

AUTHENTICITY, IDENTITY, AND
TRADITION AMONG THE HUI

Chinese minorities are frequently portrayed in art, literature, popular culture, and public policy as backward, childlike primitives, in need of the civilizing assistance of the elder brother Han nationality. Alternatively they are feminized exotics, repositories of authenticity in an age in which rapid change has all but obliterated the culture and nature of the Chinese past. These representations are neither entirely negative nor conditions from which minorities need to be extricated. Instead they suggest an ideal type, a notion of the “model minority” implicit in much Chinese discourse. Minorities may be or are alleged to be backwards and passive, but there is an appropriateness to these qualities and to minorities’ dependence on the modernizing, advanced Han. Passivity, for instance, translates into “docility” (*wenshun*), always a good thing as far as state power is concerned. Exoticism has proved to be a lucrative commodity for minority regions, attracting affluent tourists from abroad and from more urban, Han-dominated parts of the country.

The Hui are not a model minority. They rarely if ever are portrayed as exemplars of a passive, eroticized ideal. Though they sometimes seem exotic to non-Muslim Chinese—“familiar strangers,” in the words of Jonathan Lipman—notions of feminized docility are irrelevant to characterizations of Hui difference.¹ Moreover, the Hui are not the passive object of Chinese

history—quite the contrary. Where many non-Han peoples have been the target of what Stevan Harrell calls “civilizing projects,” historically the Hui often have been the ones doing the civilizing. The history of Chinese civilizing projects in Yunnan is in great part the history of the Yunnan Hui.

Post-Mao reforms have sparked a cultural, primarily religious revival among the Hui Muslims of Yunnan Province. The Hui have rebuilt mosques, established Islamic schools, revived religious networks, and resuscitated practices forced underground during the anti-traditional, anti-religious Maoist years. The cultural ferment involves more than just a straightforward recovery of lost tradition, as participants seek to expand their knowledge of Islam and their opportunities to follow the precepts of their faith.

Hui revival is part of a broader national trend, yet it reflects concerns and goals specific to the Hui as a minority *minzu*. The revival is informed by a historical consciousness of both persecution at the hands of the state and non-Muslim groups and of “rightful resistance” against that persecution.² Many Hui view the practice and promotion of their faith in light of a legacy of Muslim rebellion, as a religious requirement to defend their faith and people. Hui cultural activism also challenges official and popular stereotypes of the Hui as violent, clannish, disloyal, and even criminal. Although the Hui locate their political and cultural efforts within a history of resistance against oppression, they also seek to counter negative perceptions of them as unruly troublemakers. To this end many Hui situate their Islamic revival within the broader history of Muslims in Yunnan Province, a history replete with “patriotic” political, social, and cultural achievements.

For the Hui, as for the Dai and Bai, cultural and religious revival is both a return to tradition and an opportunity to modernize their culture and their communities. Religious resurgence has also enhanced the social capital of many Hui communities by revitalizing religious networks and community life. Revival also creates opportunities for Hui to assert the rights and privileges of minority autonomy. Yet the Hui revival is not monolithic. Among the Hui there are differences of opinion regarding the purpose of revival, its meaning, and the traditions and conceptions of Chinese Islam that should be promoted. Some have embraced a Wahhabi-influenced Islam that encourages detachment and insularity from the secular, non-Muslim society that surrounds them. Other Hui support the reconstitution of an existence and identity that is as Chinese as it is Islamic. They justify their vision of an engaged, civil Islam through reference to previous generations of Muslim scholars, writers, officials, and military leaders who

were as immersed in the Confucian, Republican, or Communist Chinese cultures of their day as they were in Islam. These competing perceptions of Islamic tradition and identity complicate the Hui people's drive for legitimacy and modernization, and the Chinese state takes notice.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The Hui are one of China's ten official Muslim minority nationalities, numbering nearly 10 million nationwide. In Yunnan, the Hui number approximately seven hundred thousand, making them the seventh largest of more than two-dozen minorities in the province. They are dispersed unevenly throughout the province: fourteen counties have Hui populations of fifty or less, while in seventeen counties the population exceeds ten thousand. The greatest concentrations are in the northeast, central, and west-central parts of the province. Even where Hui are numerous, their overall percentage of the population may be quite small; in no county or municipality do Hui account for more than 17 percent of the population. In the four urban districts of the capital Kunming, which is home to over seventy-three thousand Hui, they form less than 3 percent of the population.³

The dispersal of the Hui throughout China and within provinces explains their economic and social integration among the Han and other minorities. It also helps explain why, over the centuries, Hui people have absorbed and adopted the language, dress, architectural styles, and even culinary tastes of those other groups among whom they reside, even while attempting to maintain a distinct religious and ethnic identity. Though dispersed, the Hui often reside in tightly knit communities and maintain their identity through worship and dietary practice to some degree. The Hui settlement pattern of concentration-within-dispersal has given rise to the phrase "*da fensan, xiao jizhong*," which translates roughly as "greatly scattered, closely concentrated." In Ludian, a county in the northeastern district of Zhaotong, nearly three-quarters of the Hui population reside in a single township that is 90 percent Hui. In the Weishan Hui and Yi Autonomous County, 90 percent of the Hui population lives in the township of Yongjian.⁴

The Stalinist theory that underpins Chinese ethnography holds that minorities are constituted, in part, by distinct economic practices. However, the geographic variation of Hui communities is matched by a concomitant variation in economic conditions and practices. Historically, many Yunnan Hui were merchants, traders, metallurgists and mule caravan drivers, so many Hui settlements are clustered around commercial and transport

centers. The Hui are reputed to possess a propensity for business; they were once a major force in the development of long-distance trade and commerce in Yunnan and throughout China.⁵ Popular stereotypes also hold that the Hui tend to be affluent relative to other nationalities, including the Han. Yet today most Yunnan Hui are farmers, and many live in the most impoverished parts of the province. Nearly a quarter of all Yunnan Hui reside in the northeastern district of Zhaotong, whose rural counties are some of the poorest in the province.⁶

Nearly all Yunnan Hui, like most Chinese Muslims, are Sunni. However, within Chinese Sunni Islam there are numerous sects or factions known by a confusing array of names. In Yunnan, most Hui follow Gedimu teachings (from the Arabic *qadim*, or “old”). The Gedimu are colloquially referred to as *laojiao*, or “old teaching.” Roughly ten thousand Yunnan Hui are Naqsh-bandi Sufis, known as Zheherenye or Zhehelinye (from the Arabic word *Jahriyya*). Sufism first made inroads into Yunnan in the eighteenth century, and is called *xinjiao*, or “new teaching.” Another fifteen thousand Hui are members of the Wahhabi sect known as the Yihewani (from *Ikhwan*, Arabic for “brotherhood”). This group is typically referred to as the *zun-jingpai*, or “venerate-the-scriptures faction.”⁷ Confusingly, this too is called “new teaching,” though sometimes the term “new, new teaching” (*xinxin-jiao*) is used to differentiate it from the “new teaching” of Sufism. Yihewani Islam was introduced to Yunnan in 1925 by an acolyte of Ma Wanfu, the Gansu *hajji* who initiated the movement in northwest China in the late nineteenth century.⁸

WEISHAN, A YUNNAN HUI COMMUNITY

The religious, geographic, demographic, and economic diversity of the Hui makes it difficult to speak of a “typical” Hui community. However, the township of Yongjian in Weishan County can serve as a general model of a Hui community in Yunnan and shed light on the Hui experience during and after the Maoist period. Weishan is a Hui and Yi autonomous county located in Dali Prefecture, in west-central Yunnan. It is neither the most prosperous nor the poorest of the Hui areas in Yunnan. Still, the county is poor. Like most rural areas far from Kunming, the predominantly agricultural local economy lags behind provincial averages in terms of income, GDP, and industrial development.⁹

Weishan is unusual in that it is one of the two Hui autonomous counties in the province, the other being Xundian in central Yunnan. There are no

purely Hui autonomous counties; Weishan and Xundian are both Hui and Yi autonomous counties. That Weishan, as an autonomous county, has Hui designated in its title is somewhat odd, since out of a population of three hundred thousand, just twenty-one thousand, or 7 percent, are Hui. More than half the population is Han, and nearly a third are members of the Yi minority.¹⁰

Weishan, however, holds a distinctive place in the history of Yunnan Muslims. It is home to some of the oldest Muslim settlements in Yunnan, which were founded in the Yuan dynasty by conquering armies under the leadership of Saidianchi. Many people in Yongjian Township trace their family genealogies back to Saidianchi and his progeny. Weishan, called Menghua during the Qing dynasty, is also noteworthy for being the staging ground from which the nineteenth-century Panthay Rebellion was launched against the Qing.¹¹ It was from the villages of Yongjian that rebel leader Du Wenxiu, with a support network of Muslims and Gelaohui secret society members (many of them one and the same), planned and orchestrated the attack on Qing authority in Dali.¹² In the wake of that rebellion's collapse, the Muslim population of Weishan was decimated.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Weishan was an important religious and educational center for Yunnan Muslims, along with Shadian in the south of the province and Najiaying in central Yunnan. Prior to the Panthay Rebellion, there were twenty-eight Muslim villages in Weishan, each with at least one and sometimes two mosques that provided basic religious courses for the local inhabitants. Mosques in several of the larger villages established secondary and tertiary schools that drew students from all over the province and beyond. Most of the mosques were destroyed in the post-rebellion purges, but by the late 1870s and early 1880s Islamic religious life had revived. By the end of the nineteenth century, Weishan mosques were again functioning, as was Islamic and Arabic education. Education in Weishan was not focused solely on Islam, however. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Hui community of Weishan produced one successful imperial exam candidate (*jinshi*), twelve successful provincial-level exam candidates (*juren*), and several others who passed local exams (*gongshen*). Several of these individuals attained high positions in the imperial bureaucracy.¹³

