the implementation of financial support policies.

The new religious policy in contrast has been implemented without major conflicts. The Tu agree that the present religious policy is a great improvement, especially for projects aimed at the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Many local shamans and other religious figures have been named as the recipients of these funds under the rubric of support for intangible cultural heritage. They are understandably delighted when they receive more than 2,000 Chinese yuan per month in government subsidies. While I was interviewing a shaman, Ma Deliang of Yaoma Village, he proudly informed me that he had a government license (The Certificate of the Successor) and was receiving regular monthly compensation. Consequently, his youngest son, who at first had refused to follow in his father's shamanic footsteps, has suddenly dropped his opposition to inheriting his father's position. He is now participating in religious activities and actively learning the craft of shaman, fully willing to become his father's successor.



Figure 7-1. The *benkang*, expressed as a community center for elders

Such government support has thus been instrumental in the revival of folk religion. The government, which formerly restricted religious subsidies to the five officially recognized religions, now also supports folk religion in the minority areas, though not in the same way. It is redefined as support for ethnic diversity. In order to develop tourism by the commercialization of traditional folk practices, the central government now takes steps to protect and develop local ethnic cultures. All levels of government examine and approve projects and invest in construction related to folk religion in a variety of ways. This includes redefining religious sites as “activity centers for elders” knowing full well that they are principally used for religious activities. Such support is enthusiastically welcomed by local communities. It became clear to me that the government is aware of and respects the religious activities of villagers and folk culture.

Particularly in minority areas, many government officials themselves are members of the local ethnic minority community. They identify with their ethnic culture and have internalized its folk religion – although, as members of the Communist Party, they keep their religious beliefs to themselves. The favorable attitude which they display towards their folk religion is fully recognized and accepted by their superiors. In the implementation of religious policy such “ethnic cadres” are emotionally partial to the local religious tradition and enforce the policy on folk religious affairs in a variety of ways.

7.2 The Tu Folk Religious Revival

After the reforms which began in the 1980s, Tu folk religion has experienced a revival. Especially in the last two decades, many folk religious rituals have enjoyed wide support from local governments, which define such support as a means of preserving the local ethnic cultural diversity, which in turn attracts more tourists. Since 1980, the reconstruction of many local temples and religious sites has received financial support from the government under the rubric of “community entertainment.” The following paragraphs will explore the factors which have given momentum to this shift.

7.2.1 Popular Attachment to Religious Belief

Folk religious beliefs are deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of many of the Tu, particularly among the older generation. From birth to death, the Tu are constantly exposed to the presence of folk religion in their lives. During the Eradicating Superstitions Movement of the Cultural Revolution, countless village temples and religious monuments were destroyed, religious activities were forbidden, and religious specialists were denounced and persecuted. However, many believers continued to pray and worship in their homes. In my interviews, several elders recalled that during the Cultural Revolution the villagers had been instructed to destroy their statues. But in the dark of night, many people courageously and secretly hid the statues in the mountains or in the walls of their homes. During this period of religious suppression, villagers continued to pray to the spirits in secret for protection and blessings while at home or

while working in the fields. When the policy was rescinded, the people restored the statues to the temples.

Even today, the power of folk religion remains. Folk religious belief has never been eradicated from the life of the Tu. The Tu live in tight-knit communities centered on a single clan, and this settlement pattern has helped them to worship their family deity. Religion influences the ethics of daily life and village rules and customs via rituals, festivals, and other celebrations. These public manifestations of Tu ethnicity, particularly in the form of folk religious rituals, not only appease the spirits worshipped by the Tu but also shape the cultural identity of this ethnic group.

7.2.2 The Involvement of State Power

The constitution of the People's Republic of China has codified the principle of governmental support for religion, including now the religions of ethnic minorities. The State Administration for Religious Affairs controls China's five officially recognized religions and ensures that the registered religious organizations support and carry out the policy priorities of the government. There is, for example, a Living Buddha Contact System⁴ and Temple Management Committee⁵ in Tibetan Buddhist temples in Huzhu. It seems paradoxically that ethnic minority religions escape this strict control by the Chinese State; however, the government continues to intervene in local religious gatherings, and sometimes the politically influential temple management committee becomes involved in local religious rituals.

"New Rural Construction" is a landmark project developed in China to promote urbanization and to modify and rationalize the layout of rural settlements in order to improve people's living standards. In some rural areas, the government repairs houses,

⁴ One county governor is paired with a Living Buddha, and they need to contact each other regularly to exchange information.

⁵ It is a non-official Tibetan temple organization under the guidance of local government, but all the members are monks.

reconstructs toilets, connects tap water systems, and delivers internet services. In some areas characterized by exceptionally difficult environmental conditions, the government even resettles residents into more hospitable locations. Such New Rural Construction projects in Tu areas reconstruct or modify old houses, paint the exterior walls in uniform colors, and construct central squares or plazas. With government support, multi-functional plazas with basketball courts and fitness facilities have been built in most Tu villages. These new plazas have become very important spaces, for they provide not only a public space for recreational and political gatherings, but are also used as new centers of religious activities. People can rest, entertain friends or congregate, and on festival days or holidays, they can use these plazas to hold popular entertainment activities. New village administrative offices are built next to the plazas, so village officials can easily convene village meetings.

With the development of the ethnic tourism economy, the plazas were constructed with an iconic landmark building, decorated with characteristically Tu motifs and colors. As mentioned previously, *benkang* are traditional sites of religious worship in Tu areas and important sites of daily religious activities. According to Tu custom, each village should have its own *benkang*. On the one hand, a *benkang* is traditionally constructed at the entrance to a village in order to drive hostile spirits away and protect villagers; on the other hand, a *benkang* is also the place for villagers' daily activation of *zhuanguola*. But in the late 1950s, which was the period of harshest governmental anti-religious policy, the *benkang* were denounced as relics of feudal superstition and demolished. When the religious policy changed in the 1980s, some *benkang* were repaired or reconstructed. In the wake of the New Rural Construction movement, the local governments in collaboration with the Tu chose the *benkang* as an iconic landmark building. Large-scale reconstructions of the *benkang* were done with government support. In this manner the government's newly constructed public spaces in effect turned into religious centers.

Dongjia is a typical Tu village in Huzhu County. When I was doing my fieldwork there in 2013, a new plaza, decorated with ethnic motifs, was being constructed. At the center of the plaza was a huge *benkang*, instead of a basketball court or fitness facility. I asked a village official why such a huge *benkang* was being built. He answered, “Dongjia is purely a Tu nationality village. The government is willing to build a type of Plateau Tourist County to develop folk-custom tourism. So they invested 800,000 Chinese yuan in constructing this plaza as one part of the project to construct an ethnic folk cultural village, including the repair of any dilapidated houses in the village.” He explained that a stage was being built next to the *benkang* so that villagers could dance *anzhao* and play *lunziqiu* (a popular Tu sport). He emphasized that the construction of the *benkang* was done by volunteer labor from all the villagers, with financial support from the government. The old *benkang* near the plaza had fallen into disrepair over the years but was also being rebuilt with funding from the local government.

In addition to the plazas and *benkang*, the government provides funds to repair and renovate village temples by adding activity and entertainment rooms for the elderly. The daily routine of Tu elders centers on religious activities, so the reconstruction of such elderly activity rooms is considered to be a form of social welfare effort. The following conversation about the renovation of the village temple took place in Dongjia (here I am “X” and the interviewee is “A”).

X: Do you know how many years the temple has been here?

A: The temple was treated as feudal superstition and was destroyed in 1958, but was reconstructed several years ago in an effort to construct an activity room for elders. This was permitted by the local government after enactment of the policy of restoring the freedom of religious beliefs.

X: Well, the permission was for the activity room, but the construction is a temple. A statue of some deity is required in the temple, right?

A: Yes, but the statue was originally in the old temple. The government financially supported the construction of the basic facilities, such as the house and windows.

X: Wasn't the statue destroyed in 1958?

- A: No. The statue of our niangniang was hidden secretly at that time, since our niangniang is represented by a wooden stick that is different from other niangniang who are represented by of sacred litters. The wooden stick has a hole in it that is for the zhuangzang ritual [filling in specific things to stimulate the spirit of the statue]. In the neighboring village Bahong, they have a consecrated statue of their niangniang. But our niangniang is represented by a wooden stick and was easy to hide.
- X: Okay. Who filled in the zang [the sacred items stuffed into the wood stick]?
- A: The zang were inserted in the past. Nobody knows who did that. Now nobody dares to open the hole to see what is inside.

