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THE DAI, BAI, AND HUI IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The status of the Dai, Bai, and Hui as minority *minzu* is based on the idea that they exhibit unique configurations of cultural and religious characteristics. As official minorities they possess certain rights and privileges under Chinese law. Yet, are the Dai, Bai, and Hui distinct, bounded social entities? Do they see themselves in this way, and do others similarly recognize them as such? To what extent do state classifications dovetail with their self-perceptions? Might official categories imply boundaries or identities that in lived experience are blurred and porous?

These questions are not easy to address. Much of the historical and ethnographic material on Chinese minorities is the product of the socialist state and its scholars and reflects their assumptions and ideals. Chinese ethnologists, most of them Han, played a pivotal role in the classification process, and as Charles F. McKhann argues, "in framing the discourse on the 'nationalities question' . . . their freedom to do so was sharply circumscribed by the theoretical framework within which they were required to work."[1] Accounts of minority history and culture are consequently infused with Marxist and Maoist presuppositions about development and backwardness, class relations and exploitation, and the progression of history. These accounts also reflect the concerns of Chinese nationalism and national self-images. Popular and scholarly narratives about minorities

may tell us as much about the Han and the Chinese state as they do about minority *minzu*. It is likely impossible to extract a history of minorities unencumbered by socialist and nationalist assumptions.

Despite this dilemma, this chapter seeks to explain something of who the Dai, Bai, and Hui are and who they were historically, especially in the period prior to the Socialist era. This effort to situate these groups in history relies extensively on materials produced by the national and local government units of People's Republic of China and by Chinese scholars. In doing so, this account no doubt fails to "rescue" the histories of the Dai, Bai, and Hui from the Chinese socialist nation-state; consequently, this account reflects many of the assumptions about ethnicity, development, and culture present in Chinese nationality theory and policy.[2] In considering the Dai, Bai, and Hui as distinct *minzu*, this analysis already commits itself to many of these assumptions. Nevertheless, this material conveys some of the early history of these groups' societies prior to the founding of the PRC, and more of their recent experiences in the Maoist era.

THE DAI

Of the three cases that are the focus of my research, the Dai most closely approximate the minority ideal. The Dai are a Tai-speaking group, linguistically and culturally linked to Tai Lüe peoples in Laos, Myanmar, and northern Thailand.[3] They are the third largest minority in Yunnan, and reside primarily in the south and southwest. About one-quarter of all Dai reside in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, located in the southernmost part of Yunnan along the borders of Laos and Myanmar. It is this group of Dai and this prefecture of Xishuangbanna that are examined here.

Contemporary Xishuangbanna is roughly coterminous with Sipsongpanna, a self-governing principality established in the twelfth century. Historically, Sipsongpanna was one of several Tai political entities that existed in Laos, Burma (now Myanmar), and northern Thailand.[4] Today, Tai communities are still found in all these places as well as in parts of northern Vietnam and the Assam region of India. In contemporary Thailand, Sipsongpanna is viewed as a sort of motherland of the modern Thai people, as the source from which they came. Not surprisingly, people from Thailand make up a significant proportion of non-mainland Chinese tourists and investors in the prefecture.

Politically and socially, the Sipsongpanna Tai (henceforth the Dai) diverged considerably from the wider Chinese society and culture. Dai

society was organized along highly stratified, castelike lines. Sipsongpanna was governed by a monarch, the *zhaopianling*. Below him were aristocratic officials who comprised the political leadership, followed by *zhaomeng*, quasi-feudal lords or princes who controlled the various districts or *meng* into which Sipsongpanna was divided. Commoner villages were made up either of *daimeng*, ordinary folk descended from the original Tai settlers in the region, or of the household slaves of the monarch and nobility. All lands belonged to the *zhaopianling*, although within their districts *zhaomeng* wielded considerable authority. The monarch's lands were allocated to villages and individual households to be farmed and managed, though such holdings could not be bought or sold. A small number of peasants were freeholders who controlled their own property but were the political subjects of the *zhaopianling*.[5]

The social and political hierarchy of Sipsongpanna was reinforced and legitimated by Theravada Buddhism. Although there is no consensus about when Buddhism arrived in the region, it is generally acknowledged that Theravada practices were widespread by the fourteenth century. Nearly every village had its own temple, which served as the educational, social, and, of course, religious center of activity. Like the villages in which they were situated, temples were part of a broader religious and political network, and hierarchical relations among temples of differing rank mirrored the political structure of Sipsongpanna. Buddhism also endowed the Dai with a script. Written Dai is the language of sutras and scriptures. This script is employed in the religious context by other *minzu* such as the Bulang, who also practice Theravada Buddhism, although their spoken language differs from Dai. Although Buddhism is central to Dai life and culture, certain animist practices persisted, and over time melded with Theravada beliefs and practices.

While Sipsongpanna enjoyed relative autonomy throughout the centuries, that autonomy waxed and waned according to the power and interests of Burmese, Siamese, and imperial Chinese regimes. Chinese imperial records indicate a long history of tributary relations between Sipsongpanna and the Imperial Court.[6] This relationship intensified during the Yuan dynasty, when Yunnan was "pacified" and brought under direct imperial administrative control. The main town of Cheli (today called Jinghong) served as a garrison post for imperial troops on their forays into Burma. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Sipsongpanna was increasingly drawn into the imperial Chinese orbit as a result of reforms aimed at reducing the power of local chieftains (*tusi*) throughout southwest China.

These reforms codified local power-holders' subordinate position relative to the emperor and were attempts to "civilize" the chieftains and their families through education.[7] Yet Chinese imperial control over Sipsongpanna was not definitive. Records reveal incidents of Sipsongpanna elites defecting to or joining with Burma in conflicts with the imperial state.