Though the economy of Weishan is today primarily agricultural, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the local Hui economy was more reliant on commerce, cottage industries, and other nonfarming pursuits than it is today. For a variety of reasons related to settlement patterns

and persecution during the late Qing, Hui in Weishan were engaged in a wide range of trades. Long-distance transport and trade were mainstays of the local economy. In 1950, the area supported one hundred caravan teams, called *mabang*, comprised of 5000 mules and horses; households in the village of Huihuideng owned almost half of these teams. An investigation in 1951 found that in Huihuideng, half the 380 households derived their livelihoods entirely from transportation and trade. Another ninety households made their livelihoods half from farming and half from transport and cottage industry, while only one hundred households relied solely on farming for their income.¹⁴

The widespread reliance on nonfarming pursuits is often attributed to an innate Hui propensity to engage in commerce, a propensity often explained in ethno-racial terms. The Hui affinity for commerce, the explanation goes, is inherited from their forebears, the Arabic and Central Asian Muslim traders who settled in northwest China. Also contributing to the Hui's alleged propensity to trade was the need for people to adapt in the face of anti-Muslim persecution. Following the collapse of the Panthay Rebellion, Muslim-owned properties were confiscated, which severely reduced the landholdings of Hui families. Yet despite the steep decline in the Muslim population from deaths and out-migration after the Panthays were defeated, per capita land holdings were still much lower among the Hui than among the Han, Yi, and others in the region. As Muslim villages began to recover in the late 1870s, the experience of persecution led Hui people to live in tighter, more closely knit and guarded communities, which increased the density of settlements and exacerbated land shortages.

HUI LIFE DURING THE SOCIALIST ERA

The centrality of Islam to Hui culture and society and the reliance on commerce and trade as centerpieces of the economy meant that post-1949 socialist construction and collectivization were particularly transformative of Hui life. Because of linguistic, cultural, and economic reasons the Hui were classified as being at the same high stage of development as the Han. Like the Bai, they were thus subject to the same sorts of land reform and collectivization policies as the Han, which were implemented soon after Yunnan was declared liberated in 1950. Land reform entailed the confiscation of most of the farmland occupied and controlled by mosques, land that had provided resources to support the mosques. Official accounts suggest that cadres showed some restraint in carrying out land reform in Hui areas,

at least initially. In Weishan, mosque landholdings were reallocated only to poor and lower-middle Hui peasants, as were lands belonging to rich Hui peasants and Hui landlords, according to the *Annals of Weishan County*. The *Annals* record that cadres also restricted non-Hui people from participating in struggle and denunciation sessions against Hui landlords, due to lingering fears and enmity stemming from previous inter-ethnic strife.¹⁵

Since collectivization applied to draught animals as well as land, the horse and mule teams of the long-distance caravans were removed from private ownership and put under the control of the communes.¹⁶ State ownership of transportation firms, the growing use of motor trucks, and the construction and improvement of the Yunnan road system increasingly rendered this pre-modern mode of transport mostly obsolete, although in isolated Yunnan horse and mule teams remained necessary to the local economy.

The Great Leap Forward appears to have been as thorough and destructive in Weishan as it was elsewhere in China. Strides were made in land reclamation and irrigation system construction, but much of the investment and labor of this period was wasted. One Weishan commune invested ¥50,000 in steel production and produced nothing; another put ¥24,000 into a distillery and produced only a few liters. In Yongjian, farm labor and funds were diverted into the production of steel and even motorized vehicles. Over-reporting of grain yields decimated the food supply, and much farmland went unplanted. Neglect and misallocation of funds and labor resulted in severe food shortages, famine, and disease.¹⁷ During the Cultural Revolution, the emphasis on class struggle, the resulting attacks on capitalist elements, and the drive to make grain the centerpiece of the economy (*yi liang wei zhu*) spelled the complete demise of commercial activities. The resulting simplification of the economy and emphasis on agriculture was particularly problematic in the Hui communities of Weishan, given the dearth of farmland.

The transformations wrought during the Maoist era greatly affected Islamic faith and practice in Weishan. For the first few years after the founding of the PRC, mosques remained open. Religious leaders, called *ahong*—graduates of Arabic and Islamic study programs who lead religious instruction and ceremonies—were allowed to continue their duties. Mosques continued to offer Arabic and Islamic instruction, though Weishan's first Chinese-Arabic middle school, the Xingjian School, was reorganized as a secular state school and Arabic and Islamic instruction eliminated.¹⁸ As collectivization intensified in the mid-1950s, all remaining mosque lands were confiscated and subsumed into the collectives. The Anti-Rightist Cam-

paign, which began in 1957, led to the near-complete curtailment of religious worship and instruction. Religious leaders and scholars were labeled “counterrevolutionaries in religious garb” and sent away for re-education, as were party cadres who had followed earlier directives to respect the special characteristics and religious practices of the Hui.¹⁹ Public worship ceased entirely with the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in 1958. During the Cultural Revolution all mosques in Yongjian were closed, wrecked, or turned into granaries or performance halls.

Details concerning the course of the Cultural Revolution in Weishan’s Hui villages are somewhat murky, as is information regarding Hui participation in the factional conflicts of this period. The county as a whole was split by dozens of factions, most of which eventually coalesced into two main groups, although whether the splits were marked by ethnic strife or not is unclear. According to *The Annals of Weishan County*, “during the Cultural Revolution, the Hui people of Weishan never participated in factional fighting, nor were they influenced by outside provocation; from start to finish they upheld peace and unity and maintained production.”²⁰ People today who remember those times insist that the Hui in Weishan did not fight amongst each other. However, another source hints that conflicts between villages were quite serious, with some villages transformed into “fortresses.”²¹

Throughout the province, Hui most certainly did participate in and suffer from the factional fighting of this era. The Cultural Revolution was perhaps more devastating for Hui in Yunnan than for any other minority group. Mosques were stripped of religious references, turned into meeting halls, movie theaters, granaries, and pigsties, or simply destroyed. *Ahong*, the religious teachers, were singled out for rectification. Wells in some Hui communities were contaminated with pork, and Hui were required to eat in communal canteens that were not *qingzhen* (*halal*), that is, did not adhere to Muslim dietary guidelines and restrictions. Irreplaceable religious and historical records, sites, graves, and buildings were destroyed, including the family record of the explorer Zheng He, the nineteenth-century engravings used to print the first Chinese Koran, and scores of Yuan and Ming dynasty mosques.²² Violence and persecution were by no means specific to Muslim communities in Yunnan or elsewhere. Yet Islamic laws and dietary taboos left Hui vulnerable to insults and degradation in ways other minorities were not.

These atrocities were not always perpetrated by other groups. When asked, Hui officials and educators typically attributed factional strife to “outsiders” (*waidiren*). This claim was also made by Dai officials regarding

the course of the Cultural Revolution in Xishuangbanna, though ordinary villagers told a different story.²³ One official in the Dali branch of the Islamic Association, for instance, insisted that factional strife did not occur in the rural area where he lived, owing to the cohesiveness of Hui people. Yet there are reports of conflict among Hui, sometimes between followers of different religious sects, although these reports employed the language and symbols of revolutionary struggle.²⁴

Intra-Hui conflict played a role in the most notorious and bloody incident of the Cultural Revolution in Yunnan, the Shadian Incident. Dru Gladney recounts the circumstances and trajectory of this event in his book *Muslim Chinese*, though details surrounding the bloody incident remain opaque. Shadian, a large Hui village in southern Yunnan not far from the border with Vietnam, had been a prosperous commercial and religious community prior to the Communist era, and an important stop for Hui traders and caravans heading toward Southeast Asia. In the late 1960s, as the Cultural Revolution was well under way throughout the rest of the country, “leftist” and “revisionist” factional splits emerged among Hui, with the leftists advocating the abandonment of Islam and its laws and taboos, including abandoning the taboo on the consumption of pork. Some versions of the conflict hold that these “leftists” threw pork into Shadian wells to contaminate them and perhaps force the issue.²⁵ Such contamination is not unusual in rural Han-Hui conflicts, but in this case Hui were apparently among the perpetrators. Like many Cultural Revolution conflicts, this one turned violent. After simmering for a number of years, factional strife reemerged in 1975. This time the army stepped in to quell the discord by force. In the end, the village was virtually destroyed, and roughly a thousand Hui were killed.²⁶

Today, Hui and non-Hui still speak of the horror and bloodshed of that crackdown that arose from a local disagreement. For Hui, the Shadian Incident serves as a grim reminder of the necessity of unity, the need to oppose repression, and the precariousness of Hui existence. It is part of the long and tortuous history of anti-Hui persecution that for many Hui is a defining feature of their identity. For the state, Shadian remains an embarrassment, although it has gone to great lengths to make reparations to the people of Shadian. Officially, the responsibility for the Shadian Incident was placed on Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. To make amends, the party-state has pumped money into Shadian, rebuilding the village, creating new industries, replacing destroyed mosques and schools and constructing new ones, and organizing pilgrimage trips of village elites to Mecca for the hajj. Because of these efforts, Shadian has prospered. In 1993 Shadian

was named “southern Yunnan’s first 100-million-yuan rural town.”²⁷ Today Shadian is held up as a model of what economic reform and “nationalities’ unity” (*minzu tuanjie*) can achieve in rural areas.

