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In Pursuit of Islamic “Authenticity”: Localizing Muslim Identity on China’s Peripheries

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Abstract

In this ethnographic sketch, I analyze the complex processes of Sino-Islamic identity formation by examining the variety and diversity of locally produced “authenticity,” situated within a global understanding of Islam. Even within a single province, among a single official *minzu* (nationality) that People’s Republic of China propaganda, media, and scholarship often construct as a unified, static group, localized practices and processes of identity formation are remarkably diverse. This article investigates how trans/national discourses and practices of Islamic authenticity are localized within two specific field sites: the provincial capital of Kunming and the rural Muslim enclave of Shadian. For the purposes of this article, I focus primarily on how life is temporally and spatially structured, both in everyday practice and in imaginings of one’s place in history, modernity, the Muslim world, and the Chinese state. By setting out details of the daily lives of two Hui Muslim women, I aim to elucidate how temporal and spatial structures of life, which are tied to urban or rural location, reflect and shape local identity formation. I argue that as actors involved in their own self-production, Hui Muslims in Kunming and Shadian negotiated, appropriated, and contested both monolithic notions of Islam and the official state-propagated *minzu* classificatory system, producing their own versions of authentic Hui Muslim identities. What constituted authentic Hui Muslim identity depended to a great extent on the residence of the individual.

Keywords: Chinese Muslims, Hui, identity, modernity, trans/nationalism, comparative ethnography

“We Huizu have a genetic link to the Quran, so we are Muslims whether or not we practice the teachings of Islam.”

—Mr. Ding, 61, retired Kunming city employee, September 2010

“Ethnicity is irrelevant. What matters is that one believes in Allah and faithfully practices the teachings of Islam.”

—Mr. Ma, 58, administrator of the Shadian Great Mosque, May 2011

As the two quotations above illustrate, what constitutes Islamic “authenticity” in Yunnan Province varies ontologically in different localities. During my two years of fieldwork among Hui Muslims there, my interlocutors in both the provincial capital of Kunming and the rural

Muslim enclave of Shadian positioned themselves as uniquely authentic Muslims, but they did so in distinctly different ways. While local Hui Muslims in both places recognized the shifting, malleable, and processual nature of Hui Muslim identity, they nevertheless envisioned and utilized essentialist categories to illustrate what constituted authentic and legitimate Hui practices. No matter their residence, my interlocutors relied on hierarchies of authenticity in which certain practices were viewed as inauthentic; however, what constituted authenticity was locally defined and negotiated. Furthermore, locally constituted constellations of discourses and practices of authenticity collaboratively reflected and shaped Hui Muslim notions of trans/national belonging and modernity.

During my fieldwork in Kunming, I noticed that for most of the educated Hui elite with whom I worked, the state of being a Muslim was divorced from Islamic practice. Most of my interlocutors fervently declared their authenticity as Muslims, though few prayed five times a day and many regularly imbibed alcohol. From my perspective, these Hui seemed quite secularized, despite their protests to the contrary.¹ As the first quotation above suggests, these urbanized, educated Hui elite positioned themselves as Muslims who were uniquely absolved from the duty to practice the teachings of Islam. Many of these Hui appropriated biological rhetoric as a means to define and produce their own “authentic” Muslim ethnic identity, one that simultaneously linked them to an imagined Arab past and an imagined modernity.² In these imaginings, the scientific glory and advancement of their Arab past merged with China’s current ascendancy in global capitalism to shape the ways in which they imagined their present identity as modern Muslim subjects of the Chinese nation-state. This identity was predicated less on Islamic practice than on a mythologized genealogy that situates urban Hui at the center of the Muslim world.³ In Kunming, urbanized Hui elite relied on localized practices of interpreting lineages, genealogies, and oral stories of descent transmitted through generations, along with scientific notions of *minzu* 民族 (nationality), and cosmopolitan consumerist practices to construct a Hui Muslim identity that prioritized ethnicity.⁴

In contrast, my Hui interlocutors in the rural Muslim enclave of Shadian repeatedly emphasized Islamic practice as key to authenticity, asserting that ethnicity is irrelevant. Whenever I asked a question about Huizu 回族 (Hui nationality) in Shadian, I was promptly, and gently, chided: one’s *minzu* is of no importance; all that matters is whether or not one is a Muslim. In Shadian, even the language that Hui Muslims used to describe themselves differed

from Kunming Hui usage: whereas Kunming Hui largely appropriated the state-designated nationality category, Huizu, Hui Muslims in Shadian preferred to describe themselves as Muslim 穆斯林 (Muslim) or Zhongguo Muslim 中国穆斯林 (Chinese Muslim). Furthermore, Hui Muslims in Shadian argued that true Islamic faith is eroded in the secular city and that in order to preserve authentic forms of Islam, “real” Muslims fled the city and its secularizing, “Hanifying” influences for religious enclaves such as Shadian.

Throughout this article, I refer to an urban-rural dichotomy as a means to unpack how place influences different localized notions of belonging. Although my interlocutors in both Kunming and Shadian often reified this dichotomy, in actuality, the imagined urban-rural dichotomy is neither static nor clearly defined (see especially Skinner 1976, 1995). What is perceived as “urban” or “rural” may shift depending on the residence of the viewer: for instance, a Miao peasant from the village outside Shadian may view Gejiu as a city (indeed, officially it is one), whereas a long-term urbanite in Kunming would view Gejiu as a *nongcun* 农村 (a rural area). However, for most Chinese people today, this urban-rural dichotomy is one of the most salient ways of organizing their world: it may not be absolutely fixed, and the values allocated to “urban” or “rural” certainly shift depending on context, but this dichotomy shapes both how they imagine the world and how they live in it.

When I speak of “urban Hui” in this article, I do not mean simply “Hui who reside in urban areas.” The urban Hui to whom I refer were almost exclusively well educated and often wealthy, but their defining trait for the purposes of this analysis is that they identified strongly as Kunmingren 昆明人 (people from Kunming). They have all lived in Kunming for a long time, and some grew up there. In contrast, urban-dwelling Hui who hailed from the countryside and expressed strong attachments to their rural hometowns did not necessarily share the discourses or practices of Huiness of long-term city dwellers. Hui who resided in rural Muslim enclaves like Shadian, Najiaing, and Weishan exhibited the most deeply religious practices, though even Hui from other rural parts of Yunnan had deeper attachments to Islam than most of those who grew up in the city or had strong ties to the city. Finally, not all Hui who resided in Shadian were from rural areas; some had left cities as distant as Kashgar and Dalian to live a religious and harmonious (*hexie* 和谐) life surrounded by other Muslims. This distribution accords with what Shadian Muslims argued: that “real” Muslims “fled the city” in search of an authentic Muslim

life, away from the corruptive influence of the city. For most urban Hui in Kunming, however, leaving the city was unthinkable: they had internalized and valorized the urban-rural hierarchy that saturates contemporary China, and that, while allowing for pastoral fantasy holidays in quaint or scenic rural destinations, discriminates against the rural in favor of the urban (see Jacka 2005; Siu 2007; Kipnis 2007).

