
 REVIEW: *BRIGHT BLUE HIGHLAND BARLEY*

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Li Zhuoma 李卓玛. 2016. *Walan qingke* 瓦蓝青稞 [*Bright Blue Highland Barley*]. Xining 西宁: Qinghai renmin chubanshe 青海人民出版社 [Qinghai People's Press]. 263pp. ISBN 978-7-225-05036-2 (hardback 26RMB).

The Mongghul (Tu) population in Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County was 62,745, according to the county's official website¹ as reported in 2013. Qinghai Province's total Tu population was reported as 204,413² in 2013. Located in east central Qinghai, the Mongghul are deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and speak dialects that have many similarities to the Mongolian language.

Literary productions by Tu writers include:

- Bao Yizhi (b. 1951), a Mangghuer native of Baojia Village, Guanting Town, Minhe Hui and Tu Autonomous County and the author of *Shuimogoulide zuihou yipan shuimo* 'Mill Valley's Last Mill'; *Heimudan, baimudan, hongmudan* 'Black Peony, White Peony, Red Peony', and *Wuyede niujiaohao* 'Mournful Ox Horn'.
- Shi Yanzhi (1966-2008), a native of Shijia Village, Halazhigou Township, Huzhu County. He had a Mongghul mother, but did not speak Mongghul. His poetry includes *Meigui jiayuan* 'Rose Homeland'.
- Qi Jianqing (b. 1956), a native of Yatou Village, Weiyuan Town, Huzhu County is the author of a collection of essays entitled *Yushu linfeng* 'A Jade Tree in the Wind'. He does not speak Mongghul.
- Lü Xia (b. 1966), a Mangghuer native from Lūjia Village,

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¹ <http://goo.gl/kgTMg5>, accessed 17 March 2013.

² <http://goo.gl/VMhlf8>, accessed 17 March 2013.

Zhongchuan Township, Minhe County is the author of a collection of poems entitled *Wode heliu 'My Rivers'*.

These writers have used the Chinese language to write about life in Qinghai that lacks distinctive local ethnic characteristics. Consequently, Li Zhuoma's publication of *Bright Blue Highland Barley* becomes the first Chinese-language novel featuring Mongghul cultural content, e.g., settings, characters, rituals, and so on in the context of love affairs, business conflicts, joys, hatred, and sorrows¹ among the Bai, Ji, Qi, and Lin Mongghul families who lived in a town in a Mongghul area from 1978 to 2015.

Li Zhuoma, from Zanghgua (Sangshige)² Mongghul Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County, is fluent in Mongghul, and works as a writer in the Huzhu Literary Federation. This novel can be divided into two parts. The first half - before page 180 - features Mongghul rituals, costume, songs, and traditional Mongghul lives. The readers are able to learn a great deal about Mongghul culture and better understand who the Mongghul were/are. I discuss the second half of the book later.

The novel begins in the early spring of 1978 when Sunba (Songba) of the Bai Family sadly bids farewell to his beloved girlfriend, Ji Linghua. He assures her that she is forever in his heart and asks her to wait for him until his return. He then sets out for Shanxi Province to visit his uncle, who had fled to avoid being conscripted into General Ma Bufang's (1903-1975) army.

After Sunba's departure, Ji Linghua misses him day and night. Meanwhile, Qi Xinglong of the Qi Family, who operates a very

¹ I and my wife, Jugui, wrote a novel entitled *Passions and Colored Sleeves: Mongghul Lives in Eastern Tibet* in English that was published in 2010 in *Asian Highland Perspectives*. We strove, using information we both gathered from our respective Mongghul families over the years, to present the lives and times of actual people in real contexts that include Mongghul religious specialists, kinship, marriage patterns, end of life rituals, and authority structures as they were known and functioned.

² The text uses Chinese for Mongghul terms. I have put the Chinese equivalents in parentheses after the Mongghul terms.

successful liquor workshop, madly pursues Ji Linghua until he finally rapes her in a meadow.

Three years later, Sunba returns from Shanxi Province and witnesses the heartbreaking scene of a wedding procession passing down West Street of Rainbow Town. Ji Linghua and Qi Xinglong have married.

In 1981, Sunba also runs the Bai Family liquor workshop known as Shambala (Xiangbala). It expands and enjoys good revenue at the expense of the Qi Family's liquor factory, which is finally driven out of business. Deeply resentful, Qi Xinglong secretly poisons the Shambala liquor that results in the death of some customers. Forced to pay heavy compensation, Shambala closes its doors and Sunba's family becomes impoverished.