HUI SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF REFORM

The legitimacy and authority of the Communist Party were sorely damaged by three decades of leftist excess. Deng Xiaoping’s reforms that jump-started economic growth and allowed greater social and cultural freedoms were designed to restore the Party’s reputation. Among the Hui the task facing the CCP was particularly fraught with difficulties, given the debacle at Shadian and nearly three decades of anti-religious policies and persecution. The Party’s standing among the Hui was consequently very weak, and the need for reforms pressing.

Hui settlements were among the first in Weishan to respond to new economic policies by dismantling the communes and making the shift to household contracting. The reform process was not exactly smooth; despite the central government’s call to implement the household responsibility system, the Weishan Party Committee issued thinly veiled criticisms of the new arrangements several years after reforms were initiated. In one document from 1982, the committee described those implementing household contracting as “backward economic elements.” Just two years later, however, the committee had apparently progressed in its thinking and was promoting the household responsibility system. The subsequent economic transformation of Hui life has been considerable, despite the fits and starts of reform. In Yongjian, grain production and the per capita grain ration nearly doubled between 1978 and 1998, despite constraints on arable land. In the 1990s alone, overall rural earnings increased six times over.²⁸

The economy of Weishan continues to be dominated by farming, fishing, animal husbandry, and other agricultural pursuits. As both an officially designated poor county and a minority autonomous county, Weishan receives subsidies from the provincial government for specific projects and to make up shortfalls in revenues. Many counties that receive subsidies continue to run deep deficits year after year. Weishan, however, has actually managed to bring its spending in line with its revenues, and in 1998 it was able to “remove its deficit hat.”²⁹

To address the continuing problems of rural underemployment, local officials in Weishan, as elsewhere, have pushed the development of private and collective enterprises. Officials and entrepreneurs have sought to

capitalize on cultural preferences, skills, and requirements in this development process. In the early 1990s, township officials in Yongjian set up a *qing-zhen* beef curing and packaging plant in Huihuideng Village. Dried cured beef, or *niurou ganba*, is a Hui specialty; since the enterprise produces *qing-zhen* beef, it can take advantage of Muslim as well as non-Muslim markets in China and abroad. The “Huihuideng” brand has become well known throughout the region.³⁰ The Weishan Hui are also well known regionally for their tea, and county officials have been promoting tea production and processing in the more mountainous parts of Yongjian.

Problems still remain, however. Land remains scarce, with disparities in access to land persisting between Hui and non-Hui. The dearth of land has created religious as well as economic problems; Hui Muslims eschew cremation, but constraints on land limit the space available for burial plots. New economic opportunities have created problems of their own. One development that troubles officials concerns the Hui practice of hiring Han laborers to farm their lands. This practice is not unique to the Hui. In Xishuangbanna, Dai households engaged in rubber cultivation are hiring Han workers from the nearby state-run farms, who are lured by wages higher than those paid by the Farm Bureau. In Weishan, some officials worry that a “master-servant” (*zhupu*) relationship is developing between Hui entrepreneurs and their Han workers, and that this may aggravate resentment and mistrust between groups.³¹

Local officials blame persistent economic backwardness and underemployment for the most troubling development in Yongjian—drug trafficking. The trafficking of heroin and opium from the Golden Triangle reemerged in the 1980s, and Hui from several villages in Yongjian have been major players in its reemergence. In 1999 Yongjian was identified as one of seventeen national “drug problem areas.” A five-year “Strike Hard” campaign against trafficking resulted in the conviction of 381 drug criminals and the confiscation of 66 properties. In September 2004, the central government allowed Yongjian to remove its “drug problem area hat.” However, since then there have been several major drug arrests in or linked to Yongjian. In April 2005, police in Weishan broke up a joint Burmese-Yongjian trafficking operation, nabbing eight suspects, over eight kilograms of heroin, and ¥11,600.³²

RELIGION AND CULTURE IN THE ERA OF REFORM

The transformation of religious and cultural life has been at least as impressive as the transformation in economic affairs. Within months after the

conclusion of the Third Plenum in 1978, physical and institutional rebuilding was well underway. The government set up branches of the Nationality Affairs Committee in minority counties throughout Yunnan, including Weishan, in early 1979. In early 1980, the Islamic Association, a nationwide mass organization that oversees Muslim religious affairs, opened a Weishan branch in the Hui village of Daweigeng.³³ Similar institutional reorganization occurred in Hui communities around the province.

Mosque reconstruction commenced immediately as well. During the Cultural Revolution, mosques had been closed, neglected, or used as theaters, granaries, and performance halls. At worst, they were razed, burned down, or used as pigsties and thus contaminated. Renovation and rebuilding was necessary, and the 1980s saw a spate of mosque construction and reconstruction all over Yunnan. In Shadian, reconstruction was spearheaded by a penitent state in partial compensation for the 1975 massacre. Typically, however, renovation and construction have relied on private funds from the faithful collected through tithing and donations. In some cases, overseas Chinese Muslims have donated large sums for the construction and reconstruction of mosques in their ancestral villages.³⁴

Many new mosques in Yunnan, as in Hui communities throughout China, incorporate physical elements drawn from Arabic and other Middle Eastern architecture. Pre-communist era Yunnan mosques resemble Chinese temples in style and construction, with wooden columns, curving tiled roofs, and elaborately carved doors. Some newer structures echo the traditional style, but others include domes and spires similar to those featured in photographs of Middle Eastern mosques that hang on the walls of many Hui homes (figs. 5.1, 5.2). In the Weishan villages of Daweigeng and Xiaoweigeng, the mosques, completed in 1990, were the first to incorporate these Middle Eastern elements. The new mosque in Huihuideng melds Middle Eastern with traditional Chinese Islamic architectural elements.

These stylistic shifts are symptoms of greater wealth and access to a broader variety of building materials. They are also the fruits of increased contact between rural Muslim communities like the villages of Weishan and the greater Islamic world that reforms and prosperity made possible. These contacts have allowed more and more Chinese Muslims to make the hajj. Increasing numbers of young people are also going abroad to Muslim countries for higher education. Although variations in mosque style are related to the divergent views of different Islamic sects, these architectural trends are not clear indicators of one or another sect.³⁵ They do, however, suggest that Hui Muslims increasingly see themselves as defined



FIG. 5.1 Entrance to old mosque, Three Family Village, Weishan. The sign reads “Three Family Village Mosque” (*Sanjiacun qingzhensi*). The original date of the mosque is unclear; however, it was renovated several times during the twentieth century, most recently in 1977.



FIG. 5.2 New mosque constructed in 1997, Three Family Village, Weishan.

by a religious identity that links them to a global Islamic community. These trends point to a growing Islamic consciousness facilitated by cultural opportunity and economic growth.

Whether built in the traditional way or in the newer, quasi-Arabic style, Yunnan Hui mosques share a number of characteristics. They are generally constructed around a four-walled courtyard (*siheyuan*), at the end of which sits the main building, typically a one-level prayer hall (*libaisi*). Adjoining the main yard is a small room or courtyard where pre-prayer ablutions can be performed. The other main building in a typical mosque complex, the *jiaobailou*, is a three- or four-storey tower from which the call to prayer is broadcast. Mosques may also feature classrooms and living quarters for religious teachers or a resident caretaker. Larger mosques that offer secondary and tertiary education in Arabic and Islamic studies, such as those in the villages of Daweigeng, Xiaoweigeng, and Huihuideng, include dormitory quarters and dining halls.

The interiors of prayer halls are usually bare, in comparison to Daoist and Buddhist temples with their plethora of gods and goddesses. Mosques contain neither statues or figures nor anything resembling an altar, since Islam forbids the worship of idols and graven images of animate beings. The carved wood panels in the doors of traditional Chinese-style mosques adhere to this injunction and lack such representations, but sometimes include abstract images of flowers and plants. They also may show objects relevant to the practice of Islam, such as a Koran, a crescent moon, or, as seen on one Weishan mosque door, a carving of a toothbrush and tube of toothpaste indicating the importance of cleanliness.