For the purposes of this article, it is crucial to recognize that even though the rural-urban dichotomy is not static, Muslim lives in urban Kunming are quite different from Muslim lives in rural enclaves like Shadian.⁵ The urbanized elite Hui Muslims with whom I worked in Kunming had to negotiate the dominant capitalist modes of living there, which included work hours that did not accommodate prayer times, along with the lack of a spatially connected Muslim district, inconvenient distance from mosques, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) religious restrictions, and other impediments to living a devout Muslim life. Some urban elite Hui negotiated this liminality by passing as Han in certain settings, even as their Hui Muslim identity was deeply felt. Despite their ambivalence, urban Hui accommodated, negotiated, and contested locally dominant modes of living in ways that enabled them to assert their own claims to Islamic authenticity. In comparison, state agents and capitalist modes of production exerted less authority in Shadian, where Muslims were able to remake their religious authenticity after the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution.

Ethno-Religious Identity and Trans/National Belonging

Huizu 回族 (Hui nationality) is arguably the most ambiguous category of the ten Muslim *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族 (minority nationalities) in China: although the Hui officially comprise a *minzu* 民族 (nationality), the Huizu category noticeably lacks the defined, unifying traits by which *minzu* were differentiated in accordance with the Stalinist model of nationality, that is, “common language, common territory, common economy, and common psychological nature manifested in a common culture” (Fei 1981; Lin 1987; Harrell 1995; Gladney 1996; Lipman 1997; Litzinger 2000; Allès 2000). While many of China’s fifty-six official *shaoshu minzu* groups lack such a unified definition (see Harrell 1995, 2001; Pan 1997, 2010; Litzinger 2000; Schein 2000; Tapp 2003), and certainly, as many scholars have argued, the *minzu shibie* 民族识别 (ethnic identification campaign) of the 1950s drew on imperial and Republican

Chinese ethnic classification schemes, in addition to the Stalinist model (Fei 1989; Mullaney 2004, 2011; Fiskesjö 2006; B. Yang 2008), the Hui category is especially problematic (Gladney 1996, 1998; Harrell 1995, 33; Lipman 1997). Hui are scattered throughout China and claim descent from multiple ethnic groups. While most speak some variant of Chinese, others speak Tibetan or other minority languages (Gladney 1996, 32–34; Hillman 2004; Bai 2008), and some speak Chinese dialects that incorporate transliterated Persian and Arabic words (Wang 1996, 2001).⁶ Some scholars assert that belief in Islam ultimately defines the Hui (Z. Bai 1994; Israeli 2002), yet as anthropologist Dru Gladney (1996, 1998) attests, there are those who identify as Hui but who neither believe in nor practice any form of Islam, such as the Ding lineage of Fujian, who petitioned the Chinese state for classification as Hui based on their Arab and Persian ancestry. Gladney (1996, 1998) posits a spectrum of Hui identities ranging from those who identify as Hui primarily on religious grounds, mostly located in Northwest China, to those like the Ding lineage, whose identity is based on other characteristics, including descent from foreign Muslims, cultural practices (such as abstaining from pork and endogamy) and a sense of shared history.

While the state-propagated *minzu* classification scheme strives for scientific objectivity, it paradoxically enables multiple, conflicting practices and discourses to exist within a single *minzu* category. Hence, we see the spectrum of locally produced Hui ethnic identities that Gladney (1996, 1998) describes and the processual, context-specific *minzu* that Louisa Schein (2000), Nicholas Tapp (2002), Kevin Caffrey (2004), among others, articulate. With this in mind, I aim to emphasize that although the *minzu shibie* campaign and its subsequent nationality-focused state policies profoundly shaped the ethnic consciousness of China's peoples, Han and minority alike (see especially Gladney 1996), the process of engendering *minzu* identities was far more complex than simply imposing state-designated categories onto on-the-ground social realities (Hansen 1999; Schein 2000; Litzinger 2000; Tapp 2002; Caffrey 2004; Fan 2012). As Tapp (2002) argues, we must unravel the variety and diversity of authenticity by investigating locally produced constructions, particularly at the “sub-ethnic level,” even when they are essentialist. In the case of Hui Muslims in Yunnan, “sub-ethnic” notions of transnational belonging—to the *umma* (community of Islamic peoples) and to an imagined cosmopolitanism more generally—added yet another layer to the localized production of their identities. Local production of Hui Muslim identities was thus collaboratively influenced by national identification projects and

notions of national belonging, notions of belonging to a specific *minzu*, and differentially formed notions of transnational belonging.

Below, I provide a glimpse into these divergent configurations of Hui Muslim practices and discourses by imagining a day in the lives of two ideal-typical Hui Muslim women, one living in Kunming, the other in Shadian. The two composites are directly based on my field notes, although I have merged multiple days, conversations, and interlocutors. During the “day in a life” sections, I use the ethnographic present in order to make the fictive aspects more visible, and to mark shifts from analytical passages.

Muslims in China are perceived as (at least) dually peripheral: as a group, they are peripheral both to the imagined center of the Islamic world and to mainstream Chinese cultural and political spheres. Yunnan’s distance from China’s urban and state centers—imagined and real, cultural, historical, economic, geographical, and political—produces yet another layer of peripherality for Hui Muslims there. Scholarly papers, local gazetteers, and popular Chinese discourses have long characterized Yunnan as remote (*pianpi* 偏僻) and peripheral (Skinner 1995; Giersch 2006; Tapp 2010); this was reinforced during the Qing, when Yunnan allegedly was plagued by a contagious miasma (*zhangqi* 瘴气) that afflicted Han government officials with malaria (Bello 2005; Zhang 2005). Even today, Yunnan is oriented not only toward Beijing but also toward Southeast Asia (Evans 2000; Michaud 2007; Scott 2009),⁷ and Yunnan’s reputation as a pleasant hub for tourists stems largely from its being imagined as an exotic paradise far from China’s metropolitan centers (Xu 2001; Hyde 2001; Davis 2005; Ateljevic and Swain 2006; Zhang 2010).

Kunming City: “Catching Up” with “Cosmopolitan Modernity”

Although Kunming may not be considered a major metropolitan center on par with Beijing, Shanghai, or Hong Kong, in the past decade the city has transformed from a far-flung provincial backwater into a shiny modern metropolis, complete with steel-and-glass skyscrapers, high-rise condominiums, luxurious gated communities, an IMAX cinema, three Starbucks coffeehouses, and even a Marc Jacobs retailer. In 2012, city officials unveiled a new subway system and launched a new international airport, reportedly the fourth largest in China. In the wake of China’s economic reforms, the real estate market is “booming,” private enterprise is flourishing, and officials and some residents, responding to a sense that Kunming is “lagging

behind,” have encouraged massive development projects in an effort to “modernize” the city (Zhang 2010, 2006).

While many Kunming residents expressed optimism about the “progress” symbolized by these projects, even residents who welcomed these recent changes mourned the loss of a cherished cityscape. For Yunnanese Hui, especially those who lived in Kunming’s Shuncheng Jie Muslim District, this loss is particularly poignant: in 2004, after prolonged protests and negotiations with the local Wuhua District government and the Sailun Real Estate Corporation, the historic Hui neighborhood was demolished, displacing thousands of Hui residents (Zhang 2010, 153–156; Zhu 2005). While some residents and remnants of Shuncheng Jie’s Muslim past remain, the site has been supplanted by a sprawling, shimmering temple to capitalist consumerism: an upscale shopping mall (figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Shuncheng Jie 顺城街, once the heart of Kunming’s Muslim community, now houses an upscale shopping mall, 2010. All photos in this article were taken by the author.



Figure 2. The rumors are true: the Shuncheng Jie shopping mall has a new Marc Jacobs store, 2010.