The village head told me that, “Just as this project is being completed in our village, many plazas and activity rooms for elders have been constructed in other villages. Some of them are purely for religious activities. Government officials know this but do not object.” He continued, “No matter how big or small their issues are, villagers always like to stop by their village temples to ask for help or suggestions. Because the temples are so popular, people will welcome it if the ground is leveled and partially planted with lawns, and if other basic facilities are constructed.” This conversation alerted me to the fact that local government officials have many ways of enforcing their policies. For example, as part of providing social welfare for elders, they construct activity centers and rooms in which to carry out activities mandated by the central government, in addition to providing facilities for local people. Local officials generally do not interfere with what the villagers do in the centers; government funding is not used to construct statues of deities. The villagers are aware of the social welfare policy, and everyone is satisfied.

The State’s influence on folk religion depends on the behavior of local village-based government officials. Their treatment of folk religion affects the outcome. Village committees are the basic units of political organizations in the Tu areas, and committee members are elected directly by villagers to serve as part-time administrative cadres. Most of these village cadres are local Tu, but occasionally they are from other ethnic groups. All of them support folk religion, even if they are Communist Party members.

Their basic attitude is now one of acceptance of local customs; therefore, they will even participate themselves in religious activities.

In the same way, there is also some participation in religious activities by government officials at the town level; these officials are the highly educated official state cadres whose job it is to enforce State policies. Since they have direct responsibility for management of village committees of village affairs, these cadres take into account the needs of the local people, are good at communicating with them, and for the most part understand the need for local religious activities. Usually they participate in the activities themselves. Such local government support has been an important factor in the revival of Tu folk religion. It illustrates that even the power of the State can be and has been harnessed in support of the villagers' religious needs.

7.3 The Legalization of Folk Religion

The de-facto legalization of folk religion under the guise of promoting ethnic customs has enhanced the revival of these folk religions. But they still lack official status. In China, the five major religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism) are in the Red Zone and receive official protection qua religions in contemporary China. In contrast to the five officially recognized religions, folk religion has no definite legal status and is thus in the Grey Zone. Folk religion therefore does not have the same legal protections. Efforts have been made to find a way to officially legalize folk religion and to create more social space for promoting its revival. My research suggests several possible strategies in this regard.

7.3.1 Obtaining the Legal Status of Village Temples by Applying for Conservation and Protection of Historical Monuments

Tu village temples are important venues for many daily activities. Village temples were officially recognized as administrative centers for managing local affairs and therefore can function as windows for state power. Local leaders tried to convert the temples into administrative centers, leading to constant negotiation between authorities

and local people. This gave de facto assistance to the protection and development of Tu folk religion.

In 1982, the Cultural Relics Protection Law was passed in the Fifth Conference of the Chinese National People's Congress. Article 2 of this law places the following cultural relics under the protection of the law within the boundaries of the Peoples Republic of China: sites of ancient culture, ancient tombs, ancient architectural structures, cave temples, stone carvings, and murals that are of historical, artistic or scientific value⁶. Under this law, in many Han areas of China historically important temples have been designated as protected cultural relics.

In the same way, Tu elites have appealed to the government and the cultural relics management departments to register village temples as ancient architectural structures, request funds for repair, and thereby obtain legal status for these local temples. If it has a long history, a folk religious temple will be quickly recognized as an historical and cultural relic. Since many village temples in the Tu areas were constructed in the Ming or Qing Dynasty, and the main halls of those temples are still well protected, many have been enrolled in the conservation programs of ancient architecture. For example, the Dragon King Temple in the village of Dazhuang has been recognized as a county-level cultural relic and has received yearly maintenance funds from the government. Temples registered in government records will be protected from demolition.

Another way to gain legalization is to attach the village temples to one of the five major religions, usually either Buddhism or Daoism. In the Han areas, small temples are declared as subordinate parts of Buddhism or Daoism in order to request their official legal registration. However, in ethnic minority areas such as Tu communities, the temples are clearly linked to ethnic culture and are not registered as branches of one of the official religions. There is another way of protecting them. They fall within the

⁶ <http://www.china.org.cn/english/environment/34304.htm>, 8/21/2015.

category of “Cultural Relics” or “Folk Customs,” and can be registered as such and thus achieve legal status. It was registration under this rubric that achieved the protection of many village temples among the Tu.

7.3.2 The Legalization of Temple Fair Activities

With the Reform and Opening Up, great changes have occurred with respect to the industrialization of China’s rural areas. The promotion of local economic activities has made the legalization of temple fairs possible. Some temples hold commodity fairs in the vicinity of the temple, a totally legal form of gathering. In the *biangbianghui* rituals of Donggou and Yaoma, religious activities are held inside the village temple, but merchandise stalls are spread all over the square outside the temple. In this way, temple festivals such as *biangbianghui* function not only as religious events for villagers but also as commodity exchange fairs. In recent years, many folk religious festivals have been approved and financially supported by local governments, and have attracted tourists interested in folk customs. Huzhu tourist attractions such as the Tuguhun Military Camps, Xiaozhuang Folk Custom Park, Western China Folk Custom Park, and similar folk tourist projects were carried out in order to attract more tourists, generate revenue, and provide a wider space for local cultural activity. These ways of giving de-facto recognition to folk religion have contributed to the folk religious revival that has been occurring.

7.4 The Competition among Village Temples and the Influence of Local Elites

In the past religion has played an important role in the organization of local political power. The *tusi* (土司, native chief) system was not abrogated in the Tu areas until 1931. “Religious activities are part of the family and social life of the Monguor society. Their social organization is woven into a religious environment. The chiefs of families, villages, and clans are its promoters” (Schram, 2006, 284-286). Under the native chief system of the Tu, religion had a very close relationship with local political power. In that context

religious life served not only private and familial functions, but also has had a public and somewhat compulsory social dimension.

In recent years social pressure toward religious participation has been buttressed by economic interests generated by the surge of cultural tourism. Religious festivals and practices can now be a source of increased income. This enhances the interest which people feel in participating in religious activities. Colorful and collective religious activities make it possible for a family or an entire village to exhibit its strength and influence. Tu communities now compete with each other for the performance of creative rituals.

In the *biangbianghui* of Dazhuang in 2013, my fieldwork assistant, Hu, told me that his family was intending to publicly offer many yards of cloth and other goods in the temple to express their gratitude for their prosperity during the past year. In making such a public offering they would also be demonstrating their economic well-being to other villagers. At the site where the *biangbianghui* was enacted, I saw many villagers bring swathes of cloth and bottles of wine along with food and money to offer to the spirits. It seemed that people were proud to be able to offer such gifts as tokens of their gratitude – and as demonstrations of their prosperity.

A similar competition takes place among village temples in different communities. The amount of incense burned in a village temple, as well as the enthusiasm with which it is performed, reflects the economic development of the village. With an increase in income, the villagers renovate their houses and upgrade their lifestyle. They then donate money to their village temples to acknowledge the blessings which they have received from the spirits. The more wealthy people which a village has, the greater the financial security and external appearance of the village temple. Villagers take pride in the appearance of their temple. Conversely, if the villagers are poor, the village temple will be substandard or in a state of disrepair. Villagers who have a difficult time making ends meet have neither the time nor the money to take care of the temple.

Enjoying much more favorable economic conditions, the villages of Hualin and Dazhuang have temples housed in magnificent buildings with exquisite decorations, set in large areas. It is said that several successful businessmen in Dazhuang donated a great deal of money to the village temple. A prosperous man from Hualin who works in Beijing raised funds through his kinship network. In short village temples have become ostentatious symbols of the economic wellbeing of the residents of the village.

In the competition for status that the village temples represent, local elites have played an important role in terms of providing or raising funds. Such prominent contributors can therefore be viewed as having played an important role in the protection of folk culture. In doing so they have achieved a high status in the eyes of villagers. Allying with such local elites is also a pathway to obtaining a stronger voice and more power in a village. While investigating the Tu areas of Tongren County, I learned that the reconstruction of a local village temple cost millions of Chinese yuan raised by a professor in the Department of History at Qinghai University for Nationalities. The professor in question insisted that the village temple should be renovated as part of the process of promoting ethnic culture. He raised a large sum of money and designed the new temple himself. A palatial temple for the mountain deity was constructed. This is only one example of the manner in which local professional and economic elites have played a role in the revival of folk religion.

In conclusion, scholars have analyzed and interpreted the reasons for the revival of folk religion. This forces us to reconsider some varieties of secularization theory, which posit a decline in religion as a result of economic modernization. It is undeniable that in some places modernization has had a dampening influence on religion. In the case of the Tu, however, an increase in prosperity due to involvement in the modern world has led to a strengthening of religious traditions.