Along with serving as sites of worship, Hui mosques function as civic and economic institutions. Mosque communities raise funds to support a variety of public needs, such as mosque operating expenses, teachers' salaries, instructional materials, and special events. Funds may also support public goods and services that benefit non-Hui as well. Since the middle of the 1990s, mosques in Yongjian together have raised several million yuan for the construction of village roads and public schools.³⁶

In contemporary Yunnan Hui villages, Islam increasingly shapes the rhythms of daily life. The call to prayer is broadcast over loudspeakers ten times a day, twice before each of the five daily prayers. First broadcast is a preliminary call, which alerts the faithful to put aside whatever tasks they are engaged in and prepare for prayer by washing face, hands, and feet. This is followed five or ten minutes later with another call indicating that prayers are about to commence—a signal for men to make their way to the

mosque and for women to don a veil and lay out a prayer mat at home.³⁷ The walls of homes are laden with Islamic paraphernalia, such as photographs of Mecca, Arabic calligraphy, and calendars featuring pictures of famous mosques in China and the countries of the Middle East.

Religious festivals and holidays have been resurrected, including Ramadan and the Feast of the Prophet (also called Muhammad's Birthday). Not all Yunnan Hui observe holidays like Ramadan; adherence appears to be inversely correlated with urbanization. Many Hui I spoke to in Kunming and Dali stated that they do not fast during Ramadan because the demands of their urban jobs and lives make fasting too difficult, or because fasting draws unwanted attention from curious non-Muslims. Yet in Weishan, as in many other rural areas, Ramadan is strictly observed. Distinctly local festivals and holy days have also been revived. One of these is Wangren Jie, which commemorates those who died following the collapse of the Panthay Rebellion and the concomitant destruction of Weishan Muslim settlements. This holiday has no fixed date; in a given village it is typically held on the lunar date when that village was attacked and destroyed by Qing forces. Hui communities in other parts of Dali also observe the holiday. Each year, close to the anniversary of Du Wenxiu's suicide and posthumous decapitation, Dali Hui head to a site at the base of the Cang Mountains famous for its pink-hued rock slabs for prayer and remembrance.³⁸ Though such rock formations result from mineral deposits, they are seen as a symbolic manifestation of the spilled blood of Muslims massacred more than a century ago. Hui people offer prayers and recount the bitter history of Yunnan Muslims under the Qing, re-etching the event into Hui memory and myth.³⁹

These holidays and festivals are more than just religious events. They are opportunities for the expression of Hui and Muslim identity and solidarity. Wangren Jie, for instance, is a local affair that reinscribes, through prayer and ritual, the historic tenuousness of Hui existence and the need to combat repression. In contrast, Ramadan temporally and ritually links Hui to a global Muslim community through fasting and prayer. Like the rocket festivals and temple rededication ceremonies in Dai communities, and like *benzhu* worship and pilgrimage circuits resurrected by the Bai, these events are also opportunities for socializing beyond the boundaries of village, township, county, and even prefecture.

These events can also serve as occasions of moral or political instruction, forums in which local elites remind the faithful of their religious and civic duties. The Feast of the Prophet is a case in point. In the parts of the

Muslim world where this holiday is celebrated, it is typically held on the twelfth day of the third month of the Muslim calendar. In Yunnan, however, the date on which it is celebrated varies from mosque to mosque, making it possible for Hui from neighboring communities to join in the festivities.⁴⁰ It is often combined with other events such as the dedication of a new mosque.

At one holiday event I attended in Dali in 1997, held in conjunction with the graduation of *ahong* from the Dali Muslim Culture College, an Islamic college attached to the mosque, visitors came from surrounding villages, Dali Old Town, the nearby commercial city of Xiaguan, and neighboring counties. Many visitors were friends and family of the graduates and other students; there were also a number of Hui elites from the municipal government and the Dali Islamic Association. The centerpiece of the event was the commencement ceremony for eight young men and women. Festivities included Arabic songs, recitations from the Koran, and a demonstration of Arabic conversation by children from the mosque school. After the ceremonies concluded, those in attendance were served an inexpensive lunch in the school cafeteria. Along with the performances, the feast, and the conferring of degrees, the event also included a sermon by a representative of the Islamic Association, in which he exhorted the faithful to fulfill the precepts and observe the prohibitions of Islam, especially prohibitions against alcohol and drugs. He stressed that because the use and sale of drugs are activities that transgress the laws of the country, they violate Islamic belief. Patriotism, he reminded his listeners, “is one aspect of religion” (*aiguo shi zongjiao de yibufen*); drug trafficking was unlawful and unpatriotic, and therefore un-Islamic.⁴¹

Holiday festivals such as this one highlight the extent to which Muslim networks and community linkages have been reestablished and expanded. A number of the secondary religious schools in Yunnan draw students from all over the province and even other provinces. Most students at the Dali Muslim Culture College are from Yunnan, but some come from as far away as Henan, Fujian, Gansu, and Xinjiang. Most are Hui, but several students and teachers are members of other Muslim *minzu*. Many of the larger schools occasionally host delegations from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries, whose members give lectures and evaluate curricula.

The reestablishment of inter-community networks is both a result of Islamic revival and a cause of its expansion. The mobility and openness of the reform years has allowed increased contact with the global Islamic world. International and domestic linkages also allow more orthodox

Yunnan Muslims to monitor the condition of the faith in scattered settlements. In several cases this has produced re-conversions of Muslim communities that had strayed from the precepts of Islam, such as the Hui-Dai of Menghai County in Xishuangbanna Prefecture. The Hui-Dai are descendants of a handful of Muslims who fled south from Dali after the defeat of the Panthay Rebellion. They settled in two villages among the Dai people of Xishuangbanna, and over time adopted local customs and the Dai language. They also adopted local dietary and religious customs, including pork consumption and the practice of animist and Buddhist rituals. In the late 1980s, religious and community leaders in the central Yunnan Hui community of Najiaying got wind of this situation, and dispatched a group of religious teachers to Menghai to reacquaint the Hui-Dai with Islamic beliefs and practices. From all appearances, and from conversations with students and the local imam, the re-conversion appears to have worked (fig 5.3).⁴²

Re-conversion has also occurred in one remote village in Shangri-la County, a Tibetan autonomous county in northwest Yunnan (formerly called Zhongdian).⁴³ The village, called Haba, is in a Naxi autonomous township eighty miles from the county seat. Hui reside in two of the several natural villages that form Haba, which also includes Tibetan, Yi, Naxi and Han settlements. Haba lies in a remote valley at the base of snow-capped mountains. Public transport to the area is infrequent and irregular; buses go only as far as the township, and getting to the village requires several hours on foot or hiring a car.

Because of Haba's geography, for most of the twentieth century its residents were cut off from Muslim commercial and religious networks and other Hui communities. Like the Hui-Dai, the Haba Hui adopted many local habits and customs. This was often a matter of survival: the village is situated roughly 8,800 feet above sea level, the terrain is mountainous, and the region bitterly cold in winter. Consequently Muslims in Haba adopted local—that is, Tibetan—agricultural practices; they grow wheat, barley, corn, peppers, and raise yaks as well as lowland cattle and goats. Tibetan-style cheese and butter tea are staples of the local diet. In language and dress, too, the Hui adopted local practice. Their speech contains grammatical elements from the local Tibetan dialect, and some men and women continue to wear the thick, brightly embroidered, multicolor Tibetan-style wool robes and aprons of the region, at least in winter. For these reasons the Hui of this area are called “Zang Hui,” or Tibetan Hui.⁴⁴

Like the Hui-Dai, the Haba Hui also adopted the religious beliefs and practices of the groups around them. Post-Mao religious revival before



FIG. 5.3 Mosque melding traditional Chinese and Arabic elements, Menghai County

2000 had sparked a resurgence of Tibetan Buddhist, Naxi Dongba, and other folk rituals and practices—though not Islam. In 2000, Haba's situation was brought to the attention of Islamic leaders in Shadian, which is over five hundred miles southeast of Haba, not far from the border with Vietnam. These leaders, including the principal of an Arabic school, the directors of the Shadian Great Mosque, and the executive committee of the Shadian Foundation, raised funds to send copies of the Koran, teaching materials, and religious instructors to Haba. Hui from Kunming, Tonghai, Dali, and other regions also contributed to the effort. A wealthy entrepreneur from Shadian donated money to build a new mosque.⁴⁵ Today Islam appears to be flourishing in Haba. The village has a new mosque, a substantial grey brick structure built in the traditional Chinese style situated at one of the highest points in the village (fig. 5.4). Most villagers, men and women alike, pray at the mosque five times daily. Before praying, villagers wash in the hot and cold running water of the newly constructed bath facilities, also built with funds donated by affluent Yunnan Muslims from Shadian and other communities. Muslim head coverings are now ubiquitous, and some residents even pepper their speech with Arabic phrases.