A Day in the Life of Mrs. Na of Kunming

Mrs. Na, fifty-eight, is a retired schoolteacher and homemaker who has long resided in Kunming. She wakes around 8 A.M. and prepares a breakfast of spicy *mixian* 米线 (rice noodles) for herself and her husband before he leaves for work. Everyday lives in Kunming are structured by the work patterns of capitalist production; as such, they generally do not accommodate scheduled prayer times, but rather conform to dominant Chinese temporalities with regard to sleeping, eating, and other aspects of daily life. After breakfast, Mrs. Na dons a pair of brown trousers and a long-sleeved aubergine blouse. She walks ten minutes through her luxuriously landscaped *xiaoqu* 小区 (residential community) to the bus stop, where she takes a bus fifteen minutes to the nearest well-stocked *qingzhen* 清真 (halal) market. She can buy a few items closer to home, but ever since she and her husband moved out of the city center she has had to commute at least fifteen minutes by bus to buy quality *qingzhen* meat. It is even farther to the nearest *qingzhen* bakery (figure 3).

Back at home, Mrs. Na phones her youngest brother in Ohio to update him on their parents' health problems. Her brother settled in the United States after attending a university there, and, like many urban Hui in Kunming, Mrs. Na values Western-style education, believing

that Chinese-style education inhibits creative thinking. She had hoped that her daughter, Lingling, would go abroad to the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia for university, but, even though Lingling's standardized test scores were high, she stayed in Kunming and attended Yunnan University. After Mrs. Na and her brother hang up, she begins preparing lunch and then watches a Qing dynasty soap opera. Kunming Hui consumption patterns are a bricolage of Chinese soap operas, Western-style university educations, and Hui *qingzhen* foodstuffs; through these practices, they imagine themselves as an exceptionally modern *minzu*, a people with the illustrious heritage of an Arab past and the cosmopolitan discernment to appropriate what is useful from the West and from present-day China.⁸



Figure 3. Halal moon cakes, Kunming, 2010.

When her husband comes home shortly after noon, Mrs. Na finishes preparing lunch, an assortment of *chaocai* 炒菜 (stir-fried dishes), and sits down to eat with him. The couple discusses the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival holiday. “It’s not really our holiday; we should be celebrating Hui holidays. Why don’t you ever get those off?” Mrs. Na complains. “You know why,” her husband replies. “We Huizu technically have those days off, but if I miss work then, all my Han colleagues will notice and create problems for me. It’s much easier this way. We can still spend time together as a family on the Han holidays, even if they’re not really ours.”

After lunch, Mrs. Na phones some friends to arrange to play *majiang* 麻将 (mah-jongg) the day after tomorrow. Two of these friends are Hui women who were neighbors when Mrs. Na and her husband lived in the Muslim District in the city center. After the Muslim District was demolished in 2004, most of its residents were dispersed throughout the city. Among other things, this has made it more difficult to buy *qingzhen* products and to arrange social gatherings with other Hui.

Mrs. Na's bookcase is stocked with books on Hui history and culture, along with genealogies, lineages, and biographies of famous Hui personages. Her sister recently sent her a new compilation of biographies of notable Hui from their home county in rural Yunnan. The biographies go back as far as the Yuan dynasty, and Mrs. Na eagerly reads them to glean further insight into her own lineage and heritage. In their close readings of genealogies, biographies, and histories, Kunming Hui imagine a linear ancestral past structured by generations; spatially, this links them at once with the Arab world of their imagined past and with the intimate geography of their home counties. And yet these genealogical links are quite speculative: in some cases, elite urban Hui claim Arab or Persian rather than Central Asian descent, even though official historical documents indicate Central Asian descent for most Yunnanese Muslims. In a majority of cases, urban Hui relied on patrilineal descent to claim their authenticity as Muslims, despite the fact that nearly all Yunnanese Hui patrilineal lines were obliterated during the 1873 massacres that followed the Qing suppression of the Panthay Rebellion.

After reading for a while, Mrs. Na begins to prepare dinner. Her daughter, Lingling, is coming over, so she will make her favorite dish: *hongshao niurou* 红烧牛肉 (red-braised beef). Once both her husband and daughter have arrived, the family sits down to dinner together, complete with thimbles of *qingkejiu* 青稞酒 (barley wine). After several years as a businesswoman at a well-regarded local company in Kunming, Lingling has recently transferred to an international start-up, where she hopes her years of studying English can be put to good use. The family discusses how her job is progressing, and her mother guarantees Lingling's success. "We Huizu have a long history as successful businesspeople and traders. It's in our genes." After dinner, the family watches various game shows on television until the parents go to bed and Lingling returns to her apartment.

Localizing Identity Formation in Kunming

Although Hui Muslims in Shadian often bemoan the “corruptive” process of “Hanification” (*Hanhua* 汉化) that has occurred in Kunming, the process of identity formation for Kunming Hui has been much more complex than mere assimilation. Kunming Hui argued that although they remained Muslims, the turbulence of the past fifty years had contributed to the gradual erosion of their religious beliefs. Religious suppression during the Cultural Revolution, assignments to *danwei* 单位 (work units) in which Han were the majority, practical conformities to dominant temporal structures in order to ease work relations, and the demolition of the Kunming Muslim District and subsequent dispersal of its residents all recognizably contributed to shifts in Kunming Hui identity formation, but not only by diluting this identity. According to Kunming Hui, the erosion of their religious beliefs and the lack of opportunities to practice Islam engendered within them a sense of ambivalence about their identity as Hui Muslims that eventually sparked a desire to cultivate a sense of “Huiness” that distinguished them from the Han majority.

Although some Hui in Kunming consume alcohol and even marry Han people, shared practices such as normative endogamy, pork abstinence, readings of lineages, and storytelling provide them with the means to distinguish themselves from the Han. As Mrs. Su, a fifty-three-year-old middle school teacher, recounted in Kunming in October 2010:

When I was a young girl, I used to pray at the mosque with my mother. But then, during Wenge [the Cultural Revolution 文革], such things were no longer allowed. At home my mother told me stories of our ancestors and still tried to get me to *nianjing* [recite the Quran 念经], but the words meant nothing to me. They were just empty syllables, meaningless, and besides, that stuff just didn’t interest me. Later, I was accepted to Yunnan Normal University and went to study in Kunming. I became a Chinese-language teacher at a middle school there.... Back then, no one wore the hijab [head covering]. It was the eighties, we just didn’t wear it. I didn’t pray either, and I began to think that the only thing that really separated me from my Han colleagues was that I didn’t eat pork.... My mother always told me stories about our ancestors, so eventually I became interested in studying Huizu history, culture, and genealogy.