It must be emphasized, however, that the major causal factor in local religious change – in this case, the revival of Tu folk religion – has been, not the contributions of

wealthy villagers, but the economic support given by the Chinese State. In any case the revival of folk religion in contemporary Chinese society is an important social fact that can easily be documented in many communities. Among the Tu, folk religion flourished, declined, and then revived. Demolished village temples have been rebuilt, and many folk religious activities, formerly forbidden, are now once again being carried out. Private economic actors such as wealthy villagers can contribute to a revival, and those with cultural power such as shamans and other religious leaders can also promote the revival of religion. However, the dominant force in the case of the Tu has been the Chinese State, whose power once threatened the existence of religion in China but which is now exercising its financial and political power to support religions. In analyzing the rise and fall and subsequent revival of religion among the Tu, we must recognize that the principal driving force has been the power of the State and of its shifting policies.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

A study of folk religion in rural China generates insights not only into the religious lives of an ethnic minority living in rural China, but also into many aspects of the social lives. The practice of folk religion mobilizes mechanisms that contribute to social solidarity in such areas. Folk religions differ by region but often function to preserve cultures values and village organizational structures. The study of folk religions thus takes us far beyond the somewhat abstract domain of folk beliefs and ideologies into very concrete domains. These include not only social organization, but also healing traditions, control of weather and crops, and other very practical dimensions of local life. For the Tu, their folk religion is a core feature of their lives. It not only maintains the traditional culture carried out in ritual life, but is a major mechanism for maintaining social order and solving a variety of practical problems. Moreover, the analysis of an ethnic religion also gives observers insights into many distinctive dimensions of the culture of the ethnic minority practicing the religion.

Underlying the multiple themes that have been dealt with in these pages is one unifying theme that is at the core of Tu culture: the quest for harmony. Harmony is a central theme not only in the folk religion but also in the social and familial lives of the Tu. Syncretic pluralism is another such core theme that reoccurs in multiple domains. The Tu have a history of migration and of ethnic interaction with other ethnic groups. These intergroup contacts have contributed to the syncretism and pluralism that characterizes Tu folk religion. And the religion in turn has functioned as a vehicle for cultural stability. Although certain details of the ethnic origins of the Tu are still disputed, it is unquestionable that their religious traditions have played an important role in helping them not only to create their ethnic identity, but also to maintain this identity, along with their characteristic traditions and customs, as the centuries have passed.

The literature on the folk religion of Chinese minorities is not only of general academic interest, but also has potentially practical implications for our sharpening the definition of religion itself. One commonly held traditional view refused to consider folk belief, rituals and symbols as a bona fide religion. Critics have taken the opposite position and have insisted that a system with those elements does indeed by definition constitute a religion. Scholars who reject the status of folk belief as a religion point to the absence of scriptures and formal theological texts. They do not consider folk rituals to be the functional equivalent of worship in churches, mosques, synagogues, or Buddhist temples. Folk beliefs are seen as isolated scattered relics inherited from the distant past, not full-fledged religions.

In this view folk beliefs such as those described here are not seen as elements in a “religion” and cannot therefore presumably be compared to institutionalized religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Daoism, which are now officially recognized in China. From an anthropological perspective, however, we can define a “religion” as any cultural complex that entails (1) belief in spirits, (2) rituals to interact with those spirits, and (3) specialists who guide the community with respect to spirits and rituals. Since the folk traditions of the Tu most definitely contain all three of these constituent elements, Tu beliefs and practices from an anthropological perspective, are as much of a religion as any of the world religions which happen to have additional elements such as scriptures and complex institutional hierarchies.

Cultural anthropologists and sociologists have utilized their observations of the folk beliefs, rituals and symbols found in a religious system as a vehicle for analyzing the relationship between cultural phenomena and social phenomena in Chinese society. C. K. Yang divides all Chinese religions into two categories. The first comprises institutional religion with complete written doctrines and religious organizations. The second include more diffused religions with folk beliefs and rituals, but without a consolidated written doctrine or an institutionalized, formalized organizational system. In China, institutional

religions featuring Buddhism and Daoism have independent theological systems, worship rituals and organizational structures, which have clear boundaries and are separate from other secular social organizations. Diffused religions on the other hand include the imperial heaven worshipping ceremony, familial ancestral worship, and the hero worship of guardian deities carried out within various professions. In the case of a diffused religion, its theology, regulations, rituals and organizations are embedded within secular institution and social order. There is no clear boundary between “religion” and these ordinary non-religious secular institutions (Yang, 1961).

Tu folk religion, however, does not fit easily into either of these types defined by Yang. It does not fall into the category of institutional religion as defined by Yang. But neither is it so “embedded” in the non-religious domains of Tu life that it cannot be analyzed as a distinct system. The folk religion of the Tu indeed does have its own distinct spirit beliefs that can be elicited via interviews, its own distinct observable rituals and its own organizational structure in which shamans and other specialists are at the center. It does not have a systematized written corpus of theological texts, and its specialists are not organized into hierarchical structures with formal training and initiation procedures. But it cannot for that reason be ejected from the category “religion.”

There are certain universal features shared in the folk religions found both in Tu areas and in other Han areas. For example, both share polytheistic tendencies found in autochthonous Chinese religion that direct worship and sentiments to a variety of spirits rather than to a single deity who, as in the monotheistic religions of the West, is considered supreme over all other spirits and is viewed as the only appropriate object of exclusive worship. Both the Tu and the Han share this polytheistic inclination.

However, Tu folk religion has other ethnic and regional characteristics that set it apart from Han folk religion. Tu folk religion is more highly organized into an internally consistent series of beliefs and practices. It is an internally cohesive system with clearly articulated beliefs and specialized rituals, much more so than is found in villages

practicing Han folk religion. Furthermore, in Han areas most popularly venerated spirits are specialized in their function. But the spirits of Tu folk religions are multi-functional. This tendency is so marked that the functions of different spirits may overlap, creating rivalries among the spirits. We have also seen that Tu folk religion has been influenced by other religions, particularly Buddhism and Daoism, and is thus marked by syncretism. In its syncretic tendencies, however, it has a complete inventory of all the elements needed to define a system anthropologically as a “religion.” These include spirit beings who are objects of belief, religious specialists, religious rituals, special times in which these rituals are called for, and special sites where the rituals are carried out. As we have seen in these pages, Tu folk religion defines a wide range of times as sacred and creates multiple spaces for the performance of religious rituals. The sacred times are defined in the context of the life practices of the public, including the predictable agricultural cycle and the unpredictable occurrence of illness or other crises in the personal lives of people.

The Tu are also quite “ecumenical” and practical in terms of the spirits whom they will approach and venerate. We have already discussed certain high-status local deities such as the dragon kings and the multiple village *niangniang* who are the major focus of Tu veneration. But besides these important spirits, almost any other spirit, even one from another tradition, can be worshipped. If the Tu believe that a particular spirit can solve a particular problem, the Tu are not concerned with its origins. There is no formal ranking of folk spirits and little tendency to relegate a particular spirit to a particular functional domain. Nor is there a distinction made between the spirits of the official state-approved religions and the folk spirits of Tu tradition. Through prayer and the offering of sacrificial gifts, people communicate with all sorts of spirits and can ask not only their own shamans for help but also Tibetan Buddhists lamas or Daoist priests.

As the carriers and communicators of Tu folk religion, however, their own religious specialists, including the *bo*, the *benbenzi* and the *shidianzeng*, are the ones most

frequently consulted. They are the ones who have the major responsibility for establishing a harmonious relationship between human beings and the spirits. They do this through the practice of a series of religious rituals that ward off evil spirits, illness, and natural disasters. They also maintain the sacredness of various folk festivals and transmit religious beliefs and practices from generation to generation. With families and villages being the locus of most Tu folk religion, religious activities such as burning incense, kowtowing, walking around a *benkang* and chanting mani are a part of daily life. Religious beliefs lodged in the brain have been integrated into behaviors that occur in daily life, much more so than among many religious believers of the West who relegate religious practices to one day a week. Tu rituals are imbued with cultural understandings that make them relevant to daily life. Tu folk religion presupposes a constant linkage between spirit beliefs and the ordinary events of daily life.

We have seen that the Tu take a pragmatic approach to religion. In this sense they do make a general distinction between their own deities and those of Buddhism and Daoism. However, though they will occasionally give ritual attention to the latter, their own local deities receive more attention. The Tu are perfectly willing to honor the deities of Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism. Those spirits, however, are not seen as having as much pragmatic daily utility. People usually request help instead from their own local spirits whom they consider to be more closely related to their lives and more capable of solving practical problems. Marshaling their invisible power, these local spirits act to reconcile public conflicts, to maintain family harmony, and to meet the needs of individuals for healing and for divination.

The Tu make a de-facto distinction in their folk pantheon between benevolent deities and harmful evil spirits. The latter bring misfortune while the former are symbols of positive power and moral order. The constant combat between these two types of spirits imbues folk religion with a certain energy and vigor. The Tu worship the benevolent

spirits and perform religious rituals to solve problems and to bring good fortune to their own lives, despite the contrary efforts of hostile evil spirits.