This thoroughgoing and swift transformation underscores the strength of Hui religious and commercial networks. It also demonstrates the extent



FIG. 5.4 New mosque, constructed in 2000, in the traditional style, Haba, in Shangri-la Tibetan Autonomous County

to which the practice of Islam is central to the contemporary Hui self-understanding. Religiously observant Muslims from all over Yunnan are proud of Haba's re-conversion, seeing it as evidence of the power of their faith and the will of Allah. The Haba Hui have been brought back onto the straight and narrow, pure and true path. No longer are they "confused and perplexed in their spiritual yearnings," as the head of the Shadian Arabic School put it, the condition that presumably drove them to un-Islamic superstition in the first place.⁴⁶

While Haba's Islamic revival is celebrated by the Hui, it has generated some problems regarding intra-village, inter-ethnic relations. Non-Muslim residents of Haba are perplexed by the rapid transformation among their Hui neighbors and their refusal to participate in non-Islamic rituals they had previously embraced. Others are bothered by the placement of the new mosque, which stands near a grove of trees, a mountain stream, and several springs considered sacred by Naxi, Yi, and other non-Hui from the surrounding villages. One Tibetan man who summarized the complaint argued, "A *minzu* must pay attention to and respect another *minzu*'s religion and culture. Where the Hui built their new mosque is not good,

it doesn't show respect. They could have built it a little lower down the mountain, away from the other [ritual] sites." While this man supported the Hui's right to practice their religion, he felt that some of their actions disrespected the religious beliefs of other groups.

Overall, however, the Islamic revival has benefited the Haba Hui, often in very tangible ways. It has ameliorated their isolation, ignorance, and to some extent their poverty. For some of Haba's young people, the revival has given them the opportunity for an education that otherwise would be beyond their reach. Many have received scholarships to study at Islamic schools in Shadian. Their studies focus almost exclusively on religion and Arabic. However, they are also learning to use computers and navigate the Internet. Some hope to continue their studies at colleges in Pakistan, Malaysia, or, ideally, Saudi Arabia. The revival of Islamic tradition, ironically, is thus a catalyst for the modernization of Haba, though the village is hardly modern even by rural Chinese standards. When I visited in 2002, most of the village lacked electricity owing to the breakdown half a year earlier of a nearby hydroelectric generating station. Pointing to an unusable washing machine, one villager expressed his frustration that while the rest of China was leaping ahead, Haba was going backwards ("Zhongguo fazhan, women tuibule!"). Still, the reintegration of the Haba Hui into Islamic networks in Yunnan and beyond has brought better sanitation, new well-constructed houses, and opportunities for Haba's young people to get an education. Islam serves as a vehicle through which the Haba Hui, especially the younger generation, encounter China's modernization and capitalist transformation.

Religious Education

Islamic education has been resuscitated along with other religious institutions; in parts of Yunnan, the post-Mao recovery of religious education, called *jingtang jiaoyu* in Chinese, was swift. In Weishan, religious courses were established in several mosques by the end of 1978, shortly after the completion of the Third Plenum. By the end of 1979, over two thousand students were enrolled in twenty mosque schools, each school offering at least basic instruction in Islamic belief and practice, the Koran, and elementary Arabic. Several of the largest mosques quickly established intermediate and advanced programs for youth in their late teens and twenties.⁴⁷ There are now more than a dozen secondary and tertiary Arabic and Islamic schools and colleges throughout Yunnan, many of them

outgrowths of advanced programs based in the larger mosques. Funding for religious education comes from a variety of sources. Students at the middle and high-school level typically pay tuition, but operating expenses are also supported by community donations and tithes offered on holy days throughout the year.

Religious education is an important component of Hui Islamic identity and practice in China, central to the propagation and maintenance of the faith. It has a long pedigree in Yunnan; during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and up until the 1950s, Islamic schools in Shadian, Weishan, Tonghai, and other communities with sizeable Hui populations were renowned throughout the region. These schools drew students from around the province and across China. Weishan even earned the moniker “Little Mecca,” since so many Muslim students and scholars traveled there to teach and study. Historically, religious education in Yunnan was not limited in focus to Islam and Arabic (or Persian). Instead, the education offered was *zhong'à bingshou*, “Chinese-Arabic dual education.” The curriculum at these religious schools was nearly identical to that offered at non-Muslim private academies, except that the former included courses on Islam, Arabic, and sometimes Persian in addition to classically Chinese fare.

The dual educational approach continued into the twentieth century. The curriculum of many private Hui schools established after the May Fourth Movement reflected that movement’s concern with modern science and culture. The most well known of these was the Mingde School, established in Kunming in 1926 by prominent local Muslim intellectuals, many of them May Fourth activists.⁴⁸ In rural Weishan, the local branch of the China Islamic Association established the Xingjian Middle School in 1943, which offered courses in Chinese language and literature, history, math, natural science, music, physical education, Arabic, and Islam. Although most Xingjian students were drawn from the local Hui population, non-Hui students also attended, primarily because of the quality of the Chinese education these schools provided.

Today, many Islamic schools focus almost exclusively on religious subjects and the Arabic language skills necessary to study Islam. They do so partly because students are expected to acquire a standard, Chinese education in state schools. Islamic education is supposed to be supplemental, not unlike the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), an after-school religious instruction program for Catholic children who attend public school in the United States and elsewhere. Courses on Islam for younger children and working adults are typically offered in the evenings, outside of normal



FIG. 5.5 Hui children in a village mosque school, Menghai

school hours (fig. 5.5). Full-day intermediate and advanced programs enroll students who in theory have already graduated middle or high school. Yet in practice that is not always the case: at a girls' school I visited in Weishan, most of the two dozen or so students had finished middle school, but a handful possessed only primary school diplomas.

Despite the narrow focus of contemporary Islamic instruction, students are enthusiastic about its practicality. According to one student enrolled in a school that focuses almost exclusively on Islam and Arabic, learning about Islam was helping him to become a better Muslim. Arabic, he stated in all earnestness, "is the mother tongue of the Hui, because we are Muslim. It is important that I learn to read and speak the language of my *minzu*." It should be noted that the mother tongue (*muyu*) of the Hui is typically the Chinese dialect of the regions where they live, a fact which did not trouble this young man's analysis. Like many students, he expressed the hope that after graduating he might go abroad to continue his studies, in which case knowledge of Arabic would serve him well. Naïvely or not, this student saw his future as linked to an Islamic world, not necessarily a Chinese one.

Officials and some educators, including many who are Hui, are concerned about the neglect of nonreligious subjects at Islamic schools. As mentioned, this narrow focus should not be a problem, since religious education is intended to supplement a regular, state education. However,

some Hui regard religious education as a replacement for mainstream schooling, and a superior one at that. They see Islamic education as necessary for the protection and advancement of their people and their faith. The decision to pull students out of public school and enroll them in religious courses is a repudiation of state education and even of mainstream Chinese culture, a repudiation driven by the history of persecution from the Qing era until the leftist excesses of the Mao years. According to the authors of a study on minority education, this history still resonates among contemporary Hui:

Many worry that Islam may die out in China, and that Hui cultural traditions and customs may be lost. In recent years, due to the Party's new policies, the Hui masses have acquired the right to religious freedom. . . . Still, many people fear that . . . the religion of Allah is disappearing in front of their eyes, so they let their children quit school and enroll in mosque education instead. This problem is very serious and has even disturbed the normal system of education, causing enrollment, continuation, and graduation rates in Hui areas to drop.⁴⁹

Far from assuaging Hui fears, policies of religious freedom have exacerbated a sense of urgency regarding the preservation of Islam and Hui culture. Sending children to mosque rather than state schools is an effort to counter anti-Hui threats, real or perceived, and the tide of secular assimilation. Because of the historical experience of persecution, argue the study authors, some Hui “despise” and “underestimate” all elements of Han culture—that is, Chinese culture, including Chinese education—and reject it in favor of Islam.⁵⁰

This situation is compounded by broader problems concerning education and literacy in rural Hui communities. As with Buddhist temple schools in Xishuangbanna, the revitalization of Islamic education in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with a drop in public school enrollment rates. This drop was partly the result of economic reforms. Schooling became more expensive as new economic opportunities created incentives for parents to put their children to work, on the farm or in the marketplace. The shift to the household responsibility system and a market economy, along with increases in school fees, led rural families throughout China to pull their children out of school. However, in Hui regions, the economy is not the only culprit; the availability of Islamic education exacerbates this trend. Over the last three decades, enrollment rates in many Hui communities have lagged behind those of

neighboring Han and other minority communities, even where Hui communities are economically better off than their neighbors.⁵¹

The complexity of such matters shows that they are not simply manifestations of cultural identity. Rather, they result from interactions among a variety of cultural, economic, and historical phenomena, such as poverty, new entrepreneurial opportunities, inter-ethnic mistrust, and the collective remembrance of repression. They highlight the dilemmas posed by Islamic revival, especially for officials. Certain customs at times undermine party-state objectives. Yet if it improves relations between the Hui and the party-state, tolerance for Muslim identity and practice can buttress state authority and help maintain the social order.