Following the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists made further encroachments on Sipsongpanna's autonomy and independence. Sipsongpanna's internal district boundaries were amalgamated and reorganized as counties so as to undercut the power of the *zhaomeng*. At this time Sipsongpanna was also being gradually incorporated into the wider Chinese world via trade and commerce. Cheli became an important stopping point for traders headed to Burma and points south. Sipsongpanna was also developed as a prime tea-growing region. A few Dai capitalists emerged during this period, but most tea plantation owners and managers were Han, Hui Muslim, or Bai.[8]

Despite the erosion of its independence, Sipsongpanna on the eve of Liberation was still an isolated, relatively autonomous place. In linguistic, religious, and ethnic terms, its distinctiveness from the rest of China was notable; geographically, its isolation was striking. Yunnan itself is geographically somewhat isolated from the rest of China. In the early twentieth century travelers journeying from Kunming to Shanghai or Beijing would typically head south to Vietnam, and then continue by boat along the southeast China coast, instead of going overland through central China. Travel between provinces was no easier. In 1950, the journey from Kunming to Sipsongpanna took roughly a month due to mountainous terrain, poor roads, and the threat of banditry.[9] Today this trip takes less than a day by car; by plane, it takes just over half an hour.

Xishuangbanna under Socialism

The Chinese Communist Party has a well-deserved reputation for having run roughshod over pre-1949 religious and cultural institutions in its rise to power. Throughout most of China, the Communists built their support among the poor peasantry, galvanizing the dispossessed against a landed gentry that drew its authority from property and tradition. This assault on the feudal order reached its height during Land Reform in the early 1950s, when people received their official class labels and property was confiscated and reallocated accordingly. In the drive to radicalize the peasantry, the CCP also exposed the inequalities at the heart of "feudal superstition," such

as religion and other cultural practices, and the political-economic arrangements with which they were entwined. In most areas, religious personages, cultural notables, richer landowners, and gentry suffered grave persecution, even death, at the hands of the party and a mobilized peasantry.

Among the exceptions to this practice was a large subset of the minority nationality population, including the Dai. The decision to go easy on certain minorities was justified according to Marxist and Morganian stage theories of development.[10] Groups that had reached a stage of socio-economic development similar to that achieved by the Han were treated like the Han—radically. Those who were deemed to be at an earlier stage of development underwent "peaceful, consultative" (*heping xieshang*) land reform. Thus, among "backward" groups stuck in stages of slave society, primitive communism, or, like the Dai, feudal manorialism (*fengjian lingzhu zhuyi*), the party refrained for a time from carrying out the divisive and extractive policies of land reform. Many preexisting cultural and political structures were left intact and even subsumed into the party-state structure.

Strategic concerns shaped this approach. In some cases the party had struck political bargains with minority chieftains to ensure their support against the Nationalists. The Communists also felt that a nonassimilative program was necessary to win the trust of minority peoples, allowing the Communists to distinguish their own program from the assimilationist policies of the Nationalists. Working with established political elites also facilitated the control and integration of diverse peoples.

The party's treatment of Dai culture and political elites in the early 1950s reflects these strategic concerns.[11] Cadres used certain features of Dai life—not always in accordance with official policy—to smooth the transition to socialism. Elements of Dai culture served as shortcuts in the state-building project by providing a framework according to which Chinese socialism could be made intelligible and legitimate to the local population. Whole sections of the Dai aristocracy were absorbed into the local party-state apparatus. The case of Zhao Cunxin is emblematic. Before 1949, Zhao, a member of the Dai royalty, had held the position of *zhaojingha*, an adviser to the monarch and liaison to the world outside Sipsongpanna. When Xishuangbanna was officially established as a Dai Autonomous Prefecture in 1954, Zhao was appointed head of the prefecture (*zhouzhang*), a position he held for forty years. Many *zhaomeng* and other aristocrats retained significant influence in prefectural and county government affairs.[12] The CCP's absorption of the pre-1949 minority elite was not limited to Xishuangbanna; this policy was used throughout minority regions

in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, and other provinces. In Xishuangbanna, the policy worked especially well because of Zhao Cunxin's support for the Communist Party. Zhao had joined the underground Communist Party in 1947 and helped fight retreating Nationalist forces.[13] The Communists were thus in the position of having won over one of the most powerful and esteemed political elites in the area.

Zhao's conversion to socialism might be dismissed as savvy politics on the part of a calculating local chieftain. Written memoirs and interviews with Zhao, however, suggest a dedicated believer. At the time he joined the Party, the Nationalist presence in Xishuangbanna was substantial. The area had been under Nationalist control since 1913, and Communist operations were clandestine and fraught with danger. Zhao was one of only a handful of Dai elites to join forces with the party at this time, as many other elites were collaborating with the Nationalists. Zhao sums up his reasons for joining the Communist Party:

> The Nationalists were very corrupt. They were not interested in the livelihood of Dai people. They took money and land from Dai peasants, but did not do anything to improve their health or economic situation. The Communists I met seemed honest and trustworthy, and had plans to develop Xishuangbanna's economy, build schools and hospitals, and deal with problems like malaria. In my opinion, there was no real choice to be made, so I joined the party.[14]

As one of the most influential members of the royalty, and as someone with extensive knowledge of local conditions, Zhao was instrumental in helping the People's Liberation Army (PLA) infiltrate the area and drive remnants of the Nationalist Army into Burma. He personally guided a division of the PLA's Ninth Route Army across the Lancang River, and was later injured in a battle on the Ganlanba plain.[15] Older residents of Ganlanba still speak reverently of Zhao's role in the fighting.

Upon its victory in 1950 the Party "forgave" the errors of many Dai elites who had supported the Nationalists. Collaborators who had fled over the Burmese and Lao borders were encouraged to return and promised positions in the new party-state apparatus. "Minority autonomy" was the rallying cry during this period of velvet glove treatment of wayward Dai elites; the Party knew that without their support and connections to Dai commoners, its job would be more difficult.