Through their own local practices, influenced by specific temporal and spatial modes, Kunming Hui constructed their own version of an authentic Hui Muslim identity predicated not on Islamic religious practice but on practices of reading a genealogy that, due to mythologized descent from Arab traders and/or the Prophet Muhammad, situated them at the center of the

Muslim world. These genealogies were read as marking particular patrilineal descendants as authentic Muslims, whether or not the descendants in question practiced Islam. In the words of one self-proclaimed sayyid (descendants of the Prophet through his grandsons Hasan ibn Ali and Husayn ibn Ali), “Why should I pray five times a day, or abstain from alcohol? I am the [patrilineal] descendant of Sai Dianchi 赛典赤 [Sayyid ‘Ajall Shams Al-Din].⁹ I have a genetic relationship with the Quran [*wo gen gulanjing you jiyin de guanxi*]; there is no need [to practice Islam].”¹⁰

Most Hui in Kunming proffer more than their word as descendants of sayyids or other notable Muslims, a category that could include Arab traders, imams, or religious scholars.¹¹ When I further probed my interlocutors about the authenticity of their Islamic pasts, they “proved” to me the truth of their patrilineal descent by showing me genealogies, lineages, and biographies, at times handwritten but more often printed and bound, that traced their lineages back to unquestionably authentic ancestors. In practice, my interlocutors often moved between different texts to demonstrate who their notable ancestor was: that is, they might use multiple lineages and local genealogies to trace their ancestry back to a specific person, and then investigate that person’s life by way of local compendiums of biographies of notable personages. In this way, Kunming Hui used oral histories, lineages, and biographies to triangulate the validity of their claims.

Interestingly, my interlocutors figured their descent patrilineally, despite the well-known historical fact (at least among most educated Hui) that, after Du Wenxiu’s defeat in 1873,¹² Qing imperial forces massacred up to 90 percent of the Yunnanese Hui population, of which the remaining survivors were primarily young women (Armijo 2001; Yang 1994). Statistically, at least some of these cases of “patrilineal” descent must be at least partially matrilineal. A Kunming Hui Muslim woman of the Ding lineage acknowledged that “at least some” of the many Yunnanese Hui Muslim who claim patrilineal descent from Sai Dianchi must be refiguring that descent matrilineally, or through a combination of patrilineal and matrilineal descent. However, she assured me that, in her own case, her patrilineal descent was indeed authentic: she traced her descent back to the Ding lineage in Fujian, and showed me documents that “proved” that her patrilineal male ancestor and his “younger brother” left Fujian for Nanjing during the Ming dynasty. She told me that the elder brother “remained Huizu,” while “the younger brother became Hanzu.”¹³ Her ancestors slowly migrated westward and settled in Yunnan only after the

massacres of 1873.

Whether or not such reckonings of genealogical relationships and descent are true historically, they nevertheless shaped the ways in which my interlocutors articulate and practice their ethnic identity in present-day Kunming. In discussing the Ding lineage of Fujian, Dru Gladney notes that “the importance of [the Ding] genealogy is not its authenticity, but its acceptance by the current members of the Ding clan in validating their descent from foreign Muslim ancestors” (1996, 377n22). Indeed, we should read genealogies of Hui Muslims in Kunming similarly.

To an extent, authentic identity for Kunming Hui precludes religious practice: because a solid ethnic pedigree could absolve a person of the religious obligation to practice Islam, a known Hui Muslim who did not pray five times a day could be, among certain elite urban Hui, viewed as more ethnically authentic than one who had to prove his Huiness. While this was most commonly explained casually, as in, “Of course he doesn’t pray regularly; he’s a descendant of the Prophet,” a conversation with a mixed group of Hui and Han men that I observed and participated in during my first forays into fieldwork especially illuminates how Hui Muslims in Kunming employ this sense of primordial ethnicity in order to define their Muslim (and hence, religious) authenticity. For example, after I outlined my intended research on Yunnanese Hui to a group of officials, a Han man piped up:

Hui in Yunnan aren’t interesting; here the only thing that separates them from the Han is that they don’t eat pork. They don’t sing or dance like the other *shaoshu minzu* [minority nationalities], so what’s the point in studying them? You should either choose a different *minzu* to study or go to Ningxia [Hui Autonomous Prefecture] to study real Hui who actually pray.

Clearly offended, a Hui man interjected:

No, she should study Hui here. We’re as interesting as any other *shaoshu minzu* in Yunnan, even if we don’t sing or dance.... Ningxia Hui are just backward [*luohou* 落后] and impoverished [*pinkun* 贫困] converts to Islam. Of course they have to pray: they’re not real Hui; they are just the descendants of Han who converted, and they lack any Arab or Persian ancestry. If they were descendants of Arabs, do you think they would be so poor? No, they lack the gene for commerce, [laughing]... Besides, those Ningxia Hui are uncivilized [*bu wenming* 不文明] and of low quality [*suzhi hen di* 素质很低].... They just ask Allah to help them, and they never help themselves.... Here in Kunming, we Hui are advanced and modern, due to our Arab and Persian ancestry. We are the authentic Huizu.

In this repositioning of Hui Muslim authenticity, Kunming Hui disparaged prayer and the practice of “religious converts,” instead articulating a uniquely Muslim modernity in which their own lack of prayer at once signified their authenticity as “true” descendants of “real” Muslims, and as vanguards of modernity, commerce, and science, further symbolized in their use of genetic “science” to assert their claims of authenticity. Here, Kunming Hui’s hierarchical situating of themselves vis-à-vis other, less authentic, religious Hui, and other non-Muslim Chinese, resonates with how anthropologist Stacy Pigg (1996) untangles the ways in which the absence of traditional belief can become a marker of a modern identity: through voicing a lack of belief in shamanistic practices, “cosmopolitan villagers” in Nepal hierarchically positioned themselves as “modern,” “scientific,” and “advanced” in relationship to other, shaman-believing villagers.

Moreover, whereas encounters between Shadian’s Muslims and other Muslims heighten their consciousness of being members of the *umma*, Kunming Hui rarely encounter foreign Muslims. Instead, encounters with other Hui or with Han often, though not always, enhance the ethnic consciousness of Kunming Hui rather than their sense of religious community. In this sense, the cosmopolitanism of urban elite Hui Muslims is largely imagined.¹⁴ Furthermore, in Kunming, Hui Muslims rely on an imagined past of Islamic advancement and modernity to position themselves *within* China’s modernization narrative. Thus imagined, Kunming Hui are dually modern, advancing ahead of the Han, who lack claims to a glorious Islamic past, and ahead of non-Chinese Muslims, who lack claims to China’s ascendancy in global capitalism.

Shadian: Preserving the “Tradition of Islamic Modernity”

Not far from the Vietnam border, the Shadian *qu* 区 (administrative district) is a cluster of hamlets under the administration of Gejiu City, Honghe Hani, and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, in a region populated mostly by ethnic minority groups. My interlocutors there reported that approximately 95 percent of Shadian’s population were Hui; the rest were mostly Hani, Yi, Miao, or other minority groups, and a fraction were Han majority *nongmingong* 农民工 (peasant or migrant workers), most of whom resided in nearby Jijie township. As Gladney (1996) reports, Shadian was a “flourishing Muslim community... as early as the Ming dynasty... [and] became a center for Islamic learning throughout Southeast Asia and Southwest China, producing the first Chinese translation of the Quran” (137). My interlocutors relied on interpretations of Shadian’s

past glory to position it as a unique site in China, one that, in the words of a teacher at one of the local madrasas, “preserved the tradition of Islamic modernity.”