Tradition and Identity in Islamic Education

Many Hui educators, officials, and religious leaders are conscious of the negative consequences of Islamic revival and have sought ways to reconcile religious goals with official objectives. For instance, in the field of religious education there are alternatives to the Arabic- and Islamic-only approach. A few of the Islamic schools established in Yunnan in recent years offer expanded curricula, which updates the tradition of *zhong'a bingshou* for the twenty-first century. Two examples are the Kaiyuan Arabic Vocational School and the Dali Muslim Culture College (fig. 5.6). Both are patterned after state-run technical or vocational schools (*zhuanke xuexiao*). At the Kaiyuan Arabic School, students study Islamic theology, philosophy, history, and the classical Arabic needed to read religious texts, but they also take courses in modern Arabic conversation, comprehension and composition, business Arabic, newspaper reading, Chinese literature, and Chinese history. English and computer science are offered as electives. The college in Dali offers a similar curriculum, along with geography, math, and science. It also offers a program in Chinese language education; graduates of the program who pass state exams are qualified to teach Chinese in elementary or middle schools. For many students, the degrees they receive there are likely to be their highest. However, some go on to study Arabic in foreign language departments of Chinese universities, or to universities elsewhere in the Muslim world. In this way, for Hui and other Chinese Muslim students, Arabic and Islamic education can be a means of enhancing their skills and improving their employment prospects.

Teachers at the college in Dali claim that their goal is to train students to be both devout Muslims and productive members of China's rapidly



FIG. 5.6 Mosque flanking basketball courts at the Dali Muslim Culture College, Dali. The mosque was completed in 2001.

modernizing society. Several express concerns about the trend toward an Arabic and Islam-only curriculum at other Islamic institutions. According to the retired principal of the college, this trend is “based on narrow thinking”:

Some Muslims wish to separate themselves from all non-Muslims and believe that the only suitable course of study is an Arabic and Islamic one. At the same time, many people believe that non-Muslims should not study Arabic or anything having to do with Islamic religion, philosophy, or history.⁵²

The problem with Islamic education in Yunnan, the retired principal explains, is twofold. First, although Islamic school organizers are supposed

to secure government approval prior to establishing Islamic schools, there are few if any curricular requirements such schools must meet, with the exception of a few self-study courses like the Chinese language education program offered in Dali. Second, Muslim religious educators themselves had not yet established a set of standards, and consequently curricula varied from school to school, depending on the personal views of religious leaders and teachers.

From the principal's perspective, the phenomenon of Arabic- and Islamic-only education, while seen by some as a return to the past—to “fundamentals”—ignores the history of Yunnan Hui Muslims. That past, he argues, was one of engagement with and achievement in Chinese society, which traditional Hui education reflected. The most accomplished Hui scholars in history, he points out, knew the classics of Chinese culture as well as the sacred texts of Islam. The retired principal also compares the practices of his school to traditional Islamic education in Yunnan, which except for its religious component was indistinguishable from the education offered in non-Muslim schools of the period. In his view, the Dali Muslim Culture College epitomizes authentic Hui tradition, while the Islamic and Arabic-only trend spurns it.

In making his case, this retired principal echoes the claims of scholarship on the Hui, much of it produced by Hui researchers, educators, and officials. This scholarship, which includes provincial, county, and national histories, social scientific analyses of contemporary Hui life, and studies of Islam in China, typically advances several key points. First, scholars emphasize that the Hui possess a historical and cultural “Chineseness.” The Hui are who they are because of the melding of Islamic and Han cultural elements; the combination of these two streams of culture gave rise to this nationality. As one Yunnan Hui scholar writes, “without Islamic culture there would be no Hui, just as without Han culture there would be no Hui minority.”⁵³ In the words of another, the culture of the Hui is “Islam with Chinese characteristics.”⁵⁴

Much of this scholarship further stresses that acculturation to Han culture has long been a central component of Hui culture and tradition. The Hui are a “relatively advanced” *minzu* in great part because of their adoption and adaptation of Han *wenhua*, or Han culture. Yunnan Muslim adaptability enabled the Hui to attain great economic, political, and social influence, from the Yuan Dynasty to the present. As writers on the subject are apt to point out, the adaptation of Chinese culture is no threat to a “pure and true,” *qingzhen* Islamic existence. This latter claim is buttressed

by references to the efforts of Islamic scholars during the Ming and Qing who used Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist principles to explain the truths of Islam to a Chinese audience.⁵⁵ Finally, this scholarship argues that the Islamic revival must embrace this tradition of integration and acculturation, since it is central to Hui advancement. It is central also to the development of China: “the revival of the greatness of the Chinese nation requires that Islam advance with the times, and the development and progress of the Islamic faith of the Hui is inseparable from the greatness of the Chinese nation.”⁵⁶

Critics of mosque education fear that in its current incarnation, it is an obstacle to the continued vitality and development of the Hui. Consequently, they advocate a curriculum that can respond to the spiritual needs of Muslims and the demands of contemporary life. Some reformers have even proposed that mosque schools offer, along with a conventional curriculum, technical training in subjects such as agricultural technology, enterprise management, and computers. Educators, these critics and reformers argue, ought to model themselves on earlier generations of Muslim teachers and religious leaders; *jingtang jiaoyu* should “meet the needs of Hui masses in the twenty-first century.”⁵⁷

Although calls for the modernization of education are informed by concerns regarding practicality and relevance, they are simultaneously an assertion of identity—of a particular understanding of what it means to be Hui and of the traditions that constitute and express that identity. What worries many of the writers on this topic is that the widespread embrace of an Arabic- and Islamic-only education entails not just a rejection of a modernizing Chinese society but a repudiation of genuine Hui identity and tradition. Furthermore, one writer explains in an article on a mosque’s website, the neglect of Chinese culture and language hinders the development of the faith by preventing Hui Muslims from comprehending great Chinese texts on Islam:

When we look back at the great [Chinese] Muslim scholars . . . we see that their many contributions to their country and their nationality are inseparable from their deep comprehension of the Han language. If they had lacked this fundamental knowledge of the Han language, would we be able to read the great variety of works they produced?⁵⁸

The genius of the Hui in bygone eras, those who promote a Chinese-Islamic identity argue, was their ability to meld Islamic and Chinese cultural ele-

ments. This melding was more than useful—it is who the Hui were in the past and who they are now.

These arguments dovetail with the views and interests of the Chinese state. In expressing their concerns and plans for reform, Hui teachers, scholars, and officials are articulating an officially sanctioned position. Most of these individuals are directly or indirectly linked to the state: party and state cadres, scholars at universities and research institutions, and prominent members of the Islamic and Hui studies associations. Moreover, the books and articles that contain their views are published by state-approved and state-managed presses and journals. Their concerns reveal that the Chinese state is interested not only in what minorities do, but also in how they think about themselves and their place in Chinese society. Behavior and practices are chief among the government's preoccupations, and it seeks to contain or quash those that appear to contravene its political and economic agenda. Yet identity and tradition and how they are defined are also matters of state concern, as the discourse on Islamic education reveals.

The reformist writings of Hui scholars, educators, and officials, however, are not mere expressions of the party line. While scholars and educators are limited in what they can publicly advocate, by challenging the isolationist tendencies of contemporary religious education, these scholars counter what they see as a false tradition with one they view as authentically Hui. A Hui identity that is as Chinese as it is Islamic, as modern as it is traditional, resonates in interviews with teachers, students, and ordinary people, including the retired principal of the Muslim college in Dali.

Yet the strictly Arabic and Islamic focus of much contemporary religious instruction and existence also has roots in Chinese Muslim tradition, specifically the Yihewani movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The leaders of the Yihewani, who were influenced by Wahhabi fundamentalist teachings, advocated an Islam stripped of the Chinese aesthetic and ritual elements that characterized much Chinese Muslim practice. Its founder, Ma Wanfu, promoted a purified, Arabic aesthetic in dress, speech, architecture, and education. Ma Wanfu even called for the separation of Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and according to Jonathan Lipman, “refused to learn to read and write Chinese, forbade his children to learn Chinese, and insisted on Arabic and Persian education as the foundation of Muslim orthopraxy.”⁵⁹ Although members of subsequent generation of Yihewani were ardent Chinese nationalists and modernizers, the Salafiyya, a movement that grew out of the Yihewani in the 1930s, called for what Gladney describes as “a return to nonpoliticized fundamentalist Wahhabi

ideals.”⁶⁰ In some Yunnan Hui communities, the influence of the Yihewani in the early twentieth century was profound, despite the numerical strength of the Gedimu.⁶¹ Yihewani teachings continue to shape religious practice and education because of this history and the growing global prominence of Wahhabi Islam. Though hard to quantify, Wahhabi and Salafi influence in China itself is increasing. The Yihewani are estimated by some to be the “predominant force” within the national Islamic Association.⁶²

The efforts of some Hui to create an existence apart from mainstream Chinese social and cultural life must be seen within a broader context than immediate concerns for preserving religious identity. Isolationism and withdrawal are inherent neither in Islam nor in Hui Muslim identity and beliefs. Rather, the Hui’s motivation to withdraw from surrounding society is borne of centuries of conflict between Chinese state and Muslims and between Muslims and other social groups—conflicts in which Muslims have often been singled out for discrimination, repression, and violent persecution. Tensions between the state and Chinese Muslims are aggravated by the global War on Terror, which has provided the government an excuse to crack down on Islamic activities that it alone deems troublesome, with little if any condemnation from abroad. The desire to constitute a life separate from non-Muslim society may stem from a self-protective impulse more than anything.