The challenge facing the CCP in Xishuangbanna was one of integrating a culturally cohesive, yet highly stratified, devoutly Buddhist society into the

new socialist order. Cadres attempting to preach a message of socialist egalitarianism were up against castelike social distinctions that shaped settlement patterns, labor practices, and cultural taboos. Yet aspects of Dai village life related to status inequalities assisted the party's efforts to establish its presence. Though the ultimate aim was to impart a post-feudal, revolutionary socialist culture, cadres used elements of traditional society to habituate the Dai population to the goals and ideals of the new socialist order.

Two of the institutions that cadres found useful were *huoxi* and *heizhao*, quasi-feudal communal responsibility systems which had dictated the allocation of symbolic, political, and productive labor among and within villages.[16] Such labor included communal village labor as well as corvée in service of the *zhaomeng* or *zhaopianling*. Under the *huoxi* system, each village within a particular district (*meng*) was responsible for performing specific tasks and services. One village might be responsible for providing food, clothing, and other necessities to the local *zhaomeng*. Other villages built and repaired roads, maintained boats and ferry service across the Lancang River, or provided cooking services for the royal palace. Some of the responsibilities were rather idiosyncratic; one village was responsible for raising the *zhaopianling*'s peacocks and elephants, while others blew trumpets during royal processions or made implements for use in religious ceremonies. One village was charged with the task of peeling very thin strips of bark for the *zhaopianling* to use as toilet paper.[17]

Other kinds of labor responsibilities were allocated under the *heizhao* system, usually among residents of a particular village or district. Assignments were allocated on a rotating basis; an individual would be assigned a task for five to fifteen days, depending on the nature of the work. The allocation method varied, but was typically egalitarian, even democratic. In some villages the headman might make all decisions; in others, selection by lot determined the division of tasks.

During the first half of the 1950s, CCP cadres sometimes made use of *heizhao* and *huoxi*. On several occasions when boats were needed to move materials up and down the Lancang, cadres mobilized boat-building villages rather than assemble a random group of peasants to construct them. One benefit of this strategy was that there was no need to pay for the boats or for road-building crews, horses, kindling, construction materials, cooks, etc.; Dai people performed these duties out of customary obligation.[18]

In the short term, *heizhao* and *huoxi* were convenient means for mobilizing labor, building infrastructure, moving goods, and addressing material necessities. These traditional systems may also have helped naturalize

the transition to socialism, by allowing the CCP to organize Dai society through familiar practices. Yet the reliance on these institutions had political and ideological costs. Conceptual confusion arose from cadres' use of traditional responsibility systems to explain and anchor CCP policies in Dai terms. Cadre reports from this period complain of Dai peasants describing the Party in terms remarkably similar to those used to describe the former ruling elite. Where the Dai once were the subjects of the *zhaopianling*, they now owed their loyalty to the "*zhao gongchan*" ("King Communists").[19] To the contemporary reader, this characterization seems particularly appropriate, given later Maoist megalomania. At the time, however, the subjection and stratification implied by this phrase did not square with the Party's stated commitment to the mass line.

The exploitation of traditional intra-village labor allocation systems also caused headaches, even while helping solve practical problems. For example, when assigned to positions in work units, government posts, and mass organizations, some Dai peasants would carry out their responsibilities for only five to fifteen days—the typical timeframe for *heizhao* assignments—then quit working, return to their villages, and await reassignment. Moreover, under *heizhao* one was allowed to find and pay substitutes to perform assigned tasks. It was not unusual for cadres to discover that Dai representatives at meetings in Jinghong and Kunming were not who they were supposed to be, but rather a friend, neighbor, or cousin paid to take someone's place. On hearing that cadres had been at their jobs continuously for a year or more—an extreme length of time given *heizhao* custom—many villagers expressed their sympathy for these cadres' subjugation to what was clearly a cruel feudal master. More problematically, these practices were accompanied by new forms and avenues of exploitation. For instance, members of the aristocracy in Menghai County on whom high party positions and salaries had been bestowed continued to demand corvée from their former subjects as late as 1955.[20]

As the national tide turned increasingly leftward in the mid-1950s, the melding of Party policies with a Dai worldview became further suspect and a matter of concern. Although practical matters of securing the border and establishing basic organization occupied the party during roughly the first five years after Liberation, it should be remembered that the CCP's goals were not merely social and economic but cultural and even spiritual. The incorporation of socialist theory and practice within the traditional, "feudal" worldview of the Dai complicated the propagation of a Chinese Communist worldview.

Officials were particularly alarmed at the continued florescence of Theravada Buddhism. Despite the party's apparent success in establishing a solid institutional base in Xishuangbanna, the persistence of Buddhism and other religious practices indicated that the ideological and cultural transformations sought by the CCP were failing to materialize. Ethnographic reports show that religious activity actually increased in the early 1950s. Ironically, this was the result of Communist success. The founding of the PRC and the party's state-building efforts had improved the lives of many in Xishuangbanna. Consequently, temple offerings proliferated as people sought to demonstrate gratitude for their good fortune and ensure its continuation. For the Dai, Liberation had resulted in the "three betters": better food, better clothes, and better temple offerings.[21]

During the high tide of collectivization in the mid-1950s, officials were still proceeding somewhat cautiously in many minority areas. In Xishuangbanna the modified, "consultative" version of land reform was not completed until 1956; large-scale collectivization could not take place where the reallocation of land and other property had not yet occurred. Those in favor of gradual change argued that since border minorities historically lacked private property, commodities markets, and capitalism, socialist change was unlikely to unfold according to the schedule followed in more developed areas. The collectives that were established differed markedly from those in Han-dominated regions. They were generally smaller, comprised of fifteen to twenty households rather than the one to three hundred households per typical collective. Many Dai were allowed to retain draft animals and small private plots.[22] Local cadres were exhorted to refrain from assigning households from different *minzu* to the same collective, to avoid misunderstandings. Despite the increasingly radical character of the movement at the national level, cadres were instructed to avoid fomenting intra-minority class conflict. Above all, cadres were expected to tailor work teams and management to the abilities of local minority cadres and the receptivity of the people.