Before I visited Shadian, Hui interlocutors in Kunming insisted that spending time in Shadian was “crucial” for my research, and yet, at the same time, that it was too “dangerous” for me to go. Some claimed that Shadian sheltered “religious zealots” and even “Wahhabi terrorists.” Rumors circulated that a “fortress” or wall encircled the township, built by the villagers themselves after the notorious Shadian Incident, in which, after a series of “uprisings” during the Cultural Revolution, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) launched heavy cannons and artillery and even used MiG jets to fire rockets in an attempt to quell “resistance,” killing over a thousand Hui villagers and razing the village.¹⁵

Hopping off the bus on the highway outside of Jijie, I caught a lift into Shadian with friendly newlyweds and was astonished when we saw no walls nor met any resistance; rather, we glided into town via welcoming boulevards marked with signs in Chinese, Arabic, and English. From the bus, I had glimpsed the glinting domes of eleven mosques. Countless other buildings flaunted Arab-style architecture, including, I would later learn, the building that housed the local governmental administration. Palm trees dotted the landscape and gated mansions evoking oil baron owners flanked the town.¹⁶ At the junction of the broad boulevards sat the Great Mosque, the largest mosque in China, funded mainly through private donations and constructed in a grand, Arabized style (figure 4).

A Day in the Life of Mrs. Yang of Shadian

Mrs. Yang, fifty-one, is a homemaker and native of Shadian. By the time the familiar sound of roosting hens filters through the predawn calls to prayer, Mrs. Yang has already performed her morning ablutions. While her husband scurries down the street to the nearest mosque, she quietly slips into an alcove reserved for women’s prayers in the home. In contrast to Kunming’s dominant temporal mode of capitalist production, everyday lives in Shadian are structured by Islamic religious practices; prayer times, religious obligations, and opportunities such as Quran classes largely determine the timing of sleep, meals, and community events. After prayers, Mrs. Yang prepares a breakfast of spicy *mixian* 米线 (rice noodles) for herself and her husband before he leaves for work. She dons a navy *changpao* 长袍 (abaya) with black trousers underneath and covers her hair with a black, rhinestone-encrusted hijab. She walks down the

street to one of Shadian's eleven mosques in order to attend a morning class on the meaning of the Quran.



Figure 4. A street sign near the Great Mosque, Shadian, 2011.



Figure 5. One of many gated mansions in Shadian, 2011.

After class, Mrs. Yang heads to the market. In Shadian, practically all foodstuffs and restaurants are *qingzhen*; the few restaurants that are not are clearly marked Hanzu Fandian 汉族饭店 (Han restaurant). Back at home, she begins preparing lunch and then flips through a range of television stations that she receives because of her satellite dish: Lebanon TV, Syria TV, Jordan TV, and of course the CCTV Arabic channel. Although she speaks only Chinese, Mrs. Yang enjoys watching television series and news programs from the rest of the Muslim world, and feels that doing so connects her more to other Muslims' lives and experiences. When her husband comes home shortly after the noon prayers, she quickly finishes preparing a lunch of *chaocai* and sits down to share it with him.

After lunch, she e-mails her son, who is in Syria studying to become an Islamic scholar.¹⁷ In the afternoon, several of her friends stop by for tea and light snacks: dates, apricots, and pastries imported from Turkey. Her friends are all Hui Muslim women in their forties and fifties who live in Shadian, but many of them were born in other parts of Yunnan or even in parts of China as distant as Lanzhou and Jinan. They moved to Shadian for the “strong Islamic atmosphere” (*nonghou de yisilan fengqi* 浓厚的伊斯兰风气). As one of their daughters exclaims, “If you walk around Shadian, you feel like you’re not in China but instead in some advanced, modern city in the Middle East or maybe Pakistan or Malaysia. We even have palm trees!” (figure 5). The older women remark that Shadian is granted much more religious freedom than many other places in China, and that the “strong Islamic atmosphere” ensures, for example, that employers will provide Muslim workers with prayer halls and time off to pray during working hours.

The women chat about local affairs. Recently, a woman from Sichuan who studied for several years at one of Shadian's many madrasas returned to live in Shadian with her four children. After leaving Shadian, she had become a Chinese-Arabic translator in Guangzhou and eventually married an Iraqi man. The couple moved to Jordan, where they lived for over a decade, but when the husband died unexpectedly, the woman moved her family to Shadian, where she could count on community support. One woman from Lanzhou comments, “You know, more and more Zhongguo Musilin [Chinese Muslims] are marrying foreign Muslims. I heard that Lao Li's daughter met a Pakistani man on the Internet and they plan to marry soon. And when Ma Laoshi returned from his studies abroad, he brought back a wife from Iran.” “Well, and why not? Sharing the Islamic faith is the most important criterion for a marriage

partner; one's country of origin or ethnic background should not matter. We are all Muslims.” “Yes, but how can these foreign Muslims communicate with their Chinese in-laws? And the customs of these other places are quite different. We Chinese Muslim women have a much higher status than women in other parts of the Muslim world. How can we be sure that these foreign Muslims will respect that?” When the afternoon calls to prayer reverberate throughout the hamlet, Mrs. Yang accompanies her guests to pray at the nearest mosque.

Mrs. Yang's bookcase is stocked with books on Islam, the Arabic language, and Middle Eastern culture and history. Many of them are Chinese translations of foreign books and some were printed abroad. Mrs. Yang selects a text on Islamic faith and settles into her armchair to read. Whereas Kunming Hui read Hui histories and genealogies that are primarily oriented toward a localized past, Hui Muslims in Shadian read about Islam and the rest of the Muslim world. By consuming international Islamic literature and media, Shadian Muslims imagine a religious past, present, and future that temporally and spatially incorporates the *umma* as an entirety and marks them as members of that *umma*. After reading awhile, Mrs. Yang begins to prepare dinner, taking time to pray again around sunset. Once her husband is home, they have dinner together and decide to go watch the inter-mosque youth basketball tournament before evening prayers. Afterward, Mrs. Yang and her husband watch a subtitled Turkish TV series followed by a CCTV Arabic news program before they head to bed.

Localizing Identity Formation in Shadian

In contrast to Muslims in Kunming, Muslims in Shadian emphasized their attachment to the *umma* through their consumption of, for example, Turkish soap operas, Malaysian Islamic educations, and Jordanian halal foodstuffs; through these practices, they, too, imagine themselves as uniquely modern. Although Shadian may appear more isolated than Kunming, Muslims in Shadian have experienced on average far more actual cosmopolitan encounters than their counterparts in Kunming: through study abroad, hajj, meetings with foreign Muslims who visit Shadian, and even marriages with Muslims from abroad, in addition to imagined encounters via books, television, and other media.

In May 2011, I interviewed several women about Shadian's transformation following the economic reforms. When I asked specifically about the origins and processes of the prevalent Arabization in Shadian, everyone insisted that such “authenticity” had originated in the correct

and pious practice of Islam there. However, in separate interviews and conversations with the same interlocutors, different pictures emerged. In one such interview, with Mrs. Feng, a housewife in her late forties, we discussed the changes that had occurred since the Shadian Incident. In the words of Mrs. Feng:

We prayed, but we didn't really know what it meant. After the Shadian Incident, we clung on to our faith even more strongly. But still, we didn't know what the words of the Quran meant. Even our imam didn't really know. In 1981, Ma Jian's translation into Chinese was published and finally we knew what it meant. He was a Shadian person but he left [in the 1930s] and never really came back. Still, we finally understood our own faith, and that really changed us all, especially because of [the Shadian Incident]. Almost everyone here lost someone in their family, and the pain is still deep, so we had to keep our faith close and pray to Allah. Having a Chinese-language version of the Quran helped with that, and Shadian became increasingly Muslim.... After *gaigekaiifang* [the economic reforms and "opening up"], we had more exposure to Muslims in the rest of the world, and we began to practice the teachings of Islam more authentically. Shadian became more and more like the rest of the Muslim world.... [For example,] when I was a young woman, only hajjis wore the hijab. If you dared to wear it, everyone would make fun of you and say, "Oh, so you think you're a hajji?" But as more and more people started going abroad to countries like Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, [and] Malaysia, we learned what it was like over there, and it became increasingly acceptable to wear it here.... By about 2000, nearly all the women in Shadian wore a hijab.