MODERNITY, TRADITION, AND HUI IDENTITY

Religious revival among the Hui is not aimed simply at resurrecting the past but also at developing and modernizing cultural identity and practice. Even Yihewani fundamentalism is in some ways a neo-traditionalist attempt to grapple with modernity and its implications for the faith. For some Yunnan Muslims, celebration and exploration of their Hui identity also involves probing what it means to be Chinese. As is the case throughout China more generally, where rapid social and economic change has altered the relationship of Chinese people to their past and their traditions, debates about tradition and identity are embedded within a broader discourse of modernization and development.

While religious concerns underpin Hui desires to study and practice Islam, including efforts to go abroad for these purposes, the issue is more complex. Many Hui discuss Arabic and religious education in terms of *minzu* improvement and development. One teenage girl studying at a village mosque in Weishan and preparing to become a teacher put the matter

this way: "I feel that my *minzu* will develop quickly. I want to improve my Arabic and knowledge of Islam so that I will be at the forefront of that development, so that I can participate in the development of my *minzu*."⁶³ For this girl and for others, the study and promotion of Islam is a matter of minority development. Among the Hui, as among the Dai and Bai, the concern with modernization and development is minority-centric.

The modernity of Islam and its compatibility with modernizing Chinese ideals is asserted in a number of ways. Islam is argued to be particularly suitable for a reforming socialist market economy. In contemporary Chinese writing on minorities, the market is increasingly seen as the answer to minority backwardness, and the solution to the task of national integration. Numerous official and academic publications from the early 1990s onward describe, in laudatory terms that would make Karl Marx blush, how the market is breaking down local barriers, eroding regional differences, linking disparate minority groups in a web of commodities exchange, and enhancing the mutual interdependence among all the *minzu* who comprise the Chinese nation. In response to this valorization of the market, Muslim scholars are quick to highlight Islam's affinity with trade and commerce. Books and articles on the relation between Islam and economics note that many of the original Muslims in China were Arabic and Persian traders and that the Hui dominated commerce and long-distance trade in Yunnan during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That Muhammad himself engaged in commerce before dedicating himself to the spread of the faith further enhances the close connection between the two; "trade and commerce are enterprises loved by Allah."⁶⁴

Basic religious principles underlie arguments that Islam is particularly conducive to a market economy. Monopolies, including state ones, and restricted markets are inconsistent with Islamic belief. If all things under Heaven are created by Allah, then, according to one Chinese Islamic scholar, "closed markets are antithetical to this [belief], since they . . . restrict the free flow and exchange of all that Allah has created." Islam's this-worldly emphasis on striving and engagement rather than renunciation, continues the writer, also coheres with reformist, market-oriented goals:

Among the world's great religions, Islam not only emphasizes this world more than others, it is a religion that enters the world, and simultaneously advocates trade, commercial activity, markets and market standards. In Islamic classic texts . . . there are many references to commerce and markets, much more than in the texts or thought of other religions.⁶⁵

Because it emphasizes worldly striving and self-improvement, and because of the respect it commands for all that Allah has made, “for Islam, trade, commerce and the expansion of markets are noble enterprises.”⁶⁶

To assert the modernity of Islam, Hui also draw distinctions between their religion and the “superstitious” practices of other minorities. The teenage girls at the women’s mosque school in Weishan repeated this distinction frequently. They elaborated, for instance, on the sensible and scientific thinking behind requirements to wash one’s hands, feet, and face five times a day before prayer, and on the logic behind other basic precepts. In their view, the syncretic mix of Buddhism, Daoism, and other folk beliefs of the Han, Yi, Bai, and others was useless superstition and idol-worship that lacked a rational basis.

Science and the alleged scientific basis of Islam are preoccupations among many Chinese Muslims. Islamic websites and written publications are brimming with articles discussing the rationality of religious practices and how Islamic beliefs prefigure modern scientific discoveries such as the Big Bang, interstellar matter, plate tectonics, embryonic development, and others.⁶⁷ At the Dali Muslim Culture College, a retired science teacher who now teaches courses on science and Islam expounded on the need to demonstrate their compatibility. Understanding the scientific basis of Islam is essential if one is to appreciate the truth and logic of Islam, he explained. In addition, in a world of skepticism, appealing to science is a way of drawing people in, of piquing their interest. Using science allowed him to demonstrate the truths of Islam and the Koran and to prove that the latter is “the only Bible.”⁶⁸

There are a number of reasons for this concern with Islam’s scientific and anti-superstitious tendencies, some of which are practical and strategic. For one thing, it distinguishes Islam from “mere” superstition. For many Hui, Islam’s scientific basis is both indisputable and a mark of its superiority. Although Yunnan Muslims are convinced of Islam’s truth on religious grounds, comparisons to the “superstitious” beliefs and practices of other groups bolster that sense of its superiority. The Hui’s insistence that Islam is scientific and therefore nonsuperstitious also seems pragmatic because the Chinese state, while officially supporting both religion and science, is hostile to what it deems superstition, although the definition of that term is ambiguous. The focus on science is, however, more than a strategy, for defense or otherwise. In *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong argues that the effort to reconcile faith with scientific truth and method is a feature of contemporary fundamentalist movements, regardless of creed.⁶⁹ Islamic

movements in the Middle East increasingly stress the religion's connection to science and modernization.⁷⁰ The Hui preoccupation with the compatibility of faith and science reveals the extent to which Chinese Islam is tied to trends in global Islam. As seemingly remote as many Hui villages are, Islamic schools like the colleges in Dali and Kaiyuan are linked to currents in international Islamic thought, practice, and culture.

The emphasis on science and modernity also reflects the influence of the Yihewani. As discussed above, although the movement called for a return to scriptural and ritual purity, proponents also sought to modernize religious study. Key leaders studied in Egypt and Arabia, as well as Japan and the United States, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There they were influenced by trends in Islam and by overseas Chinese student associations promoting modern Chinese nationalism; the Yihe-wani movement became a kind of May Fourth Islam.⁷¹ The influence of the Yihewani on religious belief and education in Yunnan resonates in contemporary ideals of national development and scientific progress.

ISLAMIC RESURGENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

While the Islamic revival at times conflicts with state policy, as the example of mosque education shows, for the Hui in Yunnan their religious resurgence is a source of pride and satisfaction. They view this resurgence through the lens of their "tortuous and winding" history and a heightened awareness of their forebears' accomplishments in the spheres of religion, politics, culture, and economics. They are also cognizant of the role of oppression in shaping their past and present. The Hui revival is informed by the rich history not only of political and military success and economic prowess, but also of persecution at the hands of non-Muslims and the Chinese state.

Several Hui students and teachers I interviewed in 1997 linked the revival of their faith to a sense of obligation to "oppose oppression" (*fandui yapo*), which one student at the Dali college described as an integral element of Islam. They are quick to defend their religious practices and educational endeavors and their right to engage in them. Like the Dai and Bai cultural activists, many Hui are concerned with rights and autonomy, particularly with the right to practice their religion. The students and teachers witnessed what they believe were violations of these protected rights; their fear that what they have seen constitutes repression is not without foundation. Officials have in fact tried to restrict the expansion of mosque schools as part of the drive to implement compulsory education. Since 1994, the

government has also required all religious institutions to register with the authorities and submit to inspections.

Yunnan Hui perceive some spillover from the crackdown on Muslim separatism and religious practice in Xinjiang that began in the mid-1990s. In 1996 and 1997, following a series of bombings in Urumqi and Beijing, the government stepped up its efforts to quell Uyghur separatist activity in Xinjiang Province. The crackdown expanded to include limitations on ordinary worship activities, Islamic education, the publishing of religious texts, and the construction of new mosques. A report on Xinjiang Television in May 1996 “stressed the need to ‘consolidate and cleanse the book and magazine market’” specifically of books “privately printed and circulated without the state’s prior examination and approval.”⁷² The Communist Party in Xinjiang also moved against religious party members and called “for efforts to sternly deal with party members and cadres, especially leading cadres, who continue to be devout religious believers, despite re-education.”⁷³ That same year Xinjiang police shut down a number of “illegal” mosques and religious schools, confiscated religious material for being “reactionary,” and clamped down on illegal religious activities on college campuses.⁷⁴

While the crackdown focused on Xinjiang, several thousand miles to the northwest, teachers and students interviewed in 1997 in Weishan and Dali knew of it and were angered by the obstacles their co-religionists faced in promoting religious education. “It is getting very difficult to open new schools in villages,” one teacher explained, “and when schools are established, they are only allowed to have three or four students.” They attributed these difficulties to the state’s hostility toward Islam. When asked whether the situation for Muslims had not in fact improved greatly during the reform period, they were skeptical of the rights and autonomy ostensibly promised by the state. In the view of one female student, “that is just a show for foreigners. In reality, the government wants to control religion, especially Islam.”⁷⁵ Many Yunnan Hui went out of their way to explain that Islam in no way contravened their loyalty to China. More than one person reiterated the slogan painted on walls and buildings throughout rural Hui villages: “*Aiguo shi zongjiao de yi bufen*” (Patriotism is one part of religion). Hui view official and unofficial restrictions on religious practice as not just a hindrance but an insult.