However, this commitment to "consultative" change did not survive the first decade of the PRC. The decisive end to caution and experimentation came with the campaign against "local nationalism," the form the Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 took in minority regions. Those minority and Han cadres who had promoted the consultative approach endured public criticism sessions and were sent away for rectification and political study. This leftward shift also entailed a second land reform in Xishuangbanna, deemed necessary since the earlier consultative form had left too much

power in the hands of pre-Liberation elites.[23] Among the Dai, land reform was especially complicated. Prior to Liberation all property had belonged to the *zhaopianling*, so identifying landlords was difficult. Moreover, despite the castelike stratification of Dai society, the communal character of land and labor had created a fairly egalitarian standard of living among nonelites. The imperative to divide and label classes led to some creative and egregious solutions. For example, many who had served as village headmen prior to Liberation were denounced as landlords. Yet the position of headman was a nonhereditary, rotating one, often assigned by democratic or consensus methods. Moreover, village heads controlled no more property than other villagers, yet assumed greater responsibilities to the district *zhaomeng*. Landlord and rich peasant labels were also applied to families who possessed more gold and silver jewelry than others, even though these items did not translate easily into practical material wealth.[24]

Except for brief interludes, from the start of the Great Leap Forward until the end of the Maoist era the Xishuangbanna Dai and other minorities were subject to the uniform, "cut of one knife" policies applied to all Chinese. Showing respect for minorities' special characteristics was repudiated as "local nationalism" and bourgeois. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were profoundly disruptive and destructive for Dai and other residents of Xishuangbanna. During and immediately after the Great Leap, food shortages were severe, and many local people fled to Laos and Burma.

Xishuangbanna's remoteness did not protect it from the chaos and factional strife of the Cultural Revolution. The issue of Dai participation in the Cultural Revolution is complex. This complexity results in part from cultural stereotypes about the Dai, in particular the widespread characterization of them as "docile." Perhaps owing to this stereotype, many Xishuangbanna officials downplay the extent of Dai involvement in this movement. A number of officials interviewed claimed that conflict in Xishuangbanna was instigated by "*neidiren*" or "*waidiren*," terms that mean "insider" and "outsider" respectively, but which refer to the same entity: people from the interior of China, or from outside Xishuangbanna and the land of the Dai. Many of the participants in factional fighting were indeed among the thousands of mostly Han settlers and sent-down youth who had come to the area to work on the rubber and tea plantations of the state-run farms. Interviews with Dai villagers, however, suggest that many participated in Cultural Revolution struggles.[25] For better or worse, by the end of the Maoist era, Dai culture and society had been profoundly transformed by Maoist socialism.

THE BAI

While the Xishuangbanna Dai constituted a fairly distinct cultural, linguistic, economic, and political entity, and were thus obvious candidates for classification as *minzu*, the situation of the Bai prior to 1949 is quite different. One of the difficulties that arise when speaking of Bai cultural resurgence concerns the very "Bai-ness" of the Bai. The term "Bai," which means "white," derives from the historical usage of the terms *bai* (white) and *wu* (black) to distinguish among various Yunnan ethnic and tribal groups.[26] Yet prior to the mid-1950s, Bai people rarely if ever referred to themselves as such, or even considered themselves as ethnic. Instead, Bai called themselves *minjia*, a Chinese term that has been translated as "common people" or "civilian households."[27]

Several mid-twentieth-century studies of Dali life and society emphasize the Chineseness of the *minjia*. One of these, Francis L. K. Hsu's *Under the Ancestor's Shadow*, portrays its subjects as paragons of the Confucian Chinese order. His subjects' concerns with filial piety and ancestor worship, and the way those concerns played out in their social behavior, are characterized by Hsu as emblematic of a Chinese way of life. The "shadow" cast by ancestors over the actions and self-conceptions of West Town's residents typified rural social organization and cultural practice throughout China. In Hsu's interpretation, the *minjia* people "would be seriously offended" if their Chinese origins were denied.[28] In *The Tower of Five Glories*, C. P. Fitzgerald echoes many of Hsu's findings, emphasizing the strength of Confucian and Chinese folk traditions, values, and ideals among the *minjia*. However, whereas Hsu avoids the issue of the ethnic status of the *minjia* people, Fitzgerald raises it if only to reveal its tenuous character. Fitzgerald considered the *minjia* to be a distinct ethnic group, mainly on the basis of their language, but if they possessed any sense of minority or ethnic identity, it was a weak one.[29] The *minjia* subjects Fitzgerald discusses seemed embarrassed to be considered as ethnic, downplaying or dismissing the idea.

Neither of these studies use the term "Bai" to refer to the *minjia* people of the Dali region. Both studies show the degree to which *minjia* were acculturated to mainstream Chinese life and society. Together, Hsu's and Fitzgerald's studies suggest that in terms of both objective, "external" aspects of ethnicity and subjective ones based on self-identity, the *minjia* people could be viewed as "strongly" Chinese and only a minority in a minimal, "weak" way, certainly not constituting any social entity called the "Bai." The fact that their spoken language differed from standard Chinese was relatively

unimportant, because Chinese people throughout China spoke (and continue to speak) a number of mutually unintelligible dialects.