At the same time, the Tu recognize that even the behavior of the good spirits has to be critically evaluated. They approach these friendly spirits to coax them into their service, to exert as it were a type of control over them. . If their prayers fail to produce the desired result, people will turn away and direct prayers to other spirits. They may even punish the ineffective spirits, for example, by removing their statue from its place in the temple and placing it elsewhere. In times of trouble, people pray for protection. If one spirit does not answer their prayers, the Tu will pray to another. In doing this the Tu are in a sense trying to enforce their petitions. At any rate, as is true of most folk religious traditions studied by anthropologists, the folk religion of the Tu is highly utilitarian in its goals, concerned with the present life, not oriented toward the salvation of their souls in an afterlife.

Though they give more attention to their own spirits, there is an ecologically smooth blending in their belief system of the spirits from multiple traditions. The diversity of religions is a well-documented historical fact ([Gross, 1999](#); [McKim, 2012](#); [Smith, 1976](#)). In terms of the origin of the spirits, the Tu pantheon is a harmonious blend of Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism, and their own folk religion. The three traditions mingle seamlessly in daily life. Inclusiveness is a central feature of the Tu approach to the spirit world. This inclusiveness does not entail abandoning their own spirits as their principal interlocutors. However, the generalized attitude of inclusiveness has allowed for the co-existence of multiple religions.

The question of religiously driven conflict is important in today's world ([Brahm, 2005](#)). However, as a minority ethnic group in China, the Tu give the world an example of peaceful religious coexistence. As a result of intergroup contact the Tu have come to accept elements from three different religions (Folk religion, Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism). Although those religions do not demand exclusive worship, we have

seen that a certain level of competition arose when they first came into contact. As religions that were alien to the Tu in times past, Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism both made efforts to expand their beliefs and rituals into Tu communities. Practitioners of the indigenous folk religion accepted elements of the outside religions at the same time that their core allegiance remained with their own traditions. Religious specialists from the different traditions hold different views about the relative power of their own spirits. The Tu continue to believe in the greater instrumental power of their own deities to solve problems than the “higher status” deities of Buddhism and Daoism. In this manner multiple religions coexist within the Tu tradition in a harmonious but occasionally competitive way.

As a powerful external religion, Tibetan Buddhism has penetrated every corner of Tu folk religion; however, the spread of Tibetan Buddhism and Daoism did not lead to serious conflict with (or destruction of) the pre-existing folk religion. The negotiation between these religions has been continuous and has led to the current symbiosis. Such interaction between the Tu folk religion and other religions has infused folk religion with internal variety.

On the other hand, the relationship between Tu folk religion and Daoism has been somewhat more tenuous. Compared with the impact of Tibetan Buddhism, the impact of Daoism in Tu areas is rather weak. The Tu do invite Daoist priests to officiate at rituals, but only occasionally. In Huzhu County, only a handful of villages still ask Daoist priests to preside over ceremonial rites of passage. Though these two religions do co-exist in Tu society, there still exists a tacit competition between them.

But even with the greater integration of Buddhist deities, the Tu still prefer their own local deities. Schram investigated the beliefs in Tu areas in 1950s and claimed that, “Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism) occupies the privileged position, and has been an overwhelming influence in the country of the Monguors” but “notwithstanding the conditions favoring Lamaism, the Monguors are fervent adherents of shamanism, and

occasionally of Daoism” (Schram, 1957, 6). This gives independent validation to my own observations on the inherent vitality of folk religious traditions.

I have also discussed the symbolic importance of the number three. In the Tu encounter with Tibetan and Han cultures, dynamics of compromise and coexistence led to the emergence of a cosmic view that focuses on the number three, as a core feature of local worldview. The number three can be seen as representing Buddhism, Daoism and folk belief. At the same time, three represents the sky, the earth and the human being, as well as the three nationalities – Tibetan, Han and Tu. The structure of Three in One has become a cornerstone of Tu ethnic identity and is an important theme in the view which the Tu have of their own ethnicity.

This emphasis on the number three also demonstrates the pluralistic and polytheistic characteristics of Chinese folk beliefs on the whole. This integrated quasi-trinitarian mode of thinking symbolizes the striving for the balance of potentially competitive powers in the quest for harmony. The importance of the number three as a cultural symbol of Tu religious culture is the result of centuries of co-existence, which has led to the integration of multiple ethnic groups along the Hehuang Corridor of nationalities. The prevailing cultural model of “one house should consist of three rooms” seems to be an apt parallel to the concept of the three religions achieving a unity and complementarity. Such an integrated conceptual schema was formed in interactions and dialogues among multiple ethnic groups. A thought structure based on such an integrative theme is beneficial to promoting intergroup communication and eventual harmony among different ethnic groups. Different groups with different cultures can live together without conflicts on the one hand, and on the other hand without an amalgamation which would weaken the internal integrity and distinctiveness of each of the groups.

Although the Tu are open-minded and receptive to incorporating elements of several other religions, they have never adopted elements of Islam or Christianity. According to documentary records, some Christian missionaries were active among

the Tu area but their teachings were never adopted. Some Muslims also live with Tu in some communities, but no Tu have converted to Islam. One important factor that has prevented the spread of Christianity and Islam among the Tu is the militantly monotheistic and exclusivist character of these religions. They reject any other deities except God or Allah. The Tu people will not renounce their attention to multiple deities or confine themselves to the exclusivist monotheistic demands of Islam and Christianity. Chinese Buddhism is a polytheistic religion, that venerates many spirits but that has no concept of a personal Supreme Being who demands exclusive ritual attention. The Tu are more comfortable with this theological approach. They accept any spirit into their folk pantheon as long as it is consistent with the tenets of Tu folk religion. A monotheistic deity that demands rejection of all other spirits is not consistent with these tenets.

There is another feature of Buddhism that makes it compatible with Tu orientation. A core value of Tu culture is the quest for harmony, which is also present in the Moso culture studied by Shih ([Shih, 2010](#)). There is another ethnic group in China, the Nuosu nationality, that have the opposite orientation: “The Nuosu emphasis on the fullness of life often led to family dynamics that fell short of being fairly called ‘harmonious’.” ([Swancutt, 2011](#), 1042). The Tu and Moso both believe in Buddhism, giving those two ethnic groups similar religious practices and general cultural values.

The interaction of Tu folk religion with politics and the State has been another important phenomenon discussed in these pages. We have seen how recent State interventions have actually enhanced, in recent years, the revival and development of Tu folk religion. There were rough and perilous moments, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. But in the constantly shifting interaction between State power and folk religion, the latter has never succumbed nor lost its character. Even today In Tu communities folk religion continues to be a more powerful than local government in the lives of ordinary people. The local spirits are much more effective than government officials in reconciling public conflicts, maintaining family harmony, healing the sick, and

in divination of the best paths for people to take when they are on some crossroad. For the past few years, the revival of Tu folk religion has demonstrated its tenacity. Though folk religion still has no legal identity and remains officially marginalized, it is in constant negotiation with the State and its officials. Folk religion has found its own living space in the new era.

Folk religion had been exposed to threats long before the arrival of the Communist government and the Cultural Revolution. The New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement in the early 1900s had already begun to place folk religion under siege. The elites of the New Culture Movement claimed that folk religions were no more than feudal superstition. This view was incorporated into official policy statements. Folk religion was caricatured, was denounced, and came under siege.

Things got worse, of course, after the founding of the New China under the Communist Party. But under the Communist government shifting political winds have led to dramatic zigzags in Chinese policy toward religion. As of 1949, the central government had already begun launching a series of social reform movements. Although most of these reform movements were not explicitly opposed to religion, religions were affected. In the Land Reform of the early 1950s, in order to strengthen the power of the new regime at the grassroots level, the State crushed the power and influence of traditional clans. Through the People's Commune Movement, State power took even deeper root and completely eliminated and replaced the social power of traditional clan organization in the countryside. These State interventions weakened the power of the clan, which in turn led to a decrease in folk religious activities. The decrease occurred because in the rural community local elites such as squires and clan elders had led the building of village temples and were the ones to organize religious ceremonies and celebrations. Religious events were often financed by the clans.

Guided by Marxist-Leninist perspectives, the government of New China adopted a tougher anti-religion policy than had been the case with the government of the Republic

of China. The New China permitted Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and the two major branches of Christianity, but also established religious authorities and patriotic religious organizations that forced religious leaders to cut any ties they may have had with coreligionists outside of China. During the Cultural Revolution, however, the Eradicating Superstitions Movement aimed at the destruction of all religions. Red Guards smashed religious monuments, burned religious books, and denounced and persecuted believers. Houses of worship were closed, religious activities were prohibited, and religion almost disappeared from public social life. Folk religion in particular was attacked as feudal superstition.

