Preface

The inspiration for this book came in 2013, in the blistering heat of a July afternoon. While enrolled in a summer language program in Beijing, I had taken a long holiday weekend to visit Jinan, the city where I had lived between 2009 and 2011. I returned that summer to find a once familiar city in the midst of several dramatic changes. Like most of China's cities, Jinan was rapidly rebuilding its infrastructure and replacing shabby, old buildings with new, gleaming high-rises and shopping malls. During that summer's classes in Beijing, the subject of China's rapid urbanization and the economic, political, and social impact it had on Chinese society was the subject of many of the readings and seminar conversations that comprised our daily work. Now, on my short holiday, I couldn't help but feel I was witnessing the kinds of change discussed in our classroom firsthand. Though much of Jinan remained familiar, the many alterations that were underway felt disorienting.

The most obvious of these many changes was the ongoing construction of the city's first supertall skyscraper, near the central square. The Lüdi Center would stand over three hundred meters tall when completed, casting a literal and figurative shadow over the city and foreshadowing many more imminent transformations. Friends I spoke to in the city during that visit regarded the tower with ambivalence. Some saw it as an effort to spark economic development that was years overdue, stalled by lack of planning and localized corruption. Others saw it as a way for Jinan to catch up to Qingdao, Shandong province's other major city, which had become a more modern, prosperous, and glamorous location than the provincial capital in recent years. However, some friends saw the tower as disruptive, as it would surely bring more construction. These new projects would certainly displace the people living in their paths, causing some old friends to react with scorn.

Ambivalence to the project was felt strongest in the heart of Jinan's Hui Quarter (Huimin Xiaoqu), which sat adjacent to the site. It was no secret to

anyone in the neighborhood that the city government wanted to replace the quarter's aging brutalist apartment buildings with newer structures that would raise the value of the land and the profile of the city. The people who lived in the area feared they, too, would soon be displaced. My old friend Ma Wei, who owned a barbecue (*shaokao*) restaurant in the neighborhood, did nothing to hide his contempt for the project when I stopped by to visit one afternoon.[1] Catching me admiring the construction process while we sat together outside his shop drinking beer, he wrinkled his face in annoyance. He grumbled for a few minutes that much of the area was slated for demolition. "Including this place!" he said, adding, "I'll lose this restaurant when they tear this neighborhood down."

Stunned, I tried to imagine the transformations such urban renewal might bring to the neighborhood. During my time in Jinan, the Hui Quarter was a vibrant island of ethnic minority culture surrounded by a sea of ethnic majority Han. It stood out as an area unlike the rest of Jinan, a very typical second-tier city situated on the Yellow River in eastern China's heartland. The neighborhood, overwhelmingly populated by Hui, was known throughout the city as a warren of winding alleys filled with neon signs for purveyors of grilled meats and keg beer. At night the aroma of smoke from their long trough-style grills hung in the air alongside the shouts of restaurateurs looking to attract diners from among the people wandering by. What would become of their businesses when the demolition crews came? Where would they all go? More important, what impact would their dispersal have on the city's Hui community?

In previous travels to ethnic minority tourist spots like Dali and Lijiang in Yunnan in 2008, I had witnessed firsthand how changes in configurations of urban space—and populations—impacted the way residents accessed and maintained their ethnic identities. In fact, discussions about the Chinese state's efforts to boost economic development through the commodification of ethnic identity and the creation of a large-scale ethnic tourism industry resound not only in academic fora but also in the popular press.[2] Unlike those sites, however, Jinan's Hui Quarter was not a tourist destination, and the forces of urban transformation about to be enacted upon it were not the result of an effort to create a stylized attraction for throngs of visitors on holiday. Rather, the changes occurring in Jinan's Hui Quarter stood as the kind of ordinary remaking of urban spaces taking place in cities throughout China every day.

As I pondered the impact that completely rebuilding the neighborhood might have on its residents, a number of questions began to flood into my mind: How would these changes in the Hui Quarter's physical and demographic

makeup alter the daily habits that maintained residents' sense of connection to their ethnic identity? Would displacement of residents bring an end to ethnic traditions or merely cause them to adapt? Would the loss of the neighborhood as a locus of interaction and a repository of culture result in the diminishment of Hui identity in the city as a whole? Did these changes animate resentments against the state and its development initiatives? Most important, were these scenarios being enacted in other Hui communities throughout China?

Over the following years, I set out to understand how the complex interactions between changing urban landscapes and tactics of authoritarian governance influenced the daily expression of Hui identity. Through thirteen months in the field, during which I conducted 154 interviews and countless ethnographic observations in locations in six different provinces, I explored the everyday practice of Hui identity. This fieldwork allowed me to consider the ways in which new and competing conceptions of what it meant to be Hui emerged from the restructuring of urban spaces and the interactions between people that these processes of transformation facilitated. My conversations with respondents yielded a multifaceted, nuanced view of the way people lived out their ethnic identities on a daily basis and how state policies regarding ethnicity and development shaped and constrained them.

The Chinese state's crackdown on expressions of ethnic and religious identities by Muslim minorities in the years following my departure from the field in 2016 illustrate how even mundane habits of speech, diet, dress, worship, and association may convey deeply held identities. The state's increased efforts to police and standardize ethnic and religious expression in these communities reveal the importance of such seemingly commonplace practices as cultural and political acts and illustrate the vital role that maintaining control over ethnic politics plays in the state's legitimating narratives.[3]

This book is, therefore, an exploration of these dynamics from the bottom up. To understand the impacts of the forces of China's ethnic politics, economic development policies, and rapidly changing urban landscapes on the expression of identity, we must look to the everyday. Only by identifying the ways in which Ma Wei and countless other ordinary Hui people like him practice and express their identity daily may we hope to grasp the full significance of such change.