The minority classification project of the 1950s, however, greatly relied on external markers of uniqueness in demarcating minorities from the Han and from each other. In post-1949 Chinese scholarship on the Bai, one phenomenon typically cited as "proof" of Bai distinctiveness is *benzhu* worship. *Benzhu* worship is a decentralized, village-specific polytheistic set of practices organized around the worship of local tutelary gods and protector spirits. It is often portrayed as a distinctive and distinguishing aspect of Bai culture, unique to them as a people. It is even described as their "national [or nationality] religion."[30] In terms of Stalin's criteria of nationhood, *benzhu* worship is proof that the Bai possess a unique and shared psychological make-up, as manifest in distinct cultural practices. Yet the notion that *benzhu* demonstrates Bai distinctiveness is problematic. First, the Bai do not practice *benzhu* exclusively; they are as fervent in Buddhist and Daoist practice as they are in the worship of their local tutelary gods, and some Bai are Catholic or Protestant. While *benzhu* may be the most ancient of the religions they practice, there is no evidence that it stands in a hierarchically primary relation to either Buddhism or Daoism.[31] Second, although *benzhu* worship originated in the Dali region, it resembles folk religious practices found in other parts of China. Much like the worship of tutelary, protector gods elsewhere, *benzhu* practice sometimes parallels irrigation societies where hierarchical, intra-village relations concerning water rights are symbolically reproduced.[32]

The *benzhu* religion underscores not so much Bai distinctiveness as their syncretism. It demonstrates a willingness to adapt and meld complex, even contradictory symbolic practice. *Benzhu* originated in the worship of spirits embodied in the natural world, such as trees, streams, rocks, and rivers, but over time it incorporated deities from other religions and figures from myth and history. There are *benzhu* temples dedicated to Guanyin and other staples of Chinese folk religion, and it is not uncommon to find *benzhu* temples adjacent to those of other faiths. There are also *benzhu* temples dedicated to Kubilai Khan, who defeated the Dali kingdom and incorporated Yunnan into the Chinese empire; to Nanzhao kings; and to statesmen and scholars of various dynastic periods. In one village there is a temple dedicated to both Kubilai Khan and Duan Xingzhi, the last ruler of the Dali kingdom who surrendered to the Mongols (figs. 2.1, 2.2). Another village worships a Han dynasty official who allegedly introduced their ancestors to the art of carpet weaving, their most important cottage

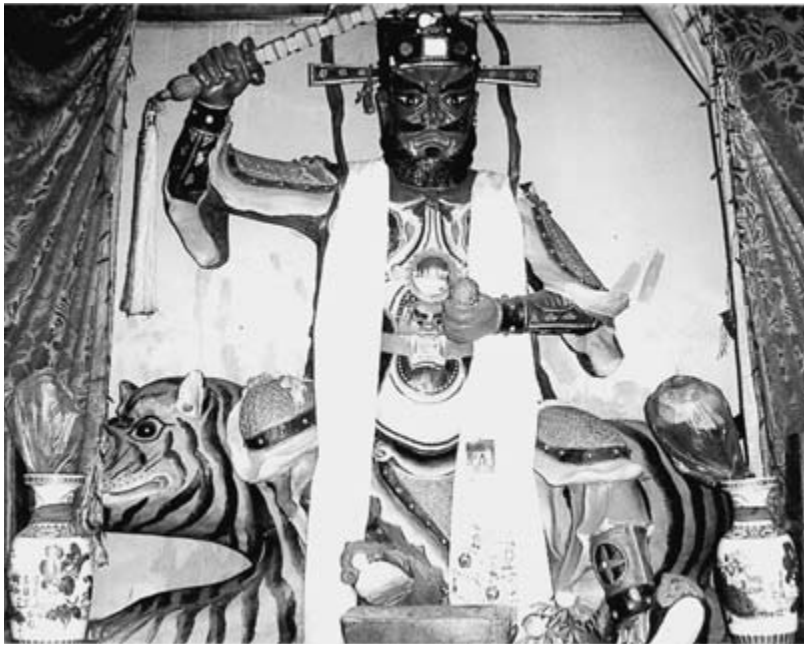

FIG. 2.1 Statue of Kubilai Khan in a *benzhu* temple, Xizhou, Dali. Kubilai's invading Mongol armies defeated the Dali kingdom in 1253. Photographed in 2002.

FIG. 2.2 Statue of Duan Xingzhi, *benzhu* temple, Xizhou, Dali. Duan was the last king of the Dali kingdom. After surrendering to the Mongols, Duan was made a marshal in the Yuan army and continued to govern the Dali region. This statue of Duan stands at the foot of the one of Kubilai depicted in Fig. 2.1. Photographed in 2002.

industry.[33] Half-jokingly, I asked a Bai archeologist if there were any *benzhu* temples dedicated to Chairman Mao. "Not yet," he responded seriously, "but maybe in a hundred years or so."[34]

Bai syncretism and the weakness of their *minzu* consciousness (*minzu yishi*) notwithstanding, phenomena like *benzhu* worship were enough to win minority status for the Bai. However, the classification of the *minjia* as Bai was met with some local resistance. In ethnographic work conducted in the 1980s, David Y. H. Wu found that many older people in the Dali region still referred to themselves as *minjia*.[35] Wu also noted that until 1983, a self-described group of *minjia* in Hunan was denied Bai minority status because they were deemed too assimilated to Han culture, a fact which further complicates the issue of Bai identity.[36] The tenuousness of Bai identity raises several questions. Why, for instance, has there been so much confusion over the "authenticity" of the Bai as a minority nationality? What significance does the syncretism of the *minjia* have for the contemporary resurgence of Bai culture and articulations of Bai identity? Does this resurgence entail an "invention of tradition?"