However, given the instability of the national political situation and the inability of the government to control the entire countryside throughout China, clan forces still survived in remote rural areas, including those populated by minority nationalities. Along with the Reform and Opening Up in the 1980s, the central government implemented a new policy towards religion and reestablished a mutual relationship between religious groups and political authorities. In order to achieve modernization, the central government enacted a series of development policies and development measures that have influenced the traditional mode of production, social structure, culture and education in minority areas. Though most were not directed at religion, these changes have also had a strong impact on local religion.

With a change of mind and a change of policy on the part of the Chinese State with respect to religion, the five officially recognized religions were allowed to embark on a path of healthy development that explicitly recognized the religious character of these entities. At the same time, folk religion has revived and resurfaced. But the State support has been disguised as a form of supporting ethnic customs and ethnic diversity. In this context folk religion in China still has no legal identity and remains marginalized.

Because folk religion has not achieved full legal status in China, the management of folk religion by the Chinese government remains somewhat ambiguous and ambivalent.

The Bureaus of Religious Affairs that supervise the five approved religions are not responsible for the management of matters related to folk religion. A confusing mix of other governmental departments deal with minority religions. Among these are the United Front Work Departments, the offices dealing with different aspects of culture, and the Spiritual Civilization Office. Meanwhile, the legal status of folk religious temples remains ambiguous. Therefore, it is difficult to find clear legal solutions to conflicts involving folk-religious temples. For example, the rights and interests of village temples, such as land-use rights, temple ownerships and financial management, and other similar rights, are neither guaranteed nor resolved. Such ambiguities cause confusion and slow down the further development of folk religion.

Since the Reform and Opening Up, with the diminished control of ideology and the greater governmental attention paid to improvement of the country's economy and of the general quality of life, religious life has once again began flourishing in the Tu areas. We have already discussed some internal and external factors that have contributed to the revival of folk religion. The internal factor is a reassertion of the importance of the psychological and spiritual need of the population. The external factor is a change in the behavior of the State. State power that was once directed to the destruction of religion has now been directed to support of religion, within the confines, of course, of recognition of the legitimacy of the Communist government.

In Tu areas, folk culture cannot be discussed apart from folk religion. The traditional religious beliefs remain the major context in which government support for Tu culture is conceived. When the government offers to support the preservation of "Tu culture," the first things that are popularly requested are the construction of temples to enshrine statues of local deities, to support annual religious festivals, to hold temple fairs and other rituals. In the Tu areas resolution of conflicts beyond the family is assumed to be the responsibility of folk religious organizations, not local representatives of the State. Folk religious themes are the salient element in discussions of local ethnic culture. In

some villages, administrators govern in the name of the village deity. The local religious specialists and authorities usually have more power than village officials. Religious figures, nor government officials, are in charge of conflict resolution and of important decisions made about events in the community.

The “activity rooms” that the government finances within temples and other Tu religious sites reflect this autonomy. Village temples are not only the center of religious activities, but also, under government support for “activity rooms,” are now becoming the centers for public affairs. However, those who have most say in such activities concerning public affairs are leaders of the religious organizations. Local government officials do not directly intervene in the affairs of local religious organizations, even when the government has financed the upgrading of a temple or the building of a *benkang*. These religious organizations have local autonomy. They are not affiliated with national or other outside religious organizations. In short, the involvement of the State in the financing of folk religious sites has not led to a decrease in the autonomy of local religious actors.

Meanwhile, in China, efforts to promote local economic development haven often taken the form of “Setting up the Cultural Stage” and “Putting on an Economic Show.” This refers to a strategy of developing the local economy by highlighting local culture, primarily for Chinese tourists. Local governments are now mandated to identify picturesque local cultural idiosyncrasies that could draw tourists and in the process put wind into the sails of the local economy.

This State policy not only attracts tourists. It also brings about a change in local Tu attitudes as well. More and more local Tu are now aware of the value of folk religion – both its cultural value and its potential economic value – and now actively participate in religious activities. Local elites and Tu scholars have also participated in the revival of local religious activities, and the masses of ordinary Tu people now seem keen to talk about the special features of Tu society and to reconfirm their own personal ethnic and

cultural identity. In this process, folk religion has received unprecedented attention as the central element in local Tu culture both by the government and by the Tu themselves.

There is another side to the story, however, another force that endangers the revival or even the survival of bona-fide folk religion. With globalization and the development of the market economy, structural changes in the job market have forced rural workers to move into cities. In this process the attitudes of young people are being transformed by contact with cultures alien to that of the Tu. As a result, traditional folk religious activities have been difficult to sustain. The role of shaman in particular is seen by youthful emigrants to be a marginal relic of a receding past. Few take it seriously enough to be interested in pursuing it, or even in participating seriously in ordinary folk rituals.

To recapitulate: the ethnic minority culture of the Tu assumed its present shape during interaction with many Chinese subcultures. Its religious traditions have also, as a result, come under diverse cultural influences. As products of cultural cross-fertilization, the structure of the Tu spirit pantheon and the diverse content Tu rituals give clear evidence of the multiple sources from which their ethnicity has been forged. All this has been the result of a dynamic process shaped by historical and cultural forces. The Tu show us that, though China's ethnic minorities continue to migrate and are forced to adapt their lives to new environments, it is possible for them to maintain continuity with their historical and cultural past.

I will conclude by suggesting that folk religion among the Tu has been the most powerful weapon in this struggle for the preservation of their ethnic identity. But far beyond questions of identity, their religion has also helped the Tu to deal with the overarching power of the State. Their religion was once a target of State aggression. It is now the principal feature of Tu life that is drawing special State support. That is, over the centuries, Tu folk religious traditions have not only affected the way people think about their production practices and their social relations. These religious traditions have also formed a subtle cushion to buffer their contact with the superstructure of

the Chinese State. It is hoped that studies of Chinese folk religion such as the present one will go beyond simply documenting the grassroots reality of a specific ethnic minority. They can also give us interesting insights into the interaction of a local human community with the Chinese nation at large and, in particular, with the Chinese State.

APPENDIX A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agu (阿姑): A term often used in addressing females among the Tu.

Anzhao (安昭): A traditional folk song and dance form that is popular in the Tu areas. The term refers to the words *anzhao suoluoluo* which are often repeated in the song.

Benbenzi (苯苯子): A category of ritual specialist who has studied some elements of Tibetan Buddhism and is in charge of chanting scriptural texts in folk religious rituals. The Benbenzi are Tu specialists who have received semi-professional training at Buddhist temples but are not Buddhist monks.

Biangbianghui (梆梆会): A traditional festival among the Tu, usually held in the second and third months of the lunar calendar, which is the planting season for green crops. The high point of the festival is the ritual dance that is performed to praise and repay the deities for the protection which they have given in the past to crops and to humans.

Biaocai (表材): A funerary ritual in which the coffin is decorated.

Bo (倅): The term used to designate the shaman in Huzhu County. He plays important roles in all folk rituals on behalf of individuals and groups as an intermediary or messenger between the human and spirit worlds. The term *bo* is also used to designate shamanic dancing or other shamanic activities in Huzhu communities.

Chumashen (出马神): The horse deity who is invoked at the moment of leaving home.

Duancha (端茶): To serve tea ceremoniously.

Fala (法拉): The term used in the Minhe area to designate the Tu Shaman who officiates at folk religious activities.

Fashen (发神): To communicate with deities through ritual dancing or through other ritual activities.

Fashenjian(发神箭): To communicate with deities using sacred divination arrows.
Fa means to hold or shake the sacred arrow when the religious specialist is transmitting messages from the spirits.

Fashi (法师): The term used by the Tu to designate a Daoist priest.

Fo-Fa-Seng (佛法僧): An acronym that refers to the three religions practiced by the Tu: Folk religion, Tibetan Buddhism, and Daoism.

Guanyin (观音): The name of the goddess of Mercy.

Guzhu (骨主): The term referring to the origin of family genes.

Hada (哈达): Also named *Khata*; this is a white silk ceremonial scarf, about a meter in length, used in ethnic groups who practice Tibetan Buddhism.

Heshoucai (贺寿材): A ritual held for elderly people before their death, during which their coffin is prepared and prayers are offered for them to continue living a long life.

Hua'er (花儿): A traditional folk song sung by nine different ethnic groups in Northwest China. The lyrics are improvised but follow certain rules. The content is about love, hard work in the countryside, or the joy of singing. The songs are also performed during community events, rituals, and other large-scale activities.

Huimashen (回马神): The horse deity who is invoked on returning home from a journey.

Jiuzi (灸滋): A traditional Tu ritual in which prayers are offered for rain.

Kang (炕): A type of traditional large bed found in Tu homes. During the day, it is used as a place for guests to sit and for family members to have a meal.

Kusang (哭丧): A funerary wailing ritual.

Lawa (拉瓦): The Tu Shaman in the Tongren area who officiates during the Wutu Festival.

Laozhe (老者): An honorific title given to elderly member of local religious organization who have a positive social reputation and who are known for their religious devotion and fairness.