Despite the limitations to religious practice, many indicators suggest that materially and spiritually, life is better now for the Hui—in Yunnan at least—compared to the pre-reform period. Prejudice and persecution

exist, but the contemporary situation bears little resemblance to the anti-religious environment of the Maoist era. Rising economic and religious expectations may account for some of the frustration, though the Hui's resentment of the increased suspicion of all Muslims due to Xinjiang unrest is genuine. Ongoing surveillance and regulation do not appear to have quelled Islamic life in Yunnan, which is thriving.

HUI VERSUS ISLAMIC REVIVAL

The concerns about the treatment of Islam in Xinjiang reveal that not only ethnic but also religious identity is a central feature in the Hui revival. Officially, being Hui means being a member of a minority *minzu*. The state perceives Hui identity as having an ethnic or ethno-national character rather than a religious one; being a member of the Hui *minzu* does not mean that one follows a certain religion, just that one shares certain ethno-cultural characteristics with other members of that group. However, a distinct criteria of Hui identity is belief in Islam, even for those whose beliefs and practices have lapsed.

Prior to the twentieth century and the minority classification project initiated by the Communist regime, Muslims in China were typically called "Hui-Hui" or "Hui-min," terms which refer to a religious rather than an ethnic identity. "Hui-Hui" was, in theory, an inclusive concept that could be applied to many Chinese Muslims. The term Huizu (or Hui *minzu*) is exclusive and applies only to a single officially recognized group of Chinese Muslims. Some members of that group might not even practice Islam.

Dru Gladney has argued that the Hui in contemporary China generally accept the ethnic implications of the official classificatory system. Though Hui identity is elaborated and expressed in a variety of ways, he argues that many Hui understand their identity in ethno-cultural rather than religious terms. Maoist and post-Mao policies have caused ethnonyms like Huizu to harden; that is, Hui and other minorities are increasingly identifying themselves as members of their respective *minzu* and engaging in collective action on the basis of those identities:

A process of ethnogenesis has . . . brought [Hui communities] closer together in dialectical interaction with state policy and local traditions. Through acceptance of the ethnic label assigned by the state, increased communication, education in special state minority schools, and the desire for more political power through larger numbers, ethnic groups are beginning to argue for the national

unity of their people—a process of pan-ethnic nationalization noted by Benedict Anderson.⁷⁶

Gladney finds evidence for this ethnogenesis in shifting interpretations of the saying “*Tianxia de Hui-Hui shi yi jia*” (All Hui-Hui under Heaven are one family). In this phrase, “Hui-Hui” historically referred to all Muslims. However, as Gladney finds, it “is now taken by the Hui as referring only to the unity of their own people,” e.g., the Hui *minzu*. Thus, where the term Hui-Hui once referred to people who followed the Islamic religion, contemporary Hui see themselves as members of an ethnic collectivity distinct from other Muslim groups.

Gladney’s findings may reflect the fact that much of his research has focused on Hui communities in China’s northwest and in Beijing, where a variety of Muslim minorities co-exist and where intra-Muslim differences and boundaries are more significant.⁷⁷ In Yunnan, however, nearly all Muslims are Hui, with the exception of some recent immigrants and itinerant traders from other provinces. Consequently, the term Hui more often than not means “Muslim.” It is not an exclusive, ethnic designation, but rather the name for all those who practice Islam. In Yunnan, the terms Hui and Han are used interchangeably with the words for Muslim and non-Muslim (Musilin and *fei* Musilin, respectively); several people I spoke to even referred to Saudi Arabia and Iran as “Hui” countries. In rural Hui areas, the first question most people asked me was, “Are you Hui or Han?” This was usually followed by, “What is your religion?”—a question only Chinese Muslims asked. On occasion people simply assumed that I was Hui, that is, Muslim. At a wedding I attended in the company of a group of teenage girls studying to be *ahong*, a middle-aged woman, seeing me with a group of head-scarf wearing young women, ran to me, grabbed my arm, and exclaimed, “*Tai hao ni shi Huizu!*” (It’s so great that you’re Hui!). I would have been happy to let her persist in her error, as she seemed overjoyed to meet a foreign Muslim. However, it seemed imperative that I explain that I was not Muslim, though Hui history in China was of great interest to me.

At the women’s mosque in Weishan and at the college in Dali, students and teachers gently tried to convert me. Several of them expressed the hope that as I continued to spend time with them and learn more about Islam, I would inevitably recognize the scientific and religious truths of Islam. As one teacher put it, “We hope that you will convert to Islam and become a famous Muslim scholar.” If I did convert, she continued, my experiences studying

the Hui would be vastly different. Doors would open to me, people would consider me as “one of their own family,” and I would be shown great hospitality. This puzzled me, as their hospitality had been more than generous.⁷⁸

For these Hui, religion appears to be the relevant marker of identity. As one man explained, “the special characteristic of the Hui is this: other nationalities are first a *minzu*, then develop a religion. However, the Hui had religion first, and then became a *minzu*. The Hui were made by, created by religion.”⁷⁹ This man further insisted that to understand the Hui, one must read the Koran; without doing so one could not comprehend what it means to be Hui. Being Hui means being Muslim, non-Hui is a synonym for non-Muslim, and Han can be a synonym for non-Muslim as well. This broad interpretation of the term Han is not unique to the Hui; in rural villages in Xishuangbanna, children on occasion called me “haw hoa leung,” Dai for “yellow-haired Han.”⁸⁰ Officially designated ethnonyms such as “Hui” are widely accepted, yet their meanings are fluid and contested.

These shifting interpretations are not limited to rural Yunnan. Urban Hui often use the terms Hui and Muslim, or Han and non-Muslim, interchangeably. Some Hui in Kunming expressed cynicism regarding government-imposed categories. One Kunming noodle shop proprietor dismissed the official minority classification scheme: “Hui, Uyghur, Dongxiang—we’re all the Islamic *minzu*!”⁸¹ The term he used, “Yisilan *minzu*,” is not an officially recognized category. The use of separate terms to draw distinctions among Muslim groups, he argued, is “the government’s attempt to keep us apart.” In his view the state fears that Chinese Muslims might indeed behave as “one family under Heaven,” so it splits Muslims into ten distinct *minzu*. Yet the state often treats Muslims as Muslims, as members of a single entity rather than as separate *minzu*, in its efforts to monitor Muslims and Islam.

LIMITS TO HUI INCLUSION

In their efforts to promote Islamic revival, many of those involved assert the legitimacy of their goals by situating them within contemporary Chinese discourses concerning national modernization, science, patriotism, and the market economy. They draw on official PRC policy in their efforts to promote religious education and transnational Islamic connections. Doing so reduces their “opportunity costs” by rendering their activities and ideals palatable to the state. Yet their actions are also aimed at expanding the meaning and practice of minority autonomy and at holding the state to its legal and political promises.

Hui cultural activism is informed also by the history of Muslim rebellion against persecution. The party-state has tried to appropriate this into a broader history of class struggle and revolution, which presents the Hui with opportunities and constraints. If Hui history is viewed as part of the history of class struggle, then Hui struggles for religious autonomy are justified through historic and ostensibly patriotic models of resistance. At the same time, showing Hui history as part of the history of revolution contributes to an image of the Hui as an aggrieved people who are on guard against attacks on their communities, their livelihoods, and their religion. This need for communal vigilance has not been alleviated by twentieth-century attacks on Muslims and on Islam.

Hui people see the defense of their religion as a righteous struggle against oppression, existing within the context of Chinese national narratives of modernization and development. Unfortunately, their ability to use this context to full advantage is hindered by non-Muslim, popular views of the Hui as simply being contentious—the Hui propensity to cause trouble. Some non-Muslim Chinese take a dim view of Hui religious and cultural practice, ironically due, in part, to Chinese assumptions regarding modernization and its presumed incompatibility with religious identity and belief. As one Han man I talked to exclaimed, “Why don’t the Hui just admit that they’re modern and give up their religion?”⁸²

Part of the problem for the Hui is that they are regarded as “relatively advanced.” They do not fit the stereotype of the docile, passive, backward minority. Instead they are noted for their cohesion, commercial savvy, and cultural accomplishments, and for their adherence to practices that other Chinese find strange, such as abstention from the consumption of pork. They are both assimilated and separate—nonexotic others who maintain a distinct identity even though they lack characteristics typically associated with minorities. In the face of their obviously advanced character, Hui adherence to faith and practice is viewed by some non-Muslims as a willful attempt to assert their separateness and claim minority privileges on the basis of an outmoded identity. Non-Hui suspicion of the Hui stems from the widespread notion that Hui behavior and belief ought to reflect their “modern” existence. If the Hui can define the modern and themselves in a way that is simultaneously Hui, Muslim, and Chinese, they may find a way out of this dilemma.