The confusion over Bai identity and culture stems in part from Chinese minority policy and its theoretical justifications. In terms of many of the relevant criteria, as Hsu, Fitzgerald, and Wu suggest, the Bai, or *minjia*—though distinct enough to justify their classification as minority *minzu*—were highly acculturated to Chinese, and thus Han, forms of agriculture, language, religion, and social customs. Since Han ways served as the standard and were by definition "advanced," the Bai too were seen as such, at least relatively. This acculturation stems from geographic, economic, and political factors. Despite their isolation and independence from the rest of China, the Erhai and Dianchi plains of Yunnan were never completely cut off from Chinese political and cultural influence. During the Eastern and Western Han dynasties, the southern Silk Road brought textiles and other products from central China through Yunnan and into Burma and India to the West. Historical records indicate the existence of a classical Confucian school in Dali County as early as 85 C.E. During the period of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms (738–1253), the ruling elite, which maintained a tributary relationship with the Tang and Song courts while enjoying de facto independence, imported noted scholars to teach them Chinese writing and Confucian classics.[37] These elite also adapted Chinese characters to fit the spoken tongue, and produced literature and written records of their deeds and histories. The Mongol invasion of the mid-thirteenth century and the consequent founding of the Yuan dynasty

entailed the further expansion of classically Chinese cultural practices and institutions.

Acculturation was at times achieved by force. During the tenth century, Nanzhao rulers carried out attacks on the city of Chengdu in Sichuan and parts of Guangxi, bringing back tens of thousands of Chinese captives in the process.[38] The regional dominance of Nanzhao and Dali, moreover, translated into control of the fertile plains of Yunnan. This control of the flatlands facilitated the development of sedentary wet-rice cultivation and multicrop agriculture—hallmarks of ostensibly "Han" Chinese economic practice. Most significant in the acculturation of the peoples of the Erhai plateau, however, was the settlement of soldiers, traders, and ordinary peasants from central and eastern China that began with the Mongol conquest and accelerated under the Ming and Qing. These settlers opened up uncultivated land, intermarried with aboriginal and tribal peoples of the region, and helped effect the integration of Yunnan into the broader Chinese culture and civilization.

Bai political, economic, and cultural preeminence is not only a feature of the distant past. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *minjia* were prominent in Yunnan's political and economic elite. Two *minjia* trading companies, the Heqing and Xizhou groups (*bang*), dominated Yunnan commerce and long-distance trade during this period. These two *bang*, along with the Hui Tengchong *bang*, established powerful commercial firms whose networks spread to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Bangkok, and beyond.[39] One of the interesting features of the post-Mao Bai cultural revival has been a rediscovery of these *minjia* capitalists. A spate of recent publications on the Bai celebrate these capitalists—until recently vilified as enemies of the people—as early proponents of "minority nationality economics" (*minzu jingji*).[40]

In a way, the question of why the Bai are so advanced is misplaced. It is not that the Bai are somehow inherently inclined toward such acculturation. Rather, the Bai of today are the products or descendents of the "winners" of indigenous political struggles in Yunnan and of the later Yuan, Ming, and Qing conquerors who settled the region and intermarried with its inhabitants. This relative advancement and cultural integration of the Erhai region had important implications for the Bai in the early years of the People's Republic. For one thing, the CCP did not need to start from scratch to establish an education system as it did in places like Xishuangbanna. After 1949, the Party reorganized and expanded existing schools under new administration and with the new socialist curriculum. In general, the

Bai did not present to the same degree the kinds of linguistic and cultural obstacles to state-building as did other linguistic, ethnic, and tribal groups.

The history of Bai integration within China played out in the implementation of Maoist policies. Like the Dai, until 1958 and the beginnings of the Great Leap Forward, most minority nationalities in Yunnan were subject to "peaceful, consultative" land reform policies and practices that minimized the pace and extent of socialist transformation and left many traditional elites in power. The Bai, however, were not subject to these modified policies. Land reform and collectivization among the Bai are noteworthy only for being unremarkable. The experiences of most Bai were in fact utterly "normal," if such a word can be applied to the Maoist era's radical experiments. The counties of Dali underwent land reform in the early 1950s; mutual aid teams were introduced in 1953 and 1954, and over the next three years collectivization intensified. With the advent of the Great Leap Forward, nearly the entire Dali population was reorganized into People's Communes. It was not until the start of the reform era that the Bai's "special characteristics" were again allowed to flourish.

THE HUI

Folk histories and archeological evidence suggest a Muslim presence in Yunnan as early as the ninth century C.E.[41] Both Dali and Kunming were stops on the southern Silk Route, and Middle Eastern traders may have passed through Yunnan on their way to the Tang capital of Chang'an.[42] Yet it was Kubilai Khan's conquest of Yunnan in 1253 that brought the first waves of permanent Muslim settlers to Yunnan. Although the Yuan dynasty was founded and ruled by the Mongols, the very first governor of Yunnan, Sayyid 'Ajall Shams ad-Din, was a Muslim of Central Asian descent. Sayyid, or Saidianchi Shansiding in Chinese, was from Bukhara and, according to his family history, a thirty-first generation direct descendant of the prophet Mohammed.[43] Because the Mongols had a long-standing practice of incorporating conquered armies rather than annihilating them, Saidianchi attained a high position in the Mongol army. Many of those soldiers who fought under him were Muslim.

On his appointment as Yunnan's first provincial governor, Saidianchi implemented the *tunken* policy, a land settlement program that stimulated the in-migration of thousands of soldiers and civilian support personnel to Yunnan from elsewhere in China. *Tunken* was aimed at cementing Yuan power; toward this end, these soldier-settlers opened up vast tracts

of uncultivated land for agricultural production.[44] This policy was aimed at controlling and subduing as much of the province and its inhabitants as possible; as a result of this, the pattern of settlement under Saidianchi's rule was greatly dispersed. Contemporary Hui communities reflect these settlement patterns: Yunnan Muslims are widely scattered, and reside in all but two remote counties.