Lingpai (令牌): A type of folk-religious token.

Majiao (马脚): An assistant of the temple custodian. They are typically four young men selected by the spirits during divination rituals.

Mani (嘛呢): The sutra of the Six Truest Words, pronounced “Om Mani Padme Hum.” It is used as a prayer in several rituals.

Manihui (嘛呢会): A ritual in which elderly Tu women gather in the village temple to recite scriptural texts. They fast from dawn to dusk and pray for blessings.

Manijing (嘛呢经): A type of scriptural text, most of them adapted from Tibetan Buddhist scriptures.

Maoguishen (猫鬼神): An evil cat spirit secretly venerated by some Tu women.

Marnyi Stones (嘛呢石): A heap of flat stone, rocks, and pebbles erected near the road leading to a village. It functions as a sacred site used for offering prayers.

Maze (麻泽): The Tu wedding ritual held at the bride’s home.

Miaojiaye (苗家爷): A local deity who protects growing crops.

Nadun (纳顿): A traditional Tu festival held in the Minhe area to celebrate a bumper harvest.

Nashijin (纳什金): A singer who functions as a master of ceremonies at weddings.

Qijiayanxi (祁家延西): It is the longest heroic epic poem among the Tu. Qijiayanxi is the name of a Tu culture hero in Tu origin accounts.

Qingmiaohui (青苗会): An elected committee that organizes the annual Tu temple fair. Committee members wield great authority among the Tu.

Rangni (让尼): A traditional fasting ritual.

Sangmenshen (丧门神): A legendary spirit believed by the Tu to be half-deity and half-ghost. He is feared as a source of misfortunes.

Sanqisanluoling (三起三落令): A practice of rising and falling three times in Tu folk songs.

Shailongwang (晒龙王): The practice of punishing dragon kings by exposing their statues to strong sunlight because of their failure to bring rain.

Shanshendian (山神殿): The name for the hall where a mountain deity is enshrined.

Shenjiao (神轿): A ritual leader in Tu folk religion.

Shidianzeng (什殿增): The spokesman for local spirits. His principal role is to shake the sacred divination arrow to communicate messages from the spirits.

Shouyi (寿衣): A shroud in which a corpse is wrapped.

Tiaoguanjing (跳观经): An annual Tibetan Buddhism Dharma activity in which Lamas dance in order to entertain the spirits in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery.

Tuqiu (图奇): A religious assistant in folk religious organizations. His job is to assist the temple custodian and the *laozhe* in enforcing decisions and rules, in collecting fines, and in resolving disputes among villagers.

Tusi (土司): A local Tu chief.

Wanshendian (万神殿): A traditional word referring to “thousands of spirits.”

Weisang (煨桑): To burn aromatic plant for offerings. People ignite pine branches, *Artemisia argyi*, and other leaves to produce strong smoke. Fried highland barley powder, yak butter, tealeaves, sugar, and other items are also used to help create smoke.

Weidasang (煨大桑): Also named Weitousang (煨头桑); this is an important community ritual to burn the first round of aromatic plant (Weisang, 煨桑) in the early morning of the first day of the year.

Wutu (於菟): A traditional festival held by the Tu in the Tongren area, in which shamanic rituals are performed for healing illness and expelling evil spirits.

Yinyang (阴阳): A well-known Daoist symbol that represents two opposing forces. The white and black elements that form a circle symbolize the complementarity, interconnectedness, and interdependence of apparently contrary forces.

Yuanman (圆满): A folk religious concept referring to excellence or perfection in the practice of religion.

Zaoshen (灶神): The Kitchen God.

Zhuanguola (转郭拉): To walk around Guola, which refers to scriptural texts that are made to spin. It is also the practice of walking clockwise around sacred places during prayer.

Zhuangzang (装脏): Folk religious ritual in which a ritual object is filled with objects that will activate and unleash spiritual forces.

Zhuanshanjing (转山经): A traditional Tu ritual in which people walk around the mountains while chanting scriptural texts and offering prayers to the spirits.

Zuo'er (座儿): A traditional Tu coffin, constructed in the form of a two-story wood building.

APPENDIX B
THE LIST OF FESTIVALS OF TU NATIONALITY

Table A-1. The list of festival of Tu Nationality

Lunar Month	Lunar Date	Name and Content of Festivals	Locations	Participants
1st	1st	Weidasang: Welcoming deities and celebrating the Lunar New Year	Huzhu mountain tops	Han, Tibetan, and Tu
	2nd&3rd	Offer sacrifice to Lashize and worship the local deity	All Tu villages and mountain tops	Tu families and clans
	8th&14th	Guan Jing Hui: Religious dance in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery	Youning Monastery	Tibetan and Tu
	15th	Lantern Festival: Ritual of exorcism and worshipping the fire deity; Tu Anzhao dancing	All non-Muslim villages in Huzhu	Han and Tu
	2nd-16th	Prayer gathering	Youning Monastery	Tibetan, Tu
2nd	2nd	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Dazhuang and Donggou village temples	Tu
	4th	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Dongshan village temple	Tu
	9th	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Chaergou village temple	Tu
3rd	3rd	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Yaoma, Lifeng, Najia Aitou village temples	Tu
	12th	Biangbianghui (also known as the Egg Festival): shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Danma village temple (Songde Community)	Tu
	18th	Biangbianghui (also known as the Egg Festival): shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Danma village temple	Tu
5th	4th-8th	Zhuanshanjing: The ritual of Xiazhen (against hail disasters) and Chapai (for harmony in the family and community)	All Tu villages	Tu
	5th	Dragon Boat Festival: planting willow trees in front of their gates, picnicking, and singing folk songs	All non-Muslim villages in Huzhu	All people in Huzhu
	5th	Qingmiaohui: Hiking, dancing, wrestling, as entertaining spirits	All Tu villages	Tu

Table A-1. Continued:

Lunar Month	Lunar Date	Name and Content of Festivals	Locations	Participants
6th	2nd-9th	Prayer gathering	Younging Monastery	Tibetan, Tu
	6th	Mantou Si Hua'er Festival: Folk song performance and competition to entertain spirits	Danma Village; Wufeng Town	All people in Huzhu
	8th	Guan Jing Hui: Religious dance in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery	Younging Monastery	Tibetan and Tu
	11th	Hua'er Festival: Folk song performance and competition; entertainment of spirits	Danma Town	All people in Huzhu
	13th	Hua'er Festival	Songpan Monastery (Donghe Town)	All people in Huzhu
7th	1st	Horse Racing Festival	Gantan Village	Tibetan and Tu
8th	15th	Mid-Autumn Festival	All non-Muslim villages in Huzhu	Tibetan and Tu
9th	9th	Xiejiang: Giving thanks to the spirits, hosting a reception for protection of the crops	Tu village temples	Tu
	9th	Double Ninth Festival (Chung Yeung Festival)	All parts of Huzhu	Han
10th	1st	Eating dumplings, worshipping ancestors (Changing into winter coats)	Han and Tu villages in Huzhu	Han and Tu
	2nd	Worshipping Bahaer Guardian Deity	Younging Monastery	Tu
	15th	Worshipping the Palden Lhamo Guardian Deity	Younging Monastery	Tibetan and Han
	19th	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Langjia village temple	Tu
	24th	Light offerings to worship Lama Tsong Khapa	Younging Monastery	Tibetan and Tu
12th	8th	Biangbianghui: shamanic dance to entertain the deities	Dongjia village temple	Tu
	8th	Labajie: eating mixed rice, getting ice from rivers	Han and Tu villages in Huzhu	Han and Tu
	23th	Seeing Kitchen God off	Han and Tu villages in Huzhu	Han and Tu
	30th	Lunar New Year's Eve: Welcoming and greeting deities and worshipping ancestors	All non-Muslim villages in Huzhu	Han Tibetan , and Tu

REFERENCES

- Ahern, E. M. (1973). *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Baker, H. D. R. (1979). *Chinese Family and Kinship*. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Baldwin, E., & Thune, M. (2008). The epistemological limits of experience-based exclusive religious belief. *Religious Studies*, 44, 445–455.
- Bell, C. (1989). Religion and chinese culture: Toward an assessment of “popular religion”. *History of Religions*, 29(1), 35–57.
- Berling, J. (1980). *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Blau, J. R., Land, K. C., & Redding, K. (1992). The expansion of religious affiliation: An explanation of the growth of church participation in the united states, 1850–1930. *Social Science Research*, 21, 329–352.
- Bock, J. G. (2001). *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and the Double-edged Sword*. Westport, Conn: Praeger.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brahm, E. (2005). Religion and conflict. In G. Burgess, & H. Burgess (Eds.) *Beyond Intractability*. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder.
- Breault, K. D. (1989). New evidence on religious pluralism, urbanism, and religious participation. *American Sociological Review*, 54, 1048–1053.
- Brewer, J. D., Higgins, G., & Teeney, F. (2010). Religion and peacemaking: A conceptualization. *Sociology*, 44(6), 1019–1137.
- Brewer, J. D., Higgins, G., & Teeney, F. (2011). *Religion, Civil Society and Peace in Northern Ireland*. OUP Oxford.
- Cai, X. (2007). ‘bo’ in tu folk religion and the analysis of its folklore function. *Journal of Northwest University for Nationalities*, 3, 94–97.
- Cavanaugh, W. T. (2009). *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.
- Chakanza, J. C., & Ross, K. R. (1992). *Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Malawi*. Zomba, Malawi: Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College, University of Malawi.
- Chan, K. (2004). China’s socioeconomic changes and the implications for the religion-state dynamic in china. *BYU Law Review*, 325.

