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Rise of the Veil: Islamic Modernity and the Hui Woman

Zainab Khalid

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Introduction: Assimilation/Dissimilation

The Hui are a familiar sight in most cities in China; famed for their *qingzhen* restaurants and their business acumen. Known usually as the "Chinese speaking Muslims," they are separated from the nine other Muslim *xiaoshu minzu* by a reputation for assimilation and adaptability that is a matter of pride for Hui in urban areas.

A conversation with Hui women at Nancheng Mosque in Kunming revealed that they believed Hui to be at an advantage compared to other *xiaoshu minzu* because of their abilities to adapt and assimilate, "we are intelligent; we know what to do in order to survive in any environment." Yet, the Hui of Yunnan also have a history of dissimilation- the Panthay Rebellion of 1856 took the shape of a Sultanate in Dali as Hui forces led a province-wide revolt against the Qing Empire. Defeated in 1873, the Hui hero Du Wenxiu was executed, and a massacre against the Hui ensued. This history is considered a vital essence to the heritage and identity of Yunnanese Hui, who, despite their greater assimilation within Chinese society compared to the Uighurs or the Salar, maintain that they are "different" from the Han.

Despite being told that the "position of Hui and Han women is exactly the same," I resolved to explore this delicate interplay of assimilation and dissimilation through the lens of gender; an angle rarely made use of in observations of the Hui. Famous female figures in history, such as Lady Du- Du Wenxiu's twenty year old daughter- have all but faded from memory. Lady Du was a general in her father's army, and commanded regiments of men, leading a siege in Kunming in 1869. Stories of her valor and leadership include her tireless efforts to save a village from a flood that wiped away livestock, and she was famed for working without rest. Captured

by Ma Rulong in 1870, she was imprisoned and murdered as she led a second invasion to Kunming.

Although she remains largely forgotten, she proves to create a fascinating treatise for the role of women in the creation of Hui history, limited though it may have been. It begs the question, however, of what role women have today in creating ideas of "Huiness" and "Muslimness." An informant in Kunming, a translator by profession, lamented that "Hui women in the city are too much like the Han- they care only about how much money a man has in his pocket, and not enough about the faith (*xinyang*) in his heart." I was told that if I wanted to see a "real Hui woman," I should go to the rural Hui settlements of Shadian, Najiaying or Dali prefecture. Women there, apparently, were untouched by the corrupting stain of the Han, "prayed five times a day and wear the *gaitou*."

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the place of women in the changing world of the Hui, where increasing contact with the Middle East has brought "Hui" closer to "*Musilin*," and to see how Hui women place themselves- or are placed- within an Islamic framework[1].

Lineage and Hui identity

During the early years of the *xiaoshu minzu* project, ethnic groups were permitted to register themselves as a nationality, and if the Classification team were able to place each group within the stipulations of the Soviet nationalities model, they would be granted official *xiaoshu minzu* status. In the beginning of the project in 1954, around four hundred groups petitioned for nationality status, but the team refused to recognize some groups, while collapsing several ethnic

[1] I visited the towns of Shadian and Najiaying, accompanied by Lesley Turnbull, a PhD student also studying the Hui, in Shadian. We were encouraged to travel together sue to security reasons that turned out to be unfounded.

minorities into one umbrella nationality, whittling away at the numbers until it reached the official fifty-six nationalities in the 1970s. In Yunnan, the Hui were one of the initial fourteen nationalities certified by the PRC[2].

The Hui category has been argued by some to be an ethnic category rather than a specifically religious category; identification with Islam does not always occur in a religious sense, and may be viewed as a part of heritage; a cultural marker rather than a religious one. Yet before the creation of the Hui category during the Classification project, the term "Hui" was used to refer to all Muslims of China, Chinese speakers as well as Turkic speakers[3].