Saidianchi brought Islam as well as Muslims to Yunnan. Historical records mention his accomplishments in establishing mosques, including twelve in the capital of Kunming.[45] Yet as Morris Rossabi points out, Saidianchi did not impose Islam on the Yunnan populace. Owing to Kubilai's own interest in Confucianism and Chinese cultural practice, Saidianchi is best known for the more "orthodox" policies and measures carried out during his tenure, and he is celebrated as a Confucian civilizer.[46] Saidianchi introduced Chinese marital and funeral customs, established Confucian schools, expanded the imperial examination system, and transferred the provincial capital from Taihe in Dali to Kunming, where it is today.[47] He promoted agriculture, lowered the tax burden on the populace, and ordered the repair and expansion of flood control and irrigation systems around Lake Dian near the new provincial capital, many of which functioned well into the twentieth century.[48] Although efforts to co-opt tribal leaders did not reach the level they did under the Ming, Saidianchi made some inroads in that direction. The first Yuan governor-general fits neatly into the pantheon of benevolent Confucian administrators and reformers. Following Saidianchi's death after just six years of governing Yunnan, Kubilai Khan decreed that his policies and plans would continue in perpetuity. In 1297 he was posthumously awarded the title Prince of Xianyang.[49]

So successful was Saidianchi in cementing Yuan rule that his sons also rose to prominent military and political positions. Nasr al-Din, the eldest, held high rank in the Mongol-Muslim army that conquered Yunnan and succeeded his father as governor of Yunnan.[50] Accounts of the history of Muslims in Yunnan praise Nasr al-Din's success in pacifying indigenous tribal peoples and enlisting them into the army. Nasr al-Din is further lauded for having developed the economy, "eradicated superstition, and improved the backward customs of every region."[51] Saidianchi's other sons also attained political prominence in Yunnan, Guangdong, and Jiangxi. This illustrious family history is a source of pride to Hui people in contemporary Yunnan, many of whom trace their ancestry directly back to Saidianchi.[52]

Continuation of Saidianchi's benevolent policies was not an option, unfortunately, for the short-lived Yuan dynasty; in 1368, it was overthrown

and replaced by the Ming. Under the Ming, however, Muslims continued to play a prominent role in the military and in the governance of Yunnan. Four of Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang's top generals and military advisers—Chang Yuchun, Hu Dahai, Lan Yu, and Mu Ying—were Muslims from Anhui and Jiangsu in eastern China.[53] Lan Yu and Mu Ying served as assistants to Fu Youde, commander of the Yunnan expeditionary forces that brought Yunnan under Ming control.[54] Mu Ying, an adopted son of the first Ming emperor, played a particularly key role in establishing Ming control over Yunnan in the mid-fourteenth century. Under his leadership the influx of Muslim as well as non-Muslim Chinese from the eastern Chinese heartland increased dramatically. A large proportion of Yunnan mosques were built during the early Ming, mainly during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang, who for a time displayed tolerance toward Islam. The Ming period is also viewed as the high tide of "*Hanhua*" ("Hanification" or sinicization) in Yunnan. The policies of Mu Ying and others were largely responsible for "Han" Chinese culture permeating Yunnan life and society more thoroughly than ever.[55]

The roster of accomplished Yunnan Muslims includes adventurous as well as ordinary Hui people. The eunuch Zheng He, China's greatest Chinese seafarer, who led maritime expeditions to Arabia and the eastern coast of Africa in the early fifteenth century, was born to a Muslim family near Kunming.[56] During the Ming and into the Qing, Yunnan Muslims began playing an important role in the spread and development of markets, long-distance trade, mining, and handicrafts, even though the vast majority of Hui were peasants. Yunnan Muslims also flourished culturally and intellectually. During the late Ming and through the Qing, Hui scholars and teachers developed a uniquely Chinese approach to Islam, one that used Confucian precepts and thought to explain Islamic philosophy, ethics, and law. This effort was driven to a large degree by political exigencies, specifically the need to render Islam coherent, and thus palatable, to the Ming and Qing courts. The attempt to reconcile two schools of thought was no easy task, due to fundamental contradictions between their basic principles. On the one hand, Islam stipulates the supremacy of Allah and the equality of all human beings before him. The Chinese Confucian worldview, on the other hand, posits a hierarchical social, political, and moral scheme in which the emperor, as the Son of Heaven and possessing divine characteristics, is venerated. Yet the reconciliation worked both ways; Yunnanese Islamic scholars borrowed from the neo-Confucians to deepen proofs and arguments for the existence of Allah and the truths of Islam.[57] Many of these scholars and religious leaders held imperial degrees or military rank.[58]

Under the Qing (1644–1911), the social and political position of the Hui greatly deteriorated, in part because of Manchu control over the military and political apparatus. Unlike the Ming and Yuan rulers, the Manchu made little room for Muslim leadership. The decline in relations with both the imperial state and the Han partly resulted from—and fueled—Hui support for Ming restoration. The slogan "oppose the Qing, restore the Ming" (*fan Qing fu Ming*) was widely propagated among Yunnan Muslims. Ming restoration societies sprung up throughout the province, and some Hui changed their surnames to Ming in a not-so-subtle protest against Manchu rule.