- Chaves, M., & Cann, D. E. (1992). Regulation, pluralism, and religious market structure: Explaining religion's vitality. *Rationality and Society*, 4, 272–290.
- Chen, H. (2003). A brief overview of law and religion in the people's republic of china. *BYU Law Review*, 2, 465–474.
- Cohen, V. P. (1987). Chinese religious: Popular religion. In M. Eliade (Ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13. New York: Macmillan.
- Comaroff, J. (1987). Of totemism and ethnicity: Consciousness, practice and the signs of inequality. *Ethnos*, 52(3-4), 301–323.
- Coward, H. G. (1985). *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Cox, L. (2007). Freedom of religion in china: Religious, economic, and social disenfranchisement for china's internal migrant workers. *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal*, 8(2), 370–430.
- Davis, E. L. (2001). *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- de Ridder, J. (2010). Religious exclusivism unlimited. *Religious Studies*, 47(4), 449–463.
- Dean, K. (1993). *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dean, K. (1998). *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Deng, X., & Sang, G. (2002). Field notes of 'baolai hui'. *China's Tu Nationality*, 03.
- Dillon, M. (2001). Religious minorities and china. *Minority Rights Group International Report*.
- Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Du, S. (2007). Divine reconciliations: The mother of grain and gautama buddha in de'ang religion. *Religion*, 37(2), 150–163.
- DuBois, T. D. (2011). *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- E, C. (2002). On the variety of religious belief in the tus' folk culture. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, 5.
- E, C. (2004). Studies of the worship of frogs in chinese minority nationalities. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, 5, 139–142.

- E, C. (2006). On the gods and ceremony in the fold belief of the tus. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute*, 02.
- E, C. (2008). Research into the sacrifice circle and belief circle of the tus. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute*, 4, 26–29.
- E, C. (2009). A religious anthropological explanation of the wizard “fashen” of the tus. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute*, 2, 15–19.
- Ebrey, P. B., & Gregory, P. N. (Eds.) (1993). *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, chap. 2-4, 6-7. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Eisenberg, A., & Spinner–Halev, J. (Eds.) (2005). *Minorities within Minorities. Equality, Rights and Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Émile Durkheim, & Swain, J. W. (1954). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Glencoe Ill: Free Press.
- Fan, Y. (1997). A brief comment on the religion of tu nationality. *Studies in World Religions*, 1.
- Fang, J. (1990). Rite of the white tiger in tu areas. *Northwest Nationalities Research*, 2.
- Feng, X. (2005). Analysis on the current situation and strategical study for hui people's female children education. *Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 6, 134–138.
- Feuchtwang, S. (1992). *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China*. London: Routledge.
- Feuchtwang, S. (2001). *Popular Religions in China: The Imperial Metaphor*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Finke, R., & Iannacoone, L. R. (1993). Supply-side explanations for religious change. In W. C. Roof (Ed.) *Religion in the Nineties*, vol. 527 of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, (pp. 27–39). London: Sage.
- Finke, R., & Stark, R. (1988). Religious economies and sacred canopies: Religious mobilization in american cities, 1906. *American Sociological Review*, 53, 41–49.
- Finke, R., & Stark, R. (1989). How the upstart sects won america: 1776-1850. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28, 27–44.
- Finke, R., & Stark, R. (1992). *The Churching of America – 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Frazer, J. G. ([1918] 2002). *Folklore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law*. Curzon Press.

- Gao, B. (1997). *Modernization and the Changes of Ethnic Lifestyle*. Tianjin: Tianjin Peoples Publishing House.
- Gao, Y. (1998). *Chinese Culture of Temple Fair*. Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Gao, Z. (2008). Multi-religion and social harmony— the study on the religion development of the minorities in yunnan. *The Journal of Yunnan Administration College*, 3.
- Gates, H., & Weller, R. P. (1987). Hegemony and chinese folk ideologies: An introduction. In *Modern China*, vol. 13 of *Symposium on Hegemony and Chinese Folk Ideologies, Part I*, (pp. 3–16). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Goossaert, V. (2005). State and religion in modern china: Religious policies and scholarly paradigms. In *Rethinking Modern Chinese History: An International Conference to Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Institute of Modern History*, State and Society. Taipei: Academia Sinica.
- Groot, J. J. M. D. (1892-1910). *The Religion System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Gross, R. M. (1999). Religious diversity: Some implications for monotheism. *Cross Currents*, 49(3).
- Hansen, V. (1990). *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- He, M. (2009). Build the harmony and respect the diversity – the study of the minority religious beliefs. <http://www.fjdh.com/wumin/2009/04/21582064969.html>.
- Hogan, L., & Lehrke, D. (2009). *Religion and the Politics of Peace and Conflict*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Hoke, N. C. (1892). Folk-custom and folk-belief in north carolina. *Journal of Ameican Folklore*, 5(17), 113–120.
- Hsu, F. L. K. (1948). *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Iannacoone, L. R. (1991). The consequences of religious market structure: Adam smith and the economics of religion. *Rationality and Society*, 3, 156–177.
- Iannacoone, L. R. (1992). Religious markets and the economics of religion. *Social Compass*, 39, 123–131.
- Jackson, S. A. (2005). *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking toward the Third Resurrection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Janke, P. (1994). *Ethnic and Religious Conflicts: Europe and Asia*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Dartmouth.
- Jin, G. (2006). Mountain god worship of tu nationality. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute–Social Sciences*, 32(4).
- Jin, Z. (1989). *Chinese Folk Beliefs*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Education Press.
- Johnson, D. (Ed.) (1995). *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies*, chap. by Robert L. Chard and by Patricia Berry. Berkeley, CA: Chinese Popular Culture Project.
- Jones, L. (2005). Chinese religion: An overview. In L. Jones (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2nd ed.
- Kang, X. (2009). Sacred space on china's ethnic frontier two temples, three religions, and a tourist attraction: Contesting. *Modern China*, 35(227).
- Knitter, P. F. (2002). *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Orbis Books.
- Krader, L. (1955). Book review. In L. M. J. Schram (Ed.) *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier: Their Origin, History, and Social Organization*, vol. 57. American Anthropologist.
- Kuutma, K. (1998). Festival as communicative performance and celebration of ethnicity. *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 7, 12–26.
- Lai, H. H. (2006). Religious policies in post-totalitarian china: Maintaining political monopoly over a reviving society. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 11(1), 55–77.
- Land, K. C., Deane, G., & Blau, J. R. (1991). Religious pluralism and church membership: A spatial diffusion model. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 237–249.
- Li, H. (2006). On the kitchen god belief of the tus in tuguan village of huzhu county. *Nationalities Research in Qinghai*, 17(3).
- Li, Q. (1990). *The Worship of Deities for Professions in China*. China Overseas Chinese Publishing House.
- Li, Z., & Li, M. (1998). The customs of the religions in the tu nationality and tibetan buddhism. *China's Tu Nationality*, 7.
- Liu, K. (1993). Playing wutu – a living fossil shows the totemism of ancient qiang people. *Nationality Arts*, 3.
- Lu, Y. (2000). *Folk Secret Cults in Shandong*. Contemporary China Publishing House.
- Lv, J. (1985). The custom of shamanism in the tu nationality. *She Hui Ke Xue Can Kao*, 24.

