

CONCLUSION

Cultural revival among the Dai, Bai, and Hui has taken a variety of forms. Members of these groups have plumbed the past for inspiration and have explored new modes of identity articulation. They have both resuscitated tradition and established new organizations and practices. The revival is an outgrowth of the post-Mao state's more tolerant and even supportive stance toward minority cultural expression and institutions. This accommodating attitude is a dramatic change from how the state treated minorities during the radical phases of Chinese socialism, from the high tide of collectivization through the Cultural Revolution. Colin Mackerras argues that the state's altered attitude entails a return to some of the policies and practices of the years immediately following the founding of the People's Republic of China.¹ At that time, the CCP wanted to enhance its authority among a diverse population, much like Deng Xiaoping's regime did at the start of the reform era. Among groups like the Dai that had been only minimally integrated into the economy, polity, and culture of pre-Communist China, the CCP's state- and nation-building efforts relied on established cultural institutions and a traditional elite, many of whom were integrated into the new party-state apparatus.

Today, however, tolerant cultural policies have been extended toward ostensibly assimilated or integrated groups like the Hui and Bai, whereas

in the 1950s, they were subject, for the most part, to assimilative policies applied in Han areas. Their identities are now generally celebrated and promoted. The reasons for the shift are many. For one thing, officials have had to acknowledge and respond to disasters perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution against minorities, especially the Hui. This response at times appears superficial, since Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, rather than the CCP itself, are still blamed for the destruction and persecution of that era. Nevertheless, the government has demonstrated remorse and a commitment to minority cultural autonomy, as in the example of the Muslim community of Shadian.

The post-Mao treatment of minorities is distinctive also for the manner in which minority and economic policy intersect. Minority culture, and even minorities themselves, are regarded as resources to be developed and deployed for the purpose of economic growth. The packaging and consumption of exotic cultural artifacts and practices fuel development, and in so doing they help diversify the economies of minority areas. County and township officials have tried to meld ostensibly traditional handicrafts with modern manufacturing methods and market incentives to spur the growth of the rural enterprise sector. Such efforts are more successful in areas like Dali and Xishuangbanna, where minority exotica combined with climate and scenery entice tourists and investors. Officials in less geographically favored areas, including remote parts of these same prefectures, are also trying to capitalize on the cultural resources at hand, though their efforts face serious challenges. Among the Hui, who are regarded warily by the state and by non-Muslims, ethno-cultural identity is somewhat less available as a resource for commercial exploitation. This is partly because, after centuries of integration into Chinese society, the Hui are not considered exotic.

The state regards cultural revival among the Dai, Bai, and Hui groups differently. The Dai and Bai have the advantage of long being seen as both cooperative and exotic, though the Bai are considered less exotic than the Dai. In a way, the phenomenon of “internal orientalism” identified by Louisa Schein—that is, the idealization by a majority group of minorities as alien, feminized others—benefits them. The Bai and Dai and the leaders of their respective autonomous prefectures have successfully packaged their identities to exploit market opportunities.² Because they are perceived as cooperative, even docile, the risk that cultural revival will foment any group solidarity that might be at odds with national cohesion is seen as small. Furthermore, these two groups are politically powerful in their respective prefectures. The participation of CCP officials in religious ritual

and cultural practice is acknowledgment of the groups' local power and position. The relative influence of minorities in the prefectures, counties, and regions where they live may be a key variable in determining the treatment they receive from the state, in particular the extent to which the state supports their religious and cultural endeavors.

The party-state in Yunnan also tolerates a range of religious expression among less easily marketable groups like the Hui. It even supports activities like the hajj which enhance transnational Islamic ties. By allowing minority cultures to flourish, the contemporary party-state tries to distinguish itself from its repressive predecessor and thereby enhance its standing with minority peoples. Officials recognize the indispensability, to use Duara's term, of a minority "cultural nexus": local, heterogeneous, symbolic, and meaning-laden cultural institutions that facilitate state power and legitimacy. At times the state behaves like a "cultural entrepreneur," hard at work expanding the "solidarity resources of the community" and the identities these resources express.³ However, while the state's actions suggest that it sees the cultural revival as instrumental in improving the economic status and political stability of local regions, many officials, especially minority ones, promote the cultural revival for reasons that go beyond utility.

The desire of the Dai, Bai, and Hui to recover long-suppressed traditions and practices drives their cultural revival. For many members of these groups, cultural revival is also an expression of their desire for modernization, albeit in minority-centric terms. Modernization is a goal and an ideal; it is an object of attachment, an emotionally resonant symbol of progress valorized in many of their cultural endeavors. At the same time, cultural activists wield ideals of modernity as justification for their projects.

For groups like the Dai and Hui, revival has enhanced connections to transnational collectivities and identities. These groups have benefited from foreign assistance in rebuilding sites of worship, religious schools, etc. Dai connections to Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, and Hui ties to Muslim countries and global Islam, have thus contributed to the vibrancy of religious and cultural life. Despite official pronouncements and laws against foreign intrusion in the sphere of religion, the state frequently supports minority identification with a pan-Tai or pan-Islamic cultural entity—as long as this identification does not appear to split the motherland.

These transnational linkages inform Dai and Hui interpretations of the national and the modern. Many Dai point to the rapid growth of the Thai economy as proof that economic development is compatible with "their" culture, despite frequent official and scholarly assertions to the contrary.

Many Hui see the prosperity and modernity of Malaysia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim states in a similar light. The scientific legacy of Islam and the history of commercial activities among Muslims—including Mohammad himself—are held up as proof of the compatibility of Hui identity and practice with Chinese national goals of economic modernization.⁴

The type of legitimacy that these two groups gain through identification with non-Chinese groups may not seem available to the Bai, given that Bai people reside only in China. However, for the Bai, an historical Bai subject, fictionalized or invented though it may be, serves an analogous function; the commercial, cultural, and educational successes of their *minjia* forebears inform contemporary Bai critiques of their present condition of “relative backwardness.” Identification with the past also influences efforts to overcome that backwardness and to retrieve an identity bound up with ideals of cultural and economic achievement.

What implications do these developments have for the cohesion of the Chinese nation? Might they lead to the unraveling of the unity of the Chinese nation-state? As explained in chapter one, conceptions of the nation based upon theoretical paradigms as diverse as modernization theory, rational choice theory, and post-modernism may lead to the logical conclusion that minority cultural revival threatens national unity.⁵ Moreover, from some angles, the revivals among the Dai, Bai, and Hui bear many of the hallmarks of ethnic nationalism. The main task of the nationalist, writes Anthony Smith, is “to discover and discern that which is truly ‘one-self,’ and to purge the collective self of any trace of ‘the other.’”⁶ This task is accomplished, he argues, through “the rediscovery, authentication, and correct interpretation of a unique ethnic past [that is] the focus of national labours.”⁷ What Smith describes is in many respects what Dai, Bai, and Hui cultural activists and revival participants have tried to do. The success of their endeavors indicates that a movement akin to cultural nationalism has been germinating for some time.

Real-world nation-states are and always have been heterogeneous entities, an obvious point that has been emphasized by much scholarship on nations, culture, and identity.⁸ Cultures are not bounded and coherent, nor is there a simple and straightforward positive correlation between culture and group identities.⁹ Yet the idea that cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities undermine national cohesion persists in much popular, journalistic, and academic discourse about many countries.¹⁰ One journalist has characterized the minority revival in China as “splintering the image

of a homogenous Han majority and heightening the distance between the provinces and Beijing.”¹¹

Yet the cases analyzed in this book show that expressions of diversity within the nation can also reflect national goals, such as the desire for economic development and modernization. The Dai, Bai, and Hui revivals entail ethnically and religiously informed interpretations and appropriations of broad Chinese national values and ideals. Expressions of minority identity can be ways of participating, or attempting to participate, in the imagined community of the nation. These interpretations and appropriations are critical ones that allow aspects of the revival to function both as expressions of minority identity and as citizenship practice.

Both the idea of citizenship as practice as well as actual citizenship practices among the Chinese people, especially the Han, are worth revisiting to understand minority identity as more than neutral characterization or simple rhetoric. Citizenship is a formal legal category, a state-imposed identity that individuals typically possess in passive fashion. With the exception of naturalized citizens, most people's behavior and choices have little bearing on their citizenship status. Practice, in other words, does not enter into it. Yet citizenship is practice, in that the actions of states and citizens expand, contract, or otherwise alter its boundaries and applications. In China, as in the United States, citizenship rights to education, freedom of speech and religion, and so on are more or less fixed in law, and they apply, in theory, to those who enjoy citizenship status (and sometimes to those who do not). Yet the actual content and meaning of these citizenship rights depend on actions, expectations, and political context. The interplay of government attempts to limit these rights, citizen efforts to expand them, and broader societal understandings renders citizenship rights mutable and dynamic.

Recent studies have explored the meaning of citizenship and how it is expressed in China. Much of this work examines popular responses to post-Mao legal reforms and the growing emphasis on the rule of law. Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, for example, have studied the explosion of administrative litigation among rural Chinese, who are suing the state over corruption, property confiscation, illegal fines, pollution, physical mistreatment, and a host of other concerns. While O'Brien and Li caution that many Chinese still view the law as an instrument of state domination, they demonstrate that legal awareness is growing; administrative litigation “may play a part in enlarging the still small bundle of rights that villagers possess.”¹² As Margaret Y. K. Woo argues, “Adjudication is not only a source of private

dispute resolution, but also a process by which public rights are determined and articulated.”¹³ In the legal cases analyzed by O’Brien, Li, Woo, and others, citizenship practice does not mean blind acceptance of state authority, or of the categories and norms the state tries to impose. Rather, these examples of citizenship practice are thoroughly contentious, as ordinary people challenge officials in the name of the law and its alleged guarantees.

Along with litigating more, Chinese people are also experimenting with new modes of participation in public affairs. Since the mid-1990s, civic associations, nongovernmental organizations, charitable foundations, and other types of citizen-led social groups have mushroomed. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in 2005 there were approximately three hundred and fifteen thousand registered “people’s organizations” (*minjian zuzhi*) throughout the country.¹⁴ Some scholars estimate there may be as many as 2 million such organizations, when unregistered groups are taken into account.¹⁵ Many of these are resuscitated traditional organizations, though others are wholly new, and focus on contemporary concerns such as women’s rights, disability, autism, and the environment.¹⁶

Identity also informs contemporary Chinese citizenship practices, including those within the sphere of law. For instance, Woo’s work analyzes the role of gender-based concerns in women’s litigation in China. Woo suggests that public actions like collective litigation can have a feedback effect on identities like gender. Women’s collective litigation that promotes the idea of the “collective gendered citizen” may strengthen Chinese women’s consciousness of their rights as both women and citizens.¹⁷

What about other forms of identity-based action? The focus of this book is not the legal system or civil society per se, but minority cultural revival. Can participation in and promotion of cultural and ethnic institutions really function as citizenship practice? Here a comparison with the Han is instructive. Han communities, like minority ones, have experienced a remarkable cultural and religious revival since the start of the post-Mao period. This revival is also driven by a variety of interests and motives. Elites and ordinary people alike have sought to recreate meaning and authenticity in their lives and to rebuild organizations that traditionally served to anchor their communities. Identity-based organizations such as ancestral halls and temple societies also serve important social and economic functions, and are promoted, or manipulated, by local officials seeking to increase revenues, fund public services, generate tourism, and attract investment from overseas Chinese and others.¹⁸ An increasing number of the civil society groups discussed above are faith-based, that is,

civic associations with some connection to Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, and other faiths.¹⁹

As among minority cultural institutions, the relationship of Han cultural institutions to the norms and values of Chinese national membership and identity is complex. By participating in religious and lineage rituals, donating money to religious charities, making temple offerings, supporting the arts, etc., Han people demonstrate community solidarity, civic duty, filial and religious piety, social status, and economic prowess. They present and perform themselves as moral, upstanding citizens, good sons and daughters, loyal members of the clan, village, town, or city, and exemplars of contemporary Chinese socio-economic values.²⁰ Yet Han, or predominantly Han, religious and cultural practice can also subvert such norms, or be seen to subvert them. The Chinese government's antipathy toward Falun Gong and similar groups reflects its wariness, influenced by centuries of history, of the power of religion to generate counter-hegemonic challenges to the state.²¹ Han cultural practice can violate mainstream norms in more subtle ways as well. Mayfair Yang has shown how ritual practice in Wenzhou—a showcase of China's market economy—subverts capitalist and state socialist norms, even as it fuels and is fueled by Wenzhou's capitalist economic growth.²² Moreover, for Han associations of a religious nature, the simple fact of operating within the bounds of an atheist state makes them inherently problematic, regardless of their goals and actions. Their religious worldviews, argues Richard Madsen, "are always at least partially at variance with the government's legitimating ideology."²³ Nevertheless, local, particularistic Han cultural practices can serve as vehicles for the expression of national and civic identities, as well as religious, ethnic, or kinship ones, though they do not always do so. The cultural practices of the Dai, Bai, and Hui are likewise both potentially subversive and expressive of national and civic identities.

Much of this analysis reveals similarities among the Dai, Bai, and Hui, showing how the state tolerates and supports their cultural endeavors. Yet there are important differences among them. First, the strategies of identity revival available to each group are constrained or facilitated depending on the social and cultural resources they possess. The scope of the Bai revival is limited because the Bai lack any institutional, ideational, or historical ties to transnational entities. In contrast, cross-national linkages and identification are integral aspects of the Dai and Hui revivals. This situation renders their revivals politically more complex, and for the state, potentially more troubling, because of the state's longstanding suspicion of cultural heterogeneity

and foreign influence. Yet the state's reaction to the Dai and Hui varies considerably. In the Dai case, the state is almost wholly supportive of expanded cross-border linkages. In the Hui case, transnational linkages are more problematic, and the state is more ambivalent.

How revival affects identification within China's borders in turn affects the way these groups are regarded. The resurgence of Theravada Buddhism, the transformation of Xishuangbanna into a packaged homeland-cum-theme park, and the reconstruction of the pre-Liberation royal palace in Jinghong all encourage Dai identification with the defined, geographically contained territorial space that is Xishuangbanna. Even cross-national linkages encourage this; the thousands of Thai tourists who visit annually enhance the salience of Xishuangbanna as a homeland, a point of origin, as much as they enhance pan-Tai cultural community. The location of Xishuangbanna thus to some extent constrains Dai cultural revival. In contrast, the Hui have no defined place—and how can they be expected to stay in their place if they do not have one? Muslim cultural revival is problematic to the state in part because it encourages Hui to identify not as a territorially delimited minority but as members of a religious collectivity that stretches across the country and around the globe.

The ambivalence and mistrust between the Yunnan Hui and the Chinese state are not merely a result of cultural factors. Despite the transformations wrought by both Chinese socialism and market reforms, and despite state attempts to make amends for past injustice, a kind of habitus of Hui-state interaction that emerged during the Qing persists today.²⁴ This habitus—institutionally embedded “traditions” of persecution, mistrust, protest, and rebellion—continues to color Hui revival and the reactions to it of others, including the state.

Yunnan has not seen the kind of ethnic separatist unrest that simmers and sporadically explodes in Xinjiang and Tibet. However, Yunnan is not free of inter-ethnic tension and conflict. Many of the most worrisome examples of such conflict have occurred between Han and Hui groups, usually between residents of villages and settlements in close proximity to one another, or between Hui communities and local state organizations. The Shadian Incident of 1975 is a particularly horrific example of this phenomenon. These incidents are not new in Yunnan; they are part of a pattern going back at least as far as the early nineteenth century. Many Hui view the treatment of Muslims in the “incident” at Shadian as typical of the way Muslims have been treated from the Qing to the present, although the incident is unusual given its origins in intra-Hui, Cultural Revolution fac-

tionalism. Yet the Shadian incident resembles other cases of inter-ethnic violence in that it emerged not out of separatist sentiments, but rather local, interpersonal conflict.

The following episode illustrates the trajectory that many such conflicts follow. In late December 1996, violence erupted between adjacent Han and Hui settlements in Nagu Township, which is in the central Yunnan county of Tonghai. The origins of the conflict were rather petty. Apparent road rage during a traffic jam led to a fight between drivers and passengers in two trucks near Nagu Township. In the course of the fight, one of the drivers tried to drive his vehicle away; accidentally or not, he hit and killed at least one of those involved in the dispute. The participants were from neighboring Han and Hui villages in Nagu Township, and the fight escalated into a conflict between the two settlements. Exacerbating the conflict was the fact that historically Nagu was a center of metallurgy, in particular gun and knife manufacturing that was allegedly halted in the early 1950s. In actuality, the manufacture of guns and knives persisted, so not surprisingly, when the fight in Nagu Township escalated into a pitched battle, it became violent and dangerous.²⁵

The battle lasted for several days, until it eventually was quelled by the People's Armed Police. For months the police were stationed everywhere in and around the town, particularly around the Hui settlement of Najiaiyang (Na Family Homestead). Though meant to dissuade further violence, their stance appeared protective of the Hui settlement, perhaps out of sensitivity regarding the Shadian Incident and other Han-Hui riots that have occurred in the region. Checkpoints were set up along the main road into the county. On the hillside above the township, someone had arranged dozens of painted white rocks to form a phrase in huge Chinese characters clearly visible from the windows of passing vehicles: "One family is not complete, ten thousand families are complete" (*Yi jia bu yuan, wan jia yuan*). The reference was to the "family" (*jia*) of the Hui settlement, Na Family Homestead (Najiaiyang); the message was in support of ethnic harmony.

Though indicative of longstanding inter-ethnic mistrust, incidents like the one in Nagu Township do not amount to separatism. Local conflicts can and do lead to anti-state violence, though; state mishandling of similar conflicts sparked the nineteenth-century Panthay Rebellion. Whether or not local disputes provoke anti-state action depends greatly on how officials respond to them. To understand minority conflicts in China, rather than scrutinizing "cultural nationalism" for secessionist tendencies, we should examine how the state deals with such matters, such as its efforts

to create parity among minorities and the Han and its overall support for minority cultural expression.

While cultural identities and inter-ethnic relations in Yunnan are at times a source of concern for the state, the state also poses problems for minorities. Although this book provides many instances of state support for minority cultural practices, the long-term prospects for this support are ambiguous. The government remains hostile toward “heterodox” institutions that are not amenable to official monitoring or co-optation. The state also retains the power to determine what does and does not threaten national unity, and officials have few qualms about using excessive measures to squelch activities and organizations perceived as threats. Efforts to eliminate secessionist Islamist elements in Xinjiang, which include restrictions on religious practice, publishing, and education, demonstrate that seemingly inoffensive cultural practice can be suppressed in the name of stability.

There are other, less obvious ways in which minority cultural practice may be constrained and marginalized over the long run. For example, official and unofficial beliefs about modernization, what it entails, and the duties of Chinese citizens in light of the modern ideal affect official rhetoric. The state’s vision of Chinese modernization is mostly one of a rationalized, homogenized, superstition-free society. Minorities may have appropriated the language of modernity to justify their endeavors and themselves, but such efforts are limited by the neo-culturalist expectations regarding minority and Chinese citizen behavior analyzed in chapter one. Contemporary neo-culturalism valorizes certain behaviors and attitudes as civilized and modern, while disparaging others as superstitious and unseemly. It pervades both popular and official thinking about what it means to be Chinese, and is not entirely compatible with minority cultural practice and identity.

One problem for minorities is that despite official distinctions between “real” religion and superstition, religious worship is still characterized in the media as unbecoming of an increasingly modern, cosmopolitan society, and is seen as such by many Chinese people. This situation may be changing; in recent years top officials have announced that religion has a role to play in constructing a “harmonious society.”²⁶ Nevertheless, official and popular conceptions of modernization have been slow to make room for religious identity and practice. To a certain degree, minorities are protected from these kinds of criticisms, in that religion is one of their special characteristics and thus was more or less legitimized by the Constitution in 1982 and the Law of Minority Autonomy in 1984. Yet these protections underscore the dilemma that minorities face. Modern, cosmopolitan, sophisticated

people—good Chinese citizens, in other words—do not engage in un-modern behaviors. Minorities, however, are expected to engage in them.

The dilemmas created by this way of thinking are evident in the ambivalence many Han express toward the Hui practice of Islam. Hui religiosity is seen by some Han as something of a sham, incompatible with the economically “advanced” and integrated lives that many Hui lead, especially those who live in urban areas. While this hostility reflects inter-ethnic mistrust, it also results from the somewhat transgressive quality of Huiness. The Hui are perceived as a not-quite-minority, not-quite-Han people who obstinately refuse to acknowledge their modernity. The Dai, in contrast, are held to a different standard of behavior. Religiosity among the Dai is still a quaint and marketable expression of their exotic character; among the Hui, it constitutes willful resistance to modernity.

In *Rescuing History from the Nation*, Prasenjit Duara argues that the study of nationalism ought to be broadened to include a variety of “nation-views and other narratives” of the nation. Nationalism, he points out,

is often considered to override other identities within a society—such as religious, racial, linguistic, class, gender, or even historical ones—to encompass these differences in a larger identity. However, even when or where such an encompassment has been temporarily achieved, the way in which the nation is represented and voiced by different self-conscious groups is often very different. Indeed, we may speak of different “nation-views,” as we do “world-views,” which are not overridden by the nation but actually define or constitute it. In place of the harmonized, monologic voice of the Nation, we find a polyphony of voices, contradictory and ambiguous, opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of the nation.²⁷

The cultural revivals of the Dai, Bai, and Hui are multilayered endeavors, polyphonies within themselves. They spring from a diversity of motives and interests: grass-roots religious faith, the desire for an authentic life, academic interest, fun, orientalist fascination, the push for market share, etc. A great deal of the ferment in minority areas entails a straightforward and fairly unreflective resurrection of everyday practices and institutions, but at other times it is deliberate and self-conscious. The Dai, Bai, and Hui are redefining national goals and ideals in ways that allow them to be minority, modern, and Chinese. Their contradictory “nation-views” negotiate a Han-centric vision of the Chinese nation, providing voices of both opposition and affirmation, rife with ambiguity and paradox.