To support the Bai Family, Gaduo, Sunba's first son, drops out of school at the age of thirteen. He endures extreme humiliation by working for Qi Xinglong wife's older brother (Ji Xiangmu, who had maliciously conspired to ruin Bai Family's business) at the Ji Family liquor factory.

Gaduo later marries his classmate, Lanmusuu (Lamusuo), Ji Xiangmu's daughter. Seven years pass. Gaduo earns enough to pay off his father's debt that he had incurred when he was forced to compensate customers poisoned by liquor from his factory.

Sunba proves successful in collecting highland barley in the countryside, transporting it to Weiyuan Town, and selling it to liquor-making enterprises. The Bai Family opens a new liquor factory and, three years later, it has achieved great success locally and on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

A daughter of the Bai Family, Jiransuu (Jiransuo), graduates from Shaanxi Normal University, returns home, finds a job in a Huzhu County travel agency, and is then pursued by Qi Duojie, a young wastrel and Qi Xinglong's son. During a Mongghul swing performance¹ for foreign tourists, Jiransuu suffers a head injury that requires

¹ Swinging was historically a form of entertainment for certain groups of Tu. For images of modern versions of swinging, see <http://goo.gl/MNqG8d> (accessed 19 June 2016) and <http://goo.gl/W7xIQj> (accessed 19 June 2016).

surgery and an urgent blood transfusion. Qi Duojie is the only potential donor whose blood type matches hers. The ensuing transfusion saves Jiransuu's life, which brings the two young people closer together.

Later, Qi Duojie learns how his father hurt Jiransuu's family (the Bai Family); mistreated and abandoned his kind-hearted wife, Linghua; and then married Zhao Jinhua, a local Han woman (Qi Duojie's mother). Qi Duojie then gives up the idea of marrying Jiransuu, telling her that the only reason he "loved" her was to obtain the Qi Family's recipe for barley liquor.

Still another twist to this story is Jiransuu's "twin brother," Danzhuu (Danzhu), who grew up with Jiransuu and eventually became an important officer in the county's Traffic Bureau. Later the reader learns that Jiransuu is not his biological twin. Instead, she was given to Sunba and his wife (Dalan) in a hospital ward where Danzhuu and Jiransuu were born at the same time. The latter was born to a Han Chinese couple (Jiransuu's biological parents) from Huangzhong County who already had four daughters. Devastated at not having a son, they pleaded with Sunba and Dalan to adopt the daughter. Danzhuu's parents agreed and announced that Dalan had given birth to twins.

The story ends happily with Danzhuu and Jiransuu (Bai Family); Qi Duojie (Qi Family) and Lin Huasuo (Lin Family); and Ji Tianbao (Ji Family) and Qi Qianqiao (Qi Duojie's younger sister) having a group wedding on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month in 2015 in Jiransuu's newly opened Mongghul Folk Performance Garden. Family members and guests come together, drink, and enjoy themselves radiating an atmosphere of unity and harmony.

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The place names in this novel are real and about eighty percent of the characters' names are Mongghul, e.g., Danzhuu, Dalan, Lamu, Lanmusuu, Sunba, and Jiransuu. Featured Mongghul food includes

halighii (halihai),¹ *maha*,² and *pansan*.³ Virtually every Mongghul man smoked in the past and the Mongghul tobacco bag and pipe are given detailed descriptions. Pipes and tobacco bags were considered "treasures." Men often smoked and enjoyed each other's pipe and tobacco once they gathered. For example, the author explains the tobacco bag and pipe belonging to Guanbu, who is Sunba's grandfather:

It is an old tobacco bag with an outside sewn from black cloth and a blue lining. Both the top and lower parts were each decorated with a piece of four *cun* red cloth sewn separately on the bag. A three *cun*⁴ opening was made at the top of the bag in order to easily accommodate the pipe and to fill it with tobacco. Cloud patterns were embroidered in gold thread using a coiling technique on the red cloth on the bottom of the bag, where three *cun* long yellow tassels were attached. As time wore on, the yellow tassels slowly turned white. Sunba lightly took out a four to five *cun* long pipe and found the small bowl was made of brass. The mouthpiece was green jade and connected to the bowl by a silver stem more than eight *cun* in length. Grandfather's odor pervaded the dainty little bowl and old bag. The brass bowl was smooth and shiny after having been handled repeatedly by Grandfather while he was alive. The green jade mouthpiece appeared glossy and moist after Grandfather's day and night puffing. The black bag had many patches, testimony to Grandfather frequently having the bag on his person (98).