Unlike in Kunming, for most in Shadian, practices of authentic Islam constituted not an advance toward a modern, cosmopolitan, future stage of development but rather a *return* to authenticity and, at the same time, a return to a previously dominant Islamic modernity.¹⁸ Most evidently, this process of returning to authenticity was embodied in the Arabization of Shadian's architectural styles, foodstuffs, media consumption, and clothing. Additionally, Shadian Hui Muslims often imagined Islamic modernity as the singular, global modernity that sparked other, lesser (secular) modernities (cf. Dirlik 2003); in doing so, they positioned the Chinese state as hampering, not spurring, their modernity. Like their counterparts in Xi'an (Gillette 2000), Hui in Shadian resisted the CCP evolutionary scale of modernization while also producing their own model of modernization.

However, unlike those in Xi'an, Shadian Hui conceptualized the early PRC era (1949–1966) and especially the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) as inducing an objectionable, forced break with an authentic, localized Islamic past. Their opposition to CCP religious policies materialized in the Shadian Incident, which in addition to being a traumatic lived and

memorialized experience for Shadian Hui Muslims, also bestowed on them a level of Islamic righteousness and authenticity that others in China, who did not resist the CCP, could not claim. Shadian Hui asserted that their own lived “backwardness” in past decades was due to China’s various modernization projects, and that when they have been able to pursue authentic lives of Islamic faith, they have been more modern than non-Muslims. In the words of one of my interlocutors there, “Capitalist and socialist systems alike deny the deep significance of faith; there is more to life than working, eating rice, drinking tea, buying things. That is actually a feudal [*fengjian* 封建] way of living. In order to live a modern [*xiandai* 现代] life, one must have faith in Allah, and practice the teachings of Islam.”

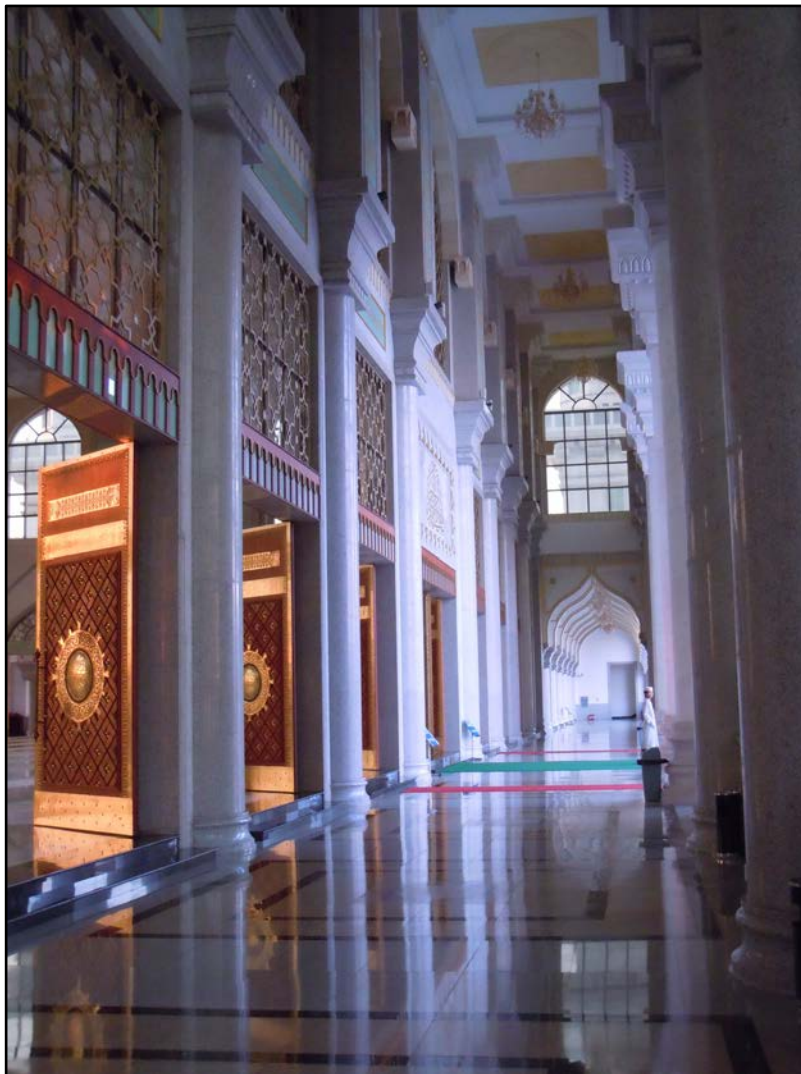


Figure 6. Just outside the prayer halls of the Great Mosque, Shadian, 2011.

In addition, whereas anthropologist Maris Boyd Gillette (2000) argues that increased contact with the Middle East since the 1980s partially accounts for Arabization in Xi'an, Hui Muslims in Shadian repeatedly insisted that such increased contact—through the hajj, through media consumption, and through cosmopolitan encounters with foreign Muslim guests—had very little impact there. Instead, Shadian Hui Muslims contended that Shadian's Arabization originated in improved local access to Chinese-language copies of the Quran, beginning in 1981. Through exposure to the translated version of the Quran, Shadian Muslims gained insight into the “true” meanings of Islam, and, accordingly, were able to practice Islam more authentically. In this narrative, Arabization arose naturally from authentic, orthodox Islamic practice, so that the Arabized architecture and consumption practices of Hui Muslims in Shadian linked them to other authentic Muslims not hierarchically but horizontally. Thus the Arabization of Shadian simultaneously subverted the CCP monopoly on modernity while creating a space for a decentered Islamic authenticity in which Shadian Muslims were no longer imagined as peripheral to Islam. Whether or not the stylistic details of Islamic practices in fact emerged organically from reading translated copies of the Quran, the Arabization of Shadian's public spaces and architectural styles, along with consumption practices and cosmopolitan encounters, connected Shadian's Muslims in practice and in imagination both to other Muslims in China and to Muslims throughout the world, while also influencing local identity formation, which above all emphasized authentic Islamic religious practice (figure 6).

To be sure, Hui Muslims in Shadian have appropriated Chinese cultural traditions and practices; however, they do so in a way that at once syncretizes and juxtaposes Chinese cultural practices with locally defined notions of Islamic authenticity (Allès 2000). Linguistically, for instance, they incorporated transliterated Arabic and Persian terms into their Chinese dialect and gave their children both Arabic names and Islamo-centric Chinese ones. On Eid-ul-Fitr, they breakfasted on *tangyuan* 汤圆, glutinous rice dumplings traditionally consumed during the Han Lantern Festival. For Hui Muslims in Shadian, these diverse practices underscored not the appropriation of Chinese customs but rather the central importance of Islamic religious practice in all aspects of life. That is, Hui Muslims in Shadian reinforced the significance of Islamic religious practices through the syncretization and juxtaposition of Chinese cultural traditions with Islamic ones.