- Ma, D. (2005). An interpretation of the cultural phenomenon of 'nadun' of the tu nationality in qinghai. *Journal of Qinghai Normal University*, 108(1), 79–84.
- Ma, X., & Han, B. (1992). *History of Chinese Folk Religion*. Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- McKim, R. (2012). *On Religious Diversity*. New York: Oxford Press.
- Minkler, L., & Cosgel, M. M. (2004). Religious identity and consumption. *Economics Working Papers*, (200403).
- Morrison, P. (1984). Religious policy in china and its implementation in the light of document no. 19. *Religious Policy in China*, 12(3), 244–255.
- Nassen-Bayer, & Stuart, K. (1992). Mongol creation stories: Man, mongol tribes, the natural world, and mongol deities. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51(2), 323–334.
- Needham, J. (1956). History of scientific thought. In *Science and Civilisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Okin, S. M. (1999). Is multiculturalism bad for women? In J. Cohen, M. Howard, & M. C. Nussbaum (Eds.) *Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okin, S. M. (2005). Multiculturalism and feminism: No simple question, no simple answers. In A. Eisenberg, & J. Spinner–Halev (Eds.) *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity*, (pp. 67–89). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinches, T. G. (1892). Upon the types of the early inhabitant of mesopotamia. *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 21, 86–99.
- Platvoet, J., & van der Toorn, K. (1995). *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Pu, W. (1985). Wangfo living buddha of youning temple and the general records of youning temple by the fifth wangfo living buddha. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute–Social Sciences*, 3.
- Pu, W. (1991). *Folk Secret Cults in China*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Peoples Publishing House.
- Qian, M. (1999). Women's equal opportunities in education and sustainable development. *Theory and Practice of Education*, 4.
- Qin, Y. (1994). A brief talk on the domination of religious temples in the tu areas of historical huzhu. *China's Tu Nationality*, 3.
- Rappaport, R. A. (1992). Ritual. In R. Bauman (Ed.) *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments*. New York.

- Ren, Z., & Li, Z. (1998). The evolution of the religious beliefs in the tu nationality. *Qinghai Minyuan Xuebao*.
- Rouner, L. S. (1984). *Religious Pluralism*. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Sachedina, A. A. (2001). *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford University Press.
- Sang, G. (2002). Experiencing 'xiu cai'. *China's Tu Nationality*, 3.
- SangjiRenqian (2004). Studies of the political participation of minority women from ethnic areas in contemporary china "golden frog" and primitive totem – of the origin of ancient tu culture. *China's Tu Nationality*, 3, 58–61.
- SangjiRenqian (2006). The god of yellow cow: The imagination of the primeval agriculture of tu nationality. *China's Tu Nationality*, 03.
- Sangren, S. P. (1984). Great tradition and little traditions reconsidered: The question of cultural integration in china. *Journal of Chinese Studies*, 1(1), 1–22.
- Sangren, S. P. (1987). *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Schlee, G. (2008). *How Enemies are Made: towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Schram, L. M. J. (1954). The monguors of the kansu-tibetan frontier: Their origin, history, and social organization. *Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 44(1).
- Schram, L. M. J. (1957). The monguors of the kansu-tibetan frontier: Part ii. their religious life. *Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 47(1).
- Schram, L. M. J. (1961). The monguors of the kansu-tibetan frontier: Part iii. records of the monguor clans. *Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 51(3).
- Schram, L. M. J. (2006). *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*. Xining City: Plateau Publications.
- Sered, S. (2007). Prologue: Negotiating women's roles and power: The practice of world religions in contemporary asia. *Religion*, 37, 111–116.
- Shachar, A. (2001). *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shao, Z. (2004). Research on zhuang females under the background of traditional culture. *Studies of the Ethnic in Guangxi*, 4.

- Sharma, A. (2009). *The World's Religions after September 11*. Westport, Conn: Praeger.
- Shih, C. (2010). *Quest for Harmony: the Moso Traditions of Sexual Union and Family Life*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Silk, M. (2007). Defining religious pluralism in america: A regional analysis. *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, 612, 64–81.
- Smith, W. C. (1976). *Religious Diversity: Essays*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Smock, D. R. (Ed.) (2006). *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War Peaceworks*. No. 55 in *Peaceworks*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Song, Z. (1990). *Wu and Folk Beliefs*. Beijing: China Overseas Chinese Publishing House.
- Stark, R. (1985). Church and sect. In P. E. Hammond (Ed.) *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, (pp. 139–149). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stark, R. (2007). *Sociology*. Thomson Wadsworth.
- Stark, R., & Bainbridge, W. S. (1985). *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stark, R., & McCann, J. C. (1993). Market forces and catholic commitment: Exploring the new paradigm. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 32, 111–124.
- Stuart, K., & Hu, J. (1991). The tu fala: Trance mediums of northwest china. *Shaman's Drum*, 23, 28–35.
- Stuart, K., & Hu, J. (1992a). Death and funerals among the minhe tu (monguor). *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51(1), 67–87.
- Stuart, K., & Hu, J. (1992b). Illness among the minhe tu, qinghai province: Prevention and etiology. *Mongolian Studies*, 15, 111–135.
- Stuart, K., & Hu, J. (1993). That all may prosper: the monguor nadun of the guanting/sanchuan region, qinghai, china. *Anthropos*, 88, 15–27.
- Swancutt, K. (2011). Review: Quest for harmony: The moso traditions of sexual union and family life by chuan-kang shih. *The China Quarterly*, 208, 1021–1062.
- Tan, M. (1993). *Nationalities and Development*. Central University for Nationalities Publishing House.
- Tang, J. (1996). The spread and development of tibetan buddhism in tu and yugu nationalities. *Northwest Nationalities Research*, 1.

- Thurston, A. F. (1988). *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of Intellectuals in China's Great Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. (1968). *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2. London: John Murray.
- Tysick, C. (2007). Fertility rites and the married body: Remembering an ancient past through symbolic imagery. *Philica.com*.
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- von Glahn, R. (2004). *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Wang, A. (2010). Folk religion for the maintenance of religious ecological balance mechanism. *China Nationality Daily*.
- Warner, S. R. (1993). Work in progress towards a new paradigm for the sociological study of religion in the united states. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 1044–1093.
- Wen, Z. (2002). Tibetan buddhism's spread in minghe region of tu nationality and cultural unity. *Northwest Nationalities Research*, 2.
- Wickeri, P. L., & Tam, T. (2011). The religion life of ethnic minority communities. In D. A. Palmer (Ed.) *Chinese Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, A. (Ed.) (1974). *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Wu, B. (1996). *The Folk Belief in China*. Shanghai People Press.
- Xie, Z. (2006). *Religious Diversity and Public Religion in China*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Xin, Y., Qi, W., & Dong, S. (2006). The research and analyses of the condor culture of tu nationality. *China's Tu Nationality*, 3.
- Xu, C. (2004). The sun-worship of tu nationality. *China's Tu Nationality*, 1.
- Yang, C. K. (1961). *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. University of California Press.
- Yang, W. (2007). On the worship of "maoguishen" of the tus. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute*, 4, 30–33.

- Yang, W., & Yang, D. (2005). A preliminary probe into worship of deity sword of the tus. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute*, 1, 25–28.
- Ye, W. (2007). Female education in china:a gender culture and system analysis. *Fujian Tribune (The Humanities & Social Sciences)*, 5.
- Yuan, L., & Teng, L. (2008). On the similarities and differences between zhuang women and hakka women. *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities*, 30(2).
- Zhai, C. (2001). The brief history of tibetan buddhism in the tu areas. *Tibetan Studies*, 2.
- Zhai, C. (2003a). The study and research on the tibentan buddhism belief of the tu nationality. *Pumen Xuebao*, 16, 1–30.
- Zhai, C. (2003b). The study of the tu's tibetan buddhism. *Tibetan Studies*, 1, 70–77.
- Zhai, C. (2003c). The tibetan buddhism among the tu nationality. *Tibetan Studies*, 1, 70–77.
- Zhai, C., & Bai, X. (2010). Funeral ceremony narrative of tus and female social psychology. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities University*, 36(1).
- Zhang, Q. (1990). The brief description of rebirth of a famous monk in qinghai youning temple—tuken hotogtu. *She Hui Ke Xue Can Kao*, 23.
- Zhao, S.-Z. (2007). Pluralism about religious culture of tu nationality and the analysis of its changing reasons. *Journal of Qinghai Nationalities Institute—Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition*, 5.
- Zhou, Y. (2003). The female uygur's matrimony and the changes. *Northwest Nationalities Research*, 2(19).
- Zou, L. (2008). Analysis of the multiple integration of the traditional culture of the dali bai from a religious perspective. *Studies of the Ethnic in Guizhou*, 3.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Haiyan Xing, who was born in Qinghai Province, is a female member of Tu nationality, one of the 55 officially recognized minority ethnic groups in China. She earned her Bachelor of Science in 1996 and her Master of Arts in folklore in 2005 from Northwest University for Nationalities in China. She then worked as a lecturer and then an associate professor at Northwest University for Nationalities in China. In 2009, she studied abroad at the University of Florida, studying anthropology while being supported by the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program. In recent years, her long-term research interests have included cultural diversity, ethnicity, and the religion of the northwestern minorities in China, especially the Tu. She has completed four research projects in Gansu Province and has published a book and thirteen journal articles in Chinese. She earned her Master of Arts in anthropology and Doctor of Philosophy in anthropology from the University of Florida in 2011 and 2015, respectively.