Sunba and Dalan's wedding showed traditional Mongghul wedding culture to the readers in detail. The wedding started with two men (bride-takers) dispatched from the groom's home to the bride's home. The next day, the bride, her companion, escorts, and bride-takers

¹ Many thin pancakes are fried. Meanwhile, highland barley flour and tawny daylily powder are sprinkled into boiling water and stirred until a thick, well-cooked mixture is achieved. Pancakes are then rolled, and the mush is put inside with steaming, ground garlic. This is festival food and is also served when important guests visit (Limusishiden and Jugui 2010:123).

² Meat.

³ Dough is twisted and then fried.

⁴ One *cun* is equivalent to 3.3 cm.

reached the groom's home. During the wedding, the women from the bride's side sing "Receiving the Dried Unskinned Sheep Carcass," "What Did You Bring?" and "Opening the Bride's Door." The lyrics are given (in Chinese) in abbreviated form. In addition, the Log tuula Ritual (Luomutuoluo) is described.¹

When the ritual of changing the bride's hair style to that of a married woman is complete, the Log tuula Ritual continues. Dalan sees a volume of scripture, a branch of cypress, a *sheng*² of grain, a bunch of wool, a bowl of milk, a black tea brick, a lamp, and a handful of chopsticks placed on the hall chest. A piece of white felt covers a table in the room. Rnqan's (Renqian) mother holds Dalan's arm and supports Dalan as she sits on the table, facing the outside. Lamu and Dalansuu hold Dalan's mother's arms as she sits on the table facing the inside. The mother and her daughter sit back to back on the table.³ At this juncture, Dalan mother's eyes are wet with tears and Dalan's eyes are also moist.

The congratulatory speech at the wedding ceremony and the Opening the Bride's Mouth Ritual⁴ are described in authentic detail. In addition, the author provides a detailed account of a Mongghul traditional funeral ritual via the death of Grandfather Guanbu. As Guanbu lies dying, a clear-water-filled bowl with a pair of chopsticks placed on it is put in front of Guanbu, signifying that a road has been made for his next incarnation. After he dies, his corpse is placed in a squatting position and adobe bricks are stacked around it forming a box. Next, villagers and clan members sit together and discuss funeral arrangements.

Once a sedan is made, the encoffining song is sung as a lamentation by the sons' wives and daughters. Unfortunately, the author mistakenly attributes the lamentation song to Guanbu's sons. Actually, it is sung by the wives and daughters of the sons of the

¹ For more on this ritual, see (Limusishiden and Stuart 1998:49-50, 54, 71).

² A variable volume unit.

³ The author mistakenly wrote Dalan's mother and her daughter sit face to face. Custom dictates that Dalan's mother and her daughter sit back to back on the table.

⁴ After this ritual, the bride calls her mother-in-law "mother."

deceased. Nevertheless, songs related to encoffining, greeting lamas, receiving the deceased's (Guanbu's) daughters' lamentation songs, cremation lamentations, and the ritual of words spoken to the maternal uncle are reliably recorded, thus adorning the novel with genuine elements of Mongghul culture.

I also want to comment on the centrality of liquor in Mongghul culture:¹ "Highland barley is the root of evil and a demon incarnate," declares Dalan's mother (28), whose alcoholic husband often beat her when he was drunk. One night, Dalan and her mother are beaten again and then flee from their home and wander until eventually making their lives as servants for the Bai Family in Wei Yuan Town. Years later after Dalan grows up and marries Sunba, a son of the Bai Family, she and her mother live permanently in the Bai Family home. Meanwhile, Dalan's father goes to mine gold in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and is never heard from again.

I spent my childhood in a Mongghul village and can testify to the historical truth of alcoholic, drunk Mongghul men beating their wives. Wives had such fear of their alcoholic husbands that they often ran away from their homes and never returned.

After page 180, the story suddenly features scenes of modern lives, mainly depicted via various love affairs among characters of the four families. Other than the characters' ethnicity, there is no other claim to Mongghul. This is surely the reality for Mongghul who work or live in cities who have Han spouses. However, for Mongghul living in rural Huzhu, traditional Mongghul weddings continue, albeit in greatly simplified form.

There are some minor issues with medical information, e.g.: "According to the current situation, the electroencephalogram (EEG) shows there is still extravasated blood in your brain, which is the reason you are blind" (234). In fact, EEG is not used to diagnose intracranial hematoma rather, computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is used in the case of head trauma.

¹ For examples of liquor used at a Mongghul wedding in Huzhu in 1999, see <https://goo.gl/RBYUGN> and <https://goo.gl/h66VKA> (both accessed 25 June 2016).

The story is set in Weiyuan Town that historically belonged to the Haliqi area¹ consequently, Li more correctly could have written "Mongghul" not "Karilang" in the below:

Granny doesn't speak. Lanmusuu takes a pancake that had been already made by her mother-in-law from the kneading board and put it into in the oil in the cooking pot and said, 'Don't you know? Tying a tuft of sheep wool to the liquor pot is our Karilang [Keerlun] people's custom to show respect to guests - the sheep wool represents propitiousness (208).

I can only speculate why Li chose "Karilang." Perhaps she has found currency in supporting the contention that Mongghul origins are to be found in the Tuyuhun,² rather than the Mongols as evidenced by her two-volume work *Tuyuhun Kingdom*. However, most Mongghul in Huzhu believe Mongghul roots and Mongol roots are the same.

These criticisms are not meant, however, to detract from this young Mongghul author's very significant achievement in creating the first novel in Chinese that engages Mongghul social history and culture. This is a significant addition to her corpus of writing that includes *Leizuode xianrenzhang 'Tears Made Cactus'*, *Wodi jinghua 'Undercover Policewoman'*, and *Tuyuhun wangguo 'Tuyuhun Kingdom'*.

I hope the future will see Li Zhuoma make good use of her position with the Huzhu Literary Federation to visit more Mongghul elders, listen to their stories and histories and, with this information, continue to write distinctive Mongghul literature.

¹ Historically Mongghul were divided into Haliqi and Fulaan Nara. The former includes today's Danma and Weiyuan towns, and Donggou, Dongshan, Wufeng, and Taizi townships. The latter includes today's Wushi Town, Hongyazigou and Songduo townships in Huzhu County; and Dala Township, Ledu Region, Haidong City. The people in Haliqi refer to themselves as Mongghul while Fulaan Nara residents call themselves Karilang.

² The Qinghai Tu Nationality Association met in August 2003 in Xining on the occasion of Lü Jianfu's publication - *Tu Nationality History*. It was then announced that the Association accepted Lü's research findings affirming Tu to be Xianbei/Tuyuhun descendants (Bao Yizhi 2006).

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

- Bai 白
- Bao Yizhi 鲍义志
- Baojia 鲍家
- cun 寸
- Dala 达拉
- Dalan 达兰
- Dalansuu, Dalansuo 达兰索
- Danma 丹麻
- Danzhuu, Danzhu 旦主
- Dasilu 大寺路
- Donggou 东沟
- Dongshan 东山
- Fulaan Nara
- Gaduo 尕多
- Guanbu 官布
- Guanting 官亭

Haidong 海东

Halazhigou 哈拉直沟

halighii, halihai 哈力海

Han 汉

Heimudan, baimudan, hongmudan 黑牡丹, 白牡丹, 红牡丹

Hongyazigou 红崖子沟

Huangzhong 湟中

Huzhu 互助

Ji 吉

Ji Linghua 吉玲花

Ji Tianbao 吉天宝

Ji Xiangmu 吉祥木

Karilang, Keerlun 克尔伦

Lamu 拉姆

Lanmusuu, Lanmusuo 兰姆索

Ledu 乐都

Leizuode xianrenzhang 泪做的仙人掌

Li Zhuoma 李卓玛

Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春)

Lin 林

Lin Huasuo 林花索

log tuula, luomutuoluo 罗木托罗

Lü Jianfu 吕建福

Lǚ Xia 吕霞

Lǚjia 吕家

maha, rou 肉

Ma Bufang 马步芳

meigui jiayuan 玫瑰家园

Minhe 民和

Hui 回

Mongghul, Tu 土

pansan 盘馐

Qi 祁

Qi Duojie 祁多杰

Qi Jianqing 祁建青

Qi Qianqiao 祁茜巧
Qi Xinglong 祁兴隆
Qinghai 青海
Qinghai renmin chubanshe 青海人民出版社
Rnqan, Renqian 仁欠
Shambala, Xiangbala 香巴拉
Shanxi 山西 Province
Shaanxi 陕西
sheng 升
Shi Yanzhi 师延智
Shijia 师家
Shuimogoulide zuihou yipan shuimo 水磨沟里的最后一盘水磨
Songduo 松多
Sunba, Songba 松巴
Taizi 台子
Tuyuhun 吐谷浑
Tuyuhun wangguo 吐谷浑王国
Walan qingke 瓦蓝青稞
Weiyuan 威远
Wode heliu 我的河流
Wodi jinghua 卧底警花
Wushi 五十
Wuyede niujiaohao 呜咽的牛角号
Xianbei 鲜卑
Xining 西宁
Yatou 崖头
Yushu 玉树
Yushu linfeng 玉树临风
Zanghgua, Sangshige 桑士哥
Zhao Jinhua 赵金花
Zhongchuan 中川