The later Qing dynasty is remembered today for its anti-Muslim massacres and repression and for Muslim revolt. The persecution of Muslims reached its nadir during the nineteenth century. In Yunnan, a series of Han-Hui ethnic riots and massacres of Hui took place beginning in the early 1800s. Many of these originated in petty, individual conflicts, such as a failure to pay debts, fistfights among individuals, etc., or from economic competition, but later escalated into larger group conflicts and even massacres.[59] Unfortunately for Hui involved in these conflicts, local and provincial Qing officials followed a divide-and-conquer strategy of "assist the Han, suppress the Hui" (*zhu Han mie Hui*), and publicly advocated a "destroy the Hui" (*mie Hui*) policy. Qing magistrates and military units in Yunnan backed and even participated in the massacre of Muslims at the hands of Han. Not surprisingly, efforts to seek redress through local and even Imperial Beijing venues were ignored, or used as justification to step up anti-Muslim attacks.[60]

The most famous response to this persecution was the Dali-based uprising known as the Panthay Rebellion, led by Du Wenxiu, which lasted from 1856 to 1873. Du, a Muslim, had traveled to the Qing court in Beijing to protest the slaughter of fellow Muslims following ethnic riots in his native Tengyue (now Tengchong), in western Yunnan. His petition was received, but his request for redress was denied.[61] In the face of this, Du spent several years organizing and mobilizing the resentful locals, who were predominantly Muslim, in Menghua County (now Weishan). Backed by a network of Muslims and *Gelaohui* secret society members—like Du himself, many Muslims were also members of the secret society—Du led an attack on Qing administrative and military units in Dali.[62] They succeeded, and what originated in a search for justice and redress grew into a province-wide secessionist uprising. From 1856 through 1873, Du and his armies controlled a wide swath of central and western Yunnan and parts of neighboring Sichuan Province. Though roughly contemporaneous with the Taiping

Rebellion, Du's revolt had little in common with that religiously motivated uprising. Rather, this rebellion on the edge of the empire was a revolt against Qing persecution and injustice.

At the height of their power, the rebels controlled roughly half of Yunnan Province, including the outskirts of the capital in Kunming. The rebellion's longevity was in part a reflection of the fact that Qing soldiers were embroiled in trying to suppress a host of other uprisings throughout China. The most notable of these was the Taiping Rebellion, whose size and proximity to the seat of Imperial power made it a more immediate threat.[63] Once the Taipings were quashed in 1864, Qing armies turned their might on the Panthay rebels, eventually defeating them with the help of Ma Rulong, a turncoat Muslim who had originally fought on the side of the rebels. The defeat ushered in a period of anti-Muslim repression far harsher than that which had inspired the uprising.[64] Muslims throughout Yunnan were slaughtered, lands were confiscated, and many Hui tried to pass as Han or Bai by abandoning identifiable surnames such as Ma, shaving their beards, and eating pork.

Today, the Panthay Rebellion is hailed as a valiant precursor to the people's revolution of the twentieth century. The main figures and events of the uprising are celebrated in numerous books and magazine articles, and a museum chronicling the rebellion now stands on the site of Du's military and political headquarters in Dali. Although its origins lay in Hui efforts to seek justice and redress, the rebellion involved coordination and cooperation among many different ethnic groups in Yunnan. It is characterized as an exemplar of *minzu* unity, a multiethnic people's struggle against a corrupt, decrepit, feudal Qing empire that fomented ethnic strife as a way of maintaining control. But for the lack of a vanguard party, the hagiography of Du implies, the rebellion might have succeeded.

One ironic outcome of the failure of the rebellion was the expansion of Hui involvement in commerce and trade. The confiscation of Hui lands after this and other Muslim revolts meant that few Hui families or communities could support themselves by farming alone, and many turned to trade. Hui came to dominate the long-distance transport industry, running horse and mule caravans (*mabang*) into Tibet and Sichuan and south into Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Using these extensive networks and connections, the Hui, like the Bai, established prosperous commercial firms, some of which had branches as far away as Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Vietnam. During the late nineteenth century, their role in handicrafts and cottage industry also expanded. Hui in the Tonghai region of central

Yunnan, for example, became famous for their metallurgy, particularly for gun and knife manufacturing that continued into the 1950s and beyond. Thus, despite persecution, many Yunnan Hui continued to prosper.

The latter half of the nineteenth century also witnessed important developments in Yunnanese Islam. During this period one of the most venerated Yunnan Islamic scholars of the late Qing, Ma Dexin, translated and printed the first Chinese Koran using woodblock technology. Ma also translated a number of Arabic works into Chinese and wrote a series of Chinese texts on Islam. He was also active in the Panthay Rebellion and helped organize a contemporaneous uprising of Muslims in central Yunnan that joined with the Dali-based revolt.

The list of illustrious Yunnan Muslim personages of the time spanning the late Qing, Republican, and early Socialist periods is as long and varied as that of previous eras. It includes capitalist entrepreneurs, Beijing and Yunnan opera singers, teachers, scholars, literary figures, newspaper publishers, and heroes of the Revolution.[65] Such achievements do not imply that all Yunnan Muslims were engaged in equally benevolent, service-oriented activities. Contemporary Chinese histories of the Yunnan Hui seem to have difficulty dealing with the "traitor" Ma Rulong, bandits, local tyrants, opium smugglers, and Yunnan Muslims who helped suppress revolts in China's northwest. It is difficult to find more than oblique references to such figures. Yet the fact of their existence highlights the degree to which Hui participated in and were integrated into Yunnan culture, economy, and society. The picture is of a flourishing though at times beleaguered Muslim community linked in important ways with the greater Islamic world, yet fully invested in, and inseparable from, the Chinese social, political, and economic order.

The lives of most ordinary Yunnan Muslims did not differ significantly from other groups, especially the Han, among whom they lived. The leaders of this dispersed and extensive Muslim community aspired to Confucian and Chinese ideals of benevolence, community service, prosperity, respect for ancestors, and defense of the motherland. While a history of persecution and resistance informs the contemporary Hui cultural revival, so too do their ancestors' economic, cultural, political, and military accomplishments. The particulars of the Hui revival, and those of the Dai and Bai, are the focus of the next three chapters.