Djamal al-Din Bai Shouyi[4], a Hui Marxist theorist, claimed that "Hui" and "Muslim" were different identities altogether, and suggested the replacement of the term *Huijiao* with *Isilanjiao*. Since many Hui communities that were descendents of Muslim merchants no longer retained the religious adherence to Islam, "Hui" became an ethnicity with a significant genealogical reference. Hui communities in Fujian, for instance, where the earliest Arab merchants landed on the sea route, despite retaining none of the qualities of a Muslim community, view their Muslim ancestry as evidence of their Hui identity. Responses to questions regarding Hui identity revealed that "we are Hui because we are descended from…Muslim ancestors."[5]Genealogies, however, traced only through the male line, since both Chinese and Islamic social structures are patrilineal. Women were forgotten in the family line, and in modern family records and recollections of family history, daughters- having been married out of the family- do not factor into genealogy.

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[2] Mullaney, Thomas S. *Coming to terms with the Nation* pg 71

[3] "Hui" was a term used to refer to Muslims of China as far back as the Yuan dynasty, and during the Nationalist Movement of the twentieth century, Sun Yat-sen identified the Hui as one of the five peoples of the Republic of China, meaning to encompass all the Muslims of China.

[4] Gladney, Dru *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* pg 18

[5] Gladney, Dru *Muslim Tombs and Ethnic Folklore: Charters for Hui Identity* pg 497

Many Yunnanese Hui trace their Muslim lineage back to Sayyid Ajall Shams ad Din, governor of Yunnan during the Yuan dynasty. Such genealogical assertions are essential to Hui identity particular to urban Hui. Yet in the more religious communities of Shadian and Najiaying, where great stress was put in conversation between the difference of being "Hui" and "Muslim," lineage was not a matter discussed frequently. Women did not speak about Muslim ancestors, and those questioned would say that they did not know where their forefathers were from. Religion was a greater force in identity, and recent history played a more significant role in the lives of women in Shadian.

Shadian Incident (Shadian Shijian)

The town of Shadian lies close to the Vietnamese border in Mengzi county, southwestern Yunnan, close to the Honghe River. From the outside, the town is shrouded in mystery, a distant, ominous place inhabited by hostile Muslims that do not welcome outsiders. Or atleast that's what I was told by most people that I consulted in Kunming. Shadian does not exist on any tourist map, and most foreigners are completely unaware that this Hui town exists. Yet those that do not know the name of Shadian also are unaware of why it has such a menacing reputation, and subsequently, its immense significance for China's largest Muslim minzu.

The town of Shadian has historically been a trading port along the Burma Road, connecting Muslim merchants to South-east Asia and the bay of Bengal.[6] The town has been a center of Islamic learning for Hui from all over China, producing some of its most imminent Islamic scholars, such as Majin, founder of the Arabic Department at Beijing University. The first

[6] *Dru Gladney,* Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic, pg 137

Chinese translation of the Holy Quran originated from Shadian, and the town continues to connect Hui to the Muslim world outside the borders of the People's Republic of China.

During the Cultural Revolution, Shadian came under attack from the "Smash the Four Olds" campaign, since its place as a center of religious activity brought it diametrically opposed to the tides of anti-religion and "superstition". Well known stories of religious oppression include Han Red Guards occupying the mosque and using the courtyard to keep pigs, throwing pig bones into the mosque's wells, and refusing to let Hui enter to pray. During the peak of the Cultural Revolution in 1968, over 200 struggle meetings were held, where Hui were forced to eat pork, and imitate the sounds and actions of pigs. In one such case when a pregnant woman was struggled against and forced to crawl and roll on the ground, she suffered a miscarriage.[7]

In 1973, when other Hui villages had begun to reopen their mosques, leaders in Shadian requested permission to do the same, only to be denied. A delegation went to the capital Kunming to demand the religious and nationality rights as described by the Constitution. They were accused of opposing Party leadership, and a militia was organized to monitor Shadian. The Hui retaliated by organizing their own militia, resