Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China

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This book is the result of three periods of field research in Liangshan Prefecture and Panzhihua City, Sichuan, undertaken in collaboration with local research institutes in those areas, as well as with provincial institutions in Chengdu. Everywhere I went, people helped out, usually enthusiastically.

Pride of place here, however, goes to my own family, because they helped out wherever I went, by being so supportive in letters and phone calls, by sending little gifts, by sitting through endless slide shows and stories, and by being there in my absence and in my presence. My most heartfelt thanks to Barbara, Cyd, and Deb.

In specific overseas places, I start with the late Tong Enzheng, who introduced me to Sichuan University and to Panzhihua in 1987, and who inspired me with his analytical brilliance, his political acumen, and his humanistic optimism. I only wish he could have been around to read the book, and can only hope, in his memory, that its scholarship comes somewhere close to the standard he would have expected of me.

Then there were the leaders of the provincial institutions who sponsored the work. At Sichuan University in 1988, these included Vice-President Wei Yingtao, Research Office Director Wu Jialun and Associate Director Zhou Jian, and Sociology Group Head Professor Yuan Yayu. At Sichuan Provincial Nationalities Research Institute, there were the successive directors Li Shaoming, Zhou Xiyin, and Wu Jingzhong (Luovu Laho). All of these leaders cooperated in a spirit of mutual respect and reciprocal learning, and provided intellectual as well as practical assistance in getting the work done.

There were also the local leaders—in Panzhihua in 1988, Party Secretary Han Guobin, Vice-Secretaries Zhang Boxi and Zhao Shihua; Vice Mayors Tan Huizhang and Li Zhixia; Cultural Bureau Chief and bridge partner Xiang Dexin; City Government Secretary General Tian Ruyi; and City Nationalities Commission Chair Li Chaoshen. At a time when taking on a high-profile foreign researcher was still something of a risk, these men opened many doors and
were not even afraid to have a presumptuous foreigner criticize some of their policies.

In Xichang in 1993 and 1994, there was Prefectural Minority Affairs Commission Chair and Nationalities Research Institute Head Qubi Shimei, along with Vice-Head Jin Junpei and Secretary Wang Wenzhi. In Yanyuan there was the indefatigable Party Secretary Yang Zipuo (Atu Nzypuo), the modest but unbelievably knowledgeable Language Committee Head Hu Jin’ao (Luoho Tuha), and that most kindly host, Animal Husbandry Bureau Head Ma Wei’er (Mgebbu Vihly), as well as the young Vice Magistrate La Mingqing. All of them seemed to sense that, despite the gaps in our education, culture, and political ideology, we could work together, and they provided all kinds of encouragement and support.

“In the field,” township and village cadres tolerated, argued, facilitated, and toasted the foreigner and the other researchers. I do not even remember all their names, but I would like to single out a few whose cooperation was especially enthusiastic. These include Party Secretary Na Chaopei in Yishala, Township head Li Guojiang in Renhe, and Village Head Hu in Zhuangshang in 1988; Township Clerk Ma Axi (Mgebbu Asi) in Baiwu, Party Secretary Xiong in Puwei, and Township Head Yang in Malong in 1993; and Team Leader Wang Kaifu in Manshuiwan, Party Secretary Yang Ziha and Chief Judge Shama in Mishi, Party Secretary Ji and Women’s Federation Chief Yang in Guabie, and Township Head Hu Mingfa, Township Clerk Hu Yaoming, and village Party Secretary Zhou in Futian in 1994.

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