From their perspective, authenticity in Islamic practice radiates out from an idealized Saudi Arabian center, with officially Islamic nations considered more authentic than secularist China, though Muslims in Shadian argued that their local authenticity in China is just as valid as that of officially Islamic nations. After all, Muslims there have endeavored to make Shadian as authentic as possible: the sale and consumption of alcohol, for instance, is banned within the Shadian administrative region.¹⁹ And, as some of my interlocutors there told me, Shadian is in some ways a more authentic expression of Islam: according to many, women in Shadian have a much higher status than women in other parts of the Muslim world, and this is in accord with what the Prophet intended for all Muslims. Relying on hadith (teachings of the Prophet) that proclaim the importance of education for and the high status of women, on Islamic histories that document women's high status, and on CCP ideology and legislation that advocate equality of women, my Hui Muslim interlocutors positioned themselves as unique practitioners of an enlightened Islamic authenticity.²⁰ Together these local discourses and practices combined to create a community of individuals who emphasized authentic Islamic practice, rather than ethnicity, as the central facet of their identities (figure 7 and 8).



Figure 7. At an engagement party in Shadian, 2011.



Figure 8. A young girl with her mother at Friday prayers, Shadian, 2011.

Conclusion

Although this article has focused on the local practices among Hui Muslims at two different sites in Yunnan Province, my intent has been to deepen our understanding of the variety and diversity of “authenticity” and the complex processes of identity formation: even within a single province, among a single official *minzu* that PRC propaganda, media, and scholarship often construct as a unified, static group, localized practices and processes of identity formation are remarkably diverse. What constitutes authentic Hui Muslim identity depends to a great extent on the residence of the individual. This ambiguity in what constitutes authenticity for Hui Muslims in Yunnan destabilizes typical Han assumptions that all Hui possess a deep ethnic consciousness that unites them no matter what.²¹ Even for those Hui who advocate a primordial ethnic Huiness, there is a sense not only of difference but also of hierarchical order, in that those Hui over there are different from us, and they are less authentic or legitimate.”

This ambiguity, flexibility, and diversity in processes of identity formation extends to other places within China and beyond. To that end, this article seeks to open up broader

conversations about the social constructedness of ethnicity and the processes of re/producing identities. In current social scientific scholarship, it is taken for granted that ethnicity is socially constructed; however, as Bourdieu (2000, 108) has shown, deconstruction alone is not sufficient to demolish such social constructions. Indeed, ethnic primordialism runs rampant in today's globalizing world; one only has to look at contemporary America's fetishization of DNA to see how salient ethnic categories remain to the majority of the populace. For social scientists, this raises the question of how to conduct research on essentialized notions of ethnicity while remaining faithful to one's interlocutors without essentializing ethnicity in one's own scholarship. At the same time, many anthropologists' interlocutors themselves recognize the shifting, malleable process of identity production, and the ambiguity and arbitrariness of such notions as ethnic group, nation, or state. When these are the same interlocutors who in another breath essentialize their own ethnic identity, the process of identity production becomes even more tangled. More crucially, when one's essentialized ethnic identity means that one could be deported, imprisoned, or even killed, the stakes are no longer merely theoretical.

Recently, on the night of March 1, 2014, a band of knife-wielding individuals clothed in black indiscriminately attacked civilians at the Kunming railway station, killing 29 and injuring more than 140 others. Reports soon circulated that the attackers were Uyghur separatists affiliated with the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, and the Chinese government has reportedly deported hundreds of Uyghurs from Yunnan back to Xinjiang. Prior to this mass deportation, Kunming and Shadian hosted among the largest Uyghur populations in Yunnan Province. Shadian in particular attracted pious Uyghurs who sought a place where they could practice Islam (relatively) freely. Other internal deportations of Uyghurs are allegedly in the works, with ethnic profiling becoming an increasing problem, and nearby Thailand is reportedly deporting Uyghurs back to China, too. In such a climate, Yunnanese Hui Muslims are at once being eyed with suspicion and being viewed as a potential "model Muslim minority," who, as relatively trustworthy Sinicized Muslims, can foster solid relations with Muslim majority nations.

All of my Hui Muslim interlocutors in Yunnan with whom I have kept contact have deplored the attack itself, and bemoaned its aftermath. Some are outraged that they are once again under suspicion merely for being Muslims; others are fearful of latent Han hostility. Still others are resentful of being used, or content to bask in the good graces of the state. Some Hui

criticize the government's anti-Uyghur bias, even as they themselves may benefit from it. A handful of cynics (understandably) note that the Chinese government purposely sows discord between the Uyghurs and the Hui in order to create cleavages that will forestall a Chinese pan-Islamic union.

Governmental favor potentially enables the Hui to cultivate the transnationalism to which they aspire, and also rebuilds trust between the state and the Hui. And yet, in order to maintain this trust, they must pursue forms of "authenticity" that are recognized (and recognizable) by the governmental authorities who control access to opportunities such as the hajj, relative religious freedom, and preferential policies. In order to benefit from their position as a model Muslim minority, they must perform all three of those roles: the model citizen, the Muslim, and the minority. This potentially forecloses opportunities to Hui who do not strive to strike a balance between assimilation to the majority and performance of state-sanctioned forms of "authenticity." Ultimately, however, it is up to Hui Muslim individuals and communities whether or not they would even be willing to perform such "authenticity." As it stands now, most of my interlocutors hope that the current tense climate will soon calm, and that they can continue to produce their own forms of "authenticity," (relatively) free from state pressure to do otherwise.

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Notes

- 1 Interestingly, even those urban Hui who were atheists simultaneously claimed to be Muslims; for such individuals these positions were not contradictory. Hillman (2004) mentions that when he asked a group of nonpracticing Hui "youths studying in the county

- seat” if they were Muslims, they “answered [his] question as if it were absurd: ‘We are Hui—of course we’re Muslims’” (63–64). Perhaps we should not be so surprised by this: during the Ming, Qing, and Republican eras, and indeed up until the 1950s, the term *Hui* meant *Muslim* (see Lipman 1997, xxiii; Gladney 1996, 1998, 2004; Harrell 1995, 34). It is arguable that residual meanings of the term *Hui* continue to operate within self and community understandings of Hui identity (Williams 1977).
- 2 Regarding my use of the “imagined,” I intend to invoke both Appadurai’s (1996) sense of “imagination as social practice” and Anderson’s ([1983] 2006) “imagined communities,” particularly in the sense that imaginings “are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson [1983] 2006, 6).
- 3 On biological “myths of descent” in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), see Sautman (1997). On Qing dynasty–era mythologizing of the origins of Islam in China, see H. Ma (2006). On the mythologized descent of the Guo and Ding lineages in Fujian, see Fan (2003). On the life and legend of an oft-claimed ancestor, Sayyid ‘Ajall Shams Al-Din, see Armijo-Hussein (1997). On genealogy as the basis for identity among Omani Muslims, see Limbert (2002). Compare these different imagined Muslim descents to Boum’s (2011) analysis of the mythologized origins and imagined pasts of Saharan Jews.
- 4 Most of my interlocutors in Kunming argued that they had inherited “Muslimness” through their genetic descent from Arab, Persian, or Central Asian Muslims, while a few intellectuals redefined their concepts of Allah and thus held beliefs in Islam in tandem with belief in no God. Some of these Hui Muslims vehemently opposed the secularizing policies of the multiethnic Chinese nation-state, and, like their brethren in Shadian, supported religious revival movements. Others, like my Hui landlord, sympathized with local state “modernizing” projects that embedded Kunming’s workers in a capitalist, consumerist economy and insisted that Islam in Yunnan and Yunnan’s Muslim communities would benefit from closer engagements with secular state organizations.
- 5 In light of these differences in urban-rural patterns of Hui practice, I should mention that every Hui person I met during my fieldwork in Yunnan avoided pork, even if they drank excessively. That is not to say that they kept halal (that is, ate only foods permissible by Islamic law); some Hui in Kunming were willing to eat at non-halal restaurants so long as we did not order any pork. In addition, almost every household—urban or rural, religious or secular—possessed a copy of the Quran, typically keeping it in an honored place. These two cultural practices appeared to be the only ones that were consistently shared among all Hui I encountered in Yunnan.
- 6 My own fieldwork in Shadian confirms this: Hui Muslims there frequently peppered their conversations with transliterated Arabic and Persian words such as *hajji* 哈吉, as well as Arabic phrases like *Insha’Allah* and *Alhamdulillah*.
- 7 Both historically and today, trade, migration, and religion link Yunnanese Hui Muslims to Southeast Asia. In Thailand they are called the Haw, in Burma the Panthay (Hill 1982, 1998; Forbes 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Forbes and Henley 1997; Sen and Chen 2009).
- 8 Although consumer choices have certainly expanded in the wake of China’s economic reforms and opening up, these sweeping historical and economic changes did not suddenly conjure a smorgasbord of expanded choices from which an individual consumer could freely pick and choose: what was valued and by whom were locally and

