

THE LAST MONGGHUL HERDSMAN ON THE KUUSHINZHANG ALPINE PASTURE, HUZHU COUNTY, QINGHAI PROVINCE, PR CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces a pasture that is significant to Mongghul (Tu) people. In 2019, Galizangzhunbu (b. 1970, male, Tu, illiterate) was the last Mongghul herdsman on the Kuushinzhang pasture in the Huzhu Mongghul area. Galizangzhunbu's personal story and his family background are presented, detailing his practice of pastoralism in 2019. I interviewed Galizangzhunbu at his home in Zhaxi Langwa Village, Hashi Administrative Village, Songduo Township, Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, Haidong Municipality, Qinghai Province, PR China on 6 April 2019. I recorded both interviews and later transcribed the audio material in English. Three maps and five photographs are provided

KEYWORDS

Kuushinzhang, Himalaya yak history, Huzhu, life narratives, Monguor biography, Monguor history, oral Tu history, herding yaks, Qinghai-Tibet Plateau

LOCATION

FIG 1. Huzhu Tu Autonomous County (inside the light-red boundary). The Kuushinzhang¹Area inside the dark-red circle) lies in Huzhu County and Ledu Region (bottom-center of the dark-red circle).²



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¹ Mongghul terms are given in the Mongghul written system (Li 1988:9).

² A revised version of <https://bit.ly/2Vx2muz>, accessed 1 March 2020.

FIG 2. A portion of the Kuushinzhang area.¹



¹ A revised version of <https://bit.ly/2Up1CFL>, accessed 13 March 2020.

FIG 3. Zhaxi Langwa Village¹ (inside the dark-red circle).



INTRODUCTION

Kuushinzhang (T, Ko shin la ka; C, Keshengzhang) is the largest pasture in the Huzhu Mongghul area, where Tibetans and Mongghul have historically herded.² Located in the southeast corner of Huzhu County, Kuushinzhang is eighty kilometers from Xining City. To the north is Bazha Township and Jiading Town; to the west is Wushi Town and Hongyazigou Township, Huzhu County; and to the southeast is Ledu Region. Kuushinzhang has about 10,500 hectares at an altitude of 2,900-4,265 meters above seal level³ and, as important rangeland in the Mongghul area, is well-known locally. For generations, Mongghul pastoralists camped and herded here.⁴ The Su family,⁵ for example, once had many livestock and were prominent in Kuushinzhang. Later, they stopped herding after Zhaxi, a Su

¹ A revised version of <https://bit.ly/3a3YYLC>, accessed 7 April 2020.

² Dunzhi (b. 1930), a Tibetan from Songduo Village, Songduo Township, Huzhu County told Limusishiden on 12 March 2020 that when he was young, his grandfather told him that there were both Tibetan and Mongghul camps herding yaks and sheep in the Kuushinzhang area.

³ <https://bit.ly/2U8N3qW>, accessed 13 March, 2020.

⁴ See Schram (2006 [1954-1961]:250-251) for comments on the Monguor vocabulary for livestock, ability to track lost animals, and abilities as shepherds.

⁵ The Mongghul Su family is from Szanghuali Mongghul Village, Donggou Township, Huzhu County.

family herder, suddenly died on the Kuushinzhang pasture. Certain incarnation lamas, e.g., Tughuan Living Buddha from Rgulang¹ Monastery, also had livestock that were herded here.²

Galizangzhunbu's grandfather was Gunbu (~1926~2006), and his grandmother was Srangzhuma (1920-2001).³ In 1958, the couple was selected to herd yaks and sheep in Kuushinzhang. Consequently, the entire family moved to live and herd in Hashi Brigade, where they pitched two tents and managed the communal rangeland. Five years later, in 1963, two small wooden houses were built, replacing the tents.

It was four hours by horseback between Zhaxi Langwa Village and the Gaxjog area.⁴

Galizangzhunbu's father is Zhaxi (b. 1949). His mother, Diixji (b. 1951), is a Tibetan from Kuushinzhang. A fluent speaker of Tibetan, she was introduced to Zhaxi and married into his camp on the Gaxjog grazing land. The couple spoke Tibetan in their daily life. In 2012, Diixji and Zhaxi found walking on the mountain slopes increasingly challenging due to their advancing age, so they moved to Zhaxi Langwa Village, where they began speaking Mongghul in deference to village residents who speak Mongghul in the village as their first language. Meanwhile, Galizangzhunbu and his wife continued to herd.

Galizangzhunbu's birthplace was a wood house in the Gaxjog pastoral area where the family lived. He speaks both Mongghul and Tibetan. He began herding yaks and sheep at the age of seven and is now the last Mongghul herder on the Kuushinzhang pastureland. The other herders are Tibetans. All other Mongghul herders have stopped herding and have returned to their villages where they farm or moved to cities for non-agricultural work.

The Household Responsibility System was implemented in 1983 in Zhaxi Langwa Village. This resulted in the seventy yaks and one hundred sheep in Galizangzhunbu's camp being evenly distributed among households in Hashi Administrative Village. Owing to Galizangzhunbu's parents' previous experience as herders, they wanted to continue herding, so they bought sixty sheep from the administrative village. These sheep, plus the sheep they had been given in the government-sanctioned distribution, meant that they had about one hundred sheep and thirteen yaks, which were now their private property. The family continued herding on the Gaxjog pasture.

After Galizangzhunbu's parents moved to Zhaxi Langwa to live, Galizangzhunbu became the third generation of his family to herd in Kuushinzhang.

GALIZANGZHUNBU

Galizangzhunbu is the oldest of three sons. The youngest, Zujii (b. 1973, illiterate), married a local Mongghul woman. After they divorced, he worked in Guide County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, where he met a local Tibetan woman, whom he married and moved into her home. The middle brother, Warimasishiden (b. 1975, three years of primary school study), also married a local Mongghul woman. They divorced, and he now lives with his son in Zhaxi Langwa Village.

Galizangzhunbu's wife (Yinsuu, b. 1972, illiterate, Mongghul, from Tughuan Village, Wushi Town) moved into his village home when Galizangzhunbu lived with his parents and siblings.

¹ Rgulang (T, Dgon lung byams pa gling; C, Youningsi), a Dge lugs monastery located in Sitan Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu County, Qinghai Province. There were 197 monks in 1990 (Nian and Bai 1993:122-126). Pu (2013:71-75) reports 396 monks in 1957. Smith (2013:291) reports over 300 monks.

² Limusishiden's father, Limuzhunmaa (b. 1942), provided this information on 4 October 2019 at his home in Tughuan Village, Danma Town, Huzhu County.

³ She died from a disease of the esophagus.

⁴ A place name in the Kuushinzhang pasture.

Galizangzhunbu herds yaks and sheep while his wife stays at home, tending the family's twelve *mu* of fields.¹ Galizangzhunbu has a daughter and a son. His daughter, Zalaxji (b. 1992), works as a nurse in a Xining City hospital. His son, Qijangcairang (b. 1996), was a university student in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in 2019.

In 2005, Galizangzhunbu's parents planned to divide the seventy-two yaks, 120 sheep, and seventy-two goats among their three sons. Unfortunately, a heavy snowstorm in the winter of 2005 killed fifty-one yaks and half of the sheep and goats. Each son thus received only seven yaks, twenty sheep, and twelve goats. Zujii and Warimasishiden sold their livestock immediately.

Galizangzhunbu continued to herd his livestock allocation after his parents moved to live permanently in Zhaxi Langwa Village. In 2019, Galizangzhunbu had sixty yaks and a total of sixty sheep and goats.

From 2000, Galizangzhunbu and his wife collected caterpillar fungus on their pasture from the mid-third to early fifth months. Price fluctuations meant that the couple earned 10,000-50,000 RMB per year.

In summer, Galizangzhunbu's checked his yaks every other day, herding them close to his camp if they moved far away. He did not milk the yaks, so the calves grew quickly and were larger than the offspring of yaks that were regularly milked.

In 2015, the yaks stayed on the pasture, but he drove the sheep to his village in winter, where they stayed until mid-spring. He then went by motorcycle to check the yaks once a week. Once the sheep were back on the Gaxjog pasture, he stayed there. If an urgent matter demanded his attention, he returned to his village home after first asking a neighbor to tend his livestock in his absence.

GALIZANGZHUNBU ACQUIRED SACRED SHEEP

In 2010, Galizangzhunbu's sheep numbered about 160. He sold 140 and bought yaks with the cash. The remaining twenty sheep were designated as "free sheep" by an incarnation lama from Songduo Township, meaning these sheep should never be slaughtered or sold.

A religiously devout, wealthy man from south China donated 90,000 RMB for one hundred sheep. The lama paid a Tibetan shepherd in Gaxjog to graze these one hundred sheep (including the sheep Galizangzhunbu had donated) until they died naturally.

Later, the Tibetan shepherd sold some of the sheep, ignoring the lama's instructions. Locals criticized the shepherd for violating Buddhist rules.

Later, the Tibetan herdsman did not want to herd the remaining twenty sacred sheep and said to Galizangzhunbu, "You are honest. I believe you won't kill or sell these sacred sheep. I'll give them to you. Please herd them on your pasture."

"Trust me! I won't sell them," Galizangzhunbu replied, and the Tibetan herdsman set a date for him to come and get the sheep.

On the designated day, Galizangzhunbu went to drive the sheep back to his pasture, but the Tibetan herdsman now said, "Can you give me one free sheep every year after you drive the scared sheep to your pasture? I will now have no sheep on my pasture."

Galizangzhunbu agreed, and the man told him to come some days later to get the sheep.

When he returned several days later, the Tibetan herder said, "I'll have no income after you drive the twenty sheep to your pasture. Can you give me 200 RMB for each of the scared sheep?"

Galizangzhunbu agreed and took the twenty sacred sheep to his pasture.

¹One *mu* = 666.6 square meters, 0.067 hectares, or 0.16 acres.

Later he returned to the camp with 4,000 RMB. However, the herder took only 3,200 RMB, probably because he felt guilty at selling the scared sheep.

The sacred sheep in Galizangzhunbu's pasture were all old ewes that no longer gave birth. He wanted someone to feed them, but no one agreed because they did not give birth, and they could not be sold. Eventually, Galizangzhunbu drove them back to his village home where, to his surprise, the ewes began giving birth once they were fed well. When villagers noticed this, they were willing to tend the old sacred ewes.

Yinsuu first refused to give the sheep away, but some days later, she complained that she was so busy with farm work that she could not continue tending the sheep. Galizangzhunbu suggested she sell all the young sheep, and if no one would take them, drive the old sacred sheep away from the village and leave them. Yinsuu agreed. Galizangzhunbu next contacted a livestock dealer, who came to his home to buy the young sheep. While bargaining, Yinsuu changed her mind, did not sell them, and did not abandon the sacred ewes. Instead, she continued caring for them.

Galizangzhunbu earns about 3,000 RMB a year from selling yak hair. He also sells three to four yaks annually. Before the year 2000, a yak sold for about 2,500 RMB. However, prices increased, and in 2019, he earned about 20,000 RMB from selling four adult yaks.

Heavy snow fell early in the winter of 2018 before Galizangzhunbu had transported fodder from Zhaxi Langwa Village to the pasture. With snow blocking the road, he drove all his yaks and sheep to the village, saving them from starvation on the grassland where many livestock died. As much as three meters of snow covered the ground.

CONCLUSION

After the year 2000, rural Mongghul areas were dramatically affected by families increasingly migrating to urban areas to find salaried work with small businesses, street and toilet cleaners, gate guards, and supermarket cashiers. Urban life was seen as comparatively more comfortable with better work conditions than village life that depended on agriculture yields that were considered uncertain because of drought and hailstorms. After years of saving money, the city migrants generally buy urban apartments and do not return to live in their village homes.

An example of a small community that follows this pattern is Pudiu,¹ a village located in Songduo Township at the bottom of a narrow valley surrounded by high mountains. Fifteen kilometers separates Zhaxi Langwa and Pudiu, which was once home to twenty-five households and one hundred residents (all Mongghul). When the author visited in the summer of 2019, twenty-two families had locked the front gates of their home compounds and worked outside of Huzhu County. Many had bought apartments in cities. Of the three families still living in the village in 2019, two had purchased an apartment in Ping'an Town, Ping'an Region, Haidong Municipality, Qinghai Province, and planned to move there the coming winter. This would leave only one family living in Pudiu Village.

Galizangzhunbu plans to continue tending his yaks and sheep. He told me, "I will continue to herd my livestock here in Kuushinzhang. I am older than most migrant laborers, so it would be hard for me to find a city job. Furthermore, I'm accustomed to living here in Kuushinzhang and herding yaks and sheep."

¹ 'Cupped hands'.

APPENDIX: YAK TERMS

FIG 4. Yak terms based on age, sex, and hybridity.

Age Years	Male	Female	Yak-Cow Hybrid
general	<i>hiinog</i>	<i>shdesinii</i>	<i>musi</i>
1	<i>buruu</i>		
2	<i>ghoori nesini hiinog</i>	<i>ghoori nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>ghoori nesini musi</i>
3	<i>ghuran nesini hiinog</i>	<i>ghuran nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>ghuran nesini musi</i>
4	<i>deeran nesini hiinog</i>	<i>deeran nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>deeran nesini musi</i>
5	<i>tawun nesini hiinog</i>	<i>tawun nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>tawun nesini musi</i>
6	<i>jirighun nesini hiinog</i>	<i>jirighun nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>jirighun nesini musi</i>
7	<i>duluun nesini hiinog</i>	<i>duluun nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>duluun nesini musi</i>
8	<i>niiman nesini hiinog</i>	<i>niiman nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>niiman nesini musi</i>
9	<i>shzin nesini hiinog</i>	<i>shzin nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>shzin nesini musi</i>
10	<i>haran nesini hiinog</i>	<i>haran nesini shdesinii</i>	<i>haran nesini musi</i>

Yak terms based on color, gender, and horned/polled

- *hara*, black, general
- *qighaan*, white, general
- *jarima*, gold, general
- *alog*, colorful, general
- *hara tuguang*, black, polled
- *qighaan ghuran nesini tuguang*, three-year-old white, polled
- *kugua deeran nesidii yarishdii hiinog*, four-year-old grey, male yak, horned
- *kiilera jarimadiingi shdesinii*, female yak, gold belly hair
- *alog ghuran nesidii hiinog*, three-year-old, mixed color, male yak
- *qighaan alog shdesinii*, female yak, white mixed with other colors
- *hara tawun nesidii jamari alog hiinog*, five-year-old male yak, black, gold mixed with other colors

Yak terms based on castrated and uncastrated

- *kunguandighasan hiinog*: castrated male yak
- *yii kunguandighasan hiinog*: uncastrated male yak

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PHOTOGRAPHS

FIG 5. Galizangzhunbu at his Zhaxi Langwa home (6 April 2019, Jugui).



FIG 6. Galizangzhunbu at his Zhaxi Langwa home (6 April 2019, Jugui).



FIG 7. Galizangzhunbu in Kuushinzhang (24 December 2019, Zalaxji).



FIGS 8 & 9. (L) Galizangzhunbu's yaks, enclosure wall, and living quarters in Kuushinzhang (4 October 2015, Zalaxji). (R) Galizangzhunbu's yaks graze on mountain slopes in Kuushinzhang (7 July 2015, Zalaxji).



NON-ENGLISH TERMS

alog, colorful

alog ghuran nesidii hiinog, three-year-old, mixed color, male yak

Bazha 巴扎 Township

buruu, calf

Danma 丹麻, 'dan ma འདྲན་མ། Town

deeran nesini hiinog, four-year-old male yak

deeran nesini musi, four-year-old yak-cow hybrid

deeran nesini shdesinii, four-year-old female yak

Diixji, bde skyid བདེ་སྐྱིད། a person's name

Donggou 东沟 Township

duluun nesini hiinog, seven-year-old male yak

duluun nesini musi, seven-year-old yak-cow hybrid

duluun nesini shedesinii, seven-year-old female yak

Dunzhi, don grub རོན་གུབ། a person's name

Galizangzhunbu, skal bzang sbyin pa གླེན་བཟང་ལྷིན་པ། a person's name

Gaxjog, a place name

ghoori nesini hiinog, two-year-old male yak

ghoori nesini musi, two-year-old yak-cow hybrid

ghoori nesini shdesinii, two-year-old female yak

ghuran nesini hiinog, three-year-old male yak

ghuran nesini shdesinii, three-year-old female yak

Guide 贵德 County

Gunbu, mgon po གུན་བོ། a person's name

hara, black

Haidong 海东 Municipality

Hainan 海南 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

hara tawun nesidii jamari alog hiinog, five-year-old male yak, black, gold mixed with other colors

hara tuguang, black, polled yak

haran nesini hiinog, ten-year-old male yak

haran nesini musii, ten-year-old yak-cow hybrid

haran nesini shdesinii, ten-year-old female yak

Hashi 喀什 Administrative Village

hiinog, male yak

Hongyazigou 红崖子沟 Township

Huzhu 互助 County

jarima, gold

Jiading 加定 Town

jirighun nesini hiinog, six-year-old male yak

jirighun nesini musii, six-year-old yak-cow hybrid

jirighun nesini shdesinii, six-year-old female yak

Jugui, a person's name

kiilera jarimadiingi shdesinii, female yak, gold belly hair

kugua deeran nesidii yarishdii hiinog, four-year-old male yak, grey, horned

kunguandighasan hiinog, castrated male yak

Kuushinzhang, ko shin la ka ཁོ་ཤིན་ལ་ཀ།, Keshengzhang 科胜掌, a pasture name

Ledu 乐都 Region

Limusishiden, klu 'bum tshe brtan ལྷ་འབུམ་ཚེ་བརྟན། Li Dechun 李得春, a person's names

Mongghul, Monguor, Mangghuer, Tuzu 土族

mu 亩, unit of land measurement; 1 hectare equals 15 *mu*

musii, yak-cow hybrid

niiman nesini hiinog, eight-year-old male yak

niiman nesini musii, eight-year-old yak-cow hybrid

niiman nesini shdesinii, eight-year-old female yak

Ningxia 宁夏 Hui 回 Autonomous Region

Ping'an 平安 Town; Region

Pudiu, Putou 普头 a village's name

qighaan, white

qighaan alog shdesinii, female yak, white mixed with other colors

qighaan ghuran nesini tuguang, three-year-old white, polled yak

Qijangcairang, a person's name

Qinghai 青海 Province

Rgulang, Youningsi 佑宁寺, dgon lung dgon pa དགོན་ལུང་དགོན་པ།, a large Tibetan Buddhist monastery in
Huzhu County

shdesinii, female yak

shzin nesini hiinog, nine-year-old male yak

shzin nesini musu, nine-year-old yak-cow hybrid

shzin nesini shdesinii, nine-year-old female yak

Songduo 松多, sum mdo ལུང་མངོ། Township

Srangzhuma, tshe ring sgrol ma ཚེ་རིང་སྒྲོལ་མ། a person's name

Su 苏, a surname

Szanghuali (Nianxian 年先) Village

tawun nesini hiinog, five-year-old male yak

tawun nesini musu, five-year-old yak-cow hybrid

tawun nesini shdesinii, five-year-old female yak

Tu 土 Monguor, Mongghul, Mangghuer

Tughuan, Tuguan 土官 Village

Warimasishiden, a person's name

Wushi 五十 Town

Xining 西宁 City, the capital of Qinghai Province

yii kungaundighasan hiinog, uncastrated male yak

Yinsuu, a person's name

Zalaxji, a person's name

Zhaxi, bkra shis བརྒ་ཤིས།, a person's name

Zhaxi Langwa (Zhaxilongwa 扎西龙哇, bkra shis lung ba བརྒ་ཤིས་ལུང་བ།) Village

Zujii, a person's name