- collectively constituted. Local everyday consumer practices were shaped by powerfully intertwined global, national, regional, and local processes that both disciplined and enabled space for these creative appropriations, negotiations, and contestations of consumer practice. Individual yearnings for cultural capital and the social mobility that ideally accompanied it, in the realm of education, for example, played out locally in complex and various ways.
- 9 Sayyid ‘Ajall Shams Al-Din, a Central Asian governor of Yunnan during the Yuan dynasty, is an oft-claimed ancestor of Hui in Yunnan (see Armijo-Hussein 1997).
- 10 For more on Hui claims of descent from the Prophet, see Gao (2000).
- 11 Such notable persons were viewed as having an inextricable connection to the Holy Quran, whether through *jiyin* 基因 (genes) or *xuetong* 血统 (“blood” lineage), as in the case of Arabs, or through religious authenticity, as in the case of imams or religious scholars, whose own ancestry was almost always traced back to an Arab, Persian, or Central Asian.
- 12 In the Du Wenxiu or Panthay Rebellion, see Bai (1953); T’ien (1981); Wang (1995); and Atwill (2005).
- 13 It is fascinating that she employs twentieth-century terminology here, both in her use of the *minzu* category and in her refiguring of the elder-younger brother relationship, one so often used in post-1949 propaganda to show the Han elder brother guiding the *shaoshu minzu* younger brothers. Because she was certainly familiar with this typical hierarchical relationship, her appropriation potentially suggests a resistance to and reworking of it.
- 14 The vast majority of “cosmopolitan encounters” for Hui, urban or rural, are imagined, typically through books and electronic media, and even those that are not imagined could be classified as what Hebdige (1990) terms “mundane cosmopolitanism” (also see Szerszynski and Urry 2002). Some elite urban Hui in Kunming occasionally vacation in the West, though usually as part of tour groups. A handful study at Western institutions abroad (where they are usually classified as “Chinese” by their non-Chinese friends) or, more often, at Western-style institutions in China where they encounter *waijiao* 外教 (lit. foreign teachers, most often English-language teachers). However, few urban Hui develop close relationships through these encounters, and, particularly when compared to the long-term relationships between some Shadian Hui and foreign Muslims, these urban Hui cosmopolitan encounters are only occasionally profound experiences for the actors involved.
- 15 For accounts of the Shadian Incident, see S. Ma (1989); Wang (1996); Gladney (1996, 137–140); Israeli (2002, 264–270); P. Ma (2008).
- 16 Shadian Hui Muslims explained the region’s thriving economy in various ways, ranging from Allah’s blessing to governmental reparations for the Shadian Incident. Whether or not it is blessed by Allah, the local economy benefits significantly from its mining industry, which is focused mainly on metals, including tin, copper, lead, zinc, silver, gold, and tungsten.
- 17 Since then I have spoken with her, and she told me he had moved to Malaysia to continue his studies.
- 18 Compare this to Gillette’s (2000) description of a similar process of Arabization in Xi’an, where she posits that such styles excluded the Han majority (110) and were “attractive because they embodied the prosperity, technological development, and modernization of

- the Middle East” (233). In Shadian, however, the “meanings of change and the politics of pastness” (Appadurai 1996, 3) are quite different from those in Xi’an, and significantly influenced Shadian’s notion of a return to authenticity.
- 19 Chinese scholar of Islam Wang Jianping (personal communication) raised the question: Why were Shadian Muslims able to ban alcohol successfully, whereas Muslims in Henan and Xi’an failed to do so? Shadian Muslims repeatedly stressed that because of specific historical and economic circumstances, particularly after the Shadian Incident, they were able to exert more legal and governmental authority locally than were Muslims in other parts of China. See also Gillette (2000, 167–184) on the failed alcohol ban in Xi’an’s Muslim District.
- 20 These hadith and stories are too numerous to list here. In practice, Shadian Hui Muslim women are indeed relatively well educated, whether through state schools or Quranic ones, and many older local women continue to pursue Quranic education at one of Shadian’s many madrasas. A surprisingly high number of local women have pursued bachelor’s or master’s degrees, and many women pursue careers and other leadership positions outside the home, even after marriage and children. Local women interpret Islamic prescriptions for modest dress and the wearing of *gaitou* 盖头/*toujin* 头巾 (hijab) as liberating: such styles of dress not only mark a woman’s relationship with Allah but also enable her to focus on developing her intellect and other skills, safe in the knowledge that others will not judge her by her looks. Submitting to religious authority empowers some women (cf. Mahmood 2005). Mosques, too, provide “spaces of their own” for women: women’s mosques and female imams, rare or absent in other parts of the world, are common in China (Jaschok and Shui 2000, 2012; Allès 2000; Tatlow 2012).
- 21 Hanzu in Yunnan often deplore what they viewed as preferential treatment of the Hui by the government, at national, provincial, and local levels. This perceived preferential treatment consists of official preferential policies (*youthui zhengce* 优惠政策), as well as governmental actions allegedly based on a fear of Hui historical and genetic tendencies toward “violence” and “rebellions.” According to many Han interlocutors, if any incident occurs between a Han and a Hui, the Hui people rush to defend their “brethren,” so the government take careful steps to placate the Hui. Han in Yunnan often explain that this is due to the deep ethnic consciousness of the Hui, even though some Han believe this unification has no basis in genetic truth. Many Han express a desire that, like the Hui, they, too, could unite together as an ethnic group against others in China, and lament the fact that most Han lack a primordial ethnic consciousness and seem ambivalent about expressing ethnic pride. For more on Han views of Hui in Yunnan, see Blum (2001), Caffrey (2007), and Zhang (2010, 153–156). See Allès (2003) for relationships between Han and Hui villages in Henan. See Carrico’s (2013) dissertation for a fascinating ethnographic account of Han nationalism. For more on Han ethnic consciousness (and lack thereof) see the Mullaney et al. (2012) volume *Critical Han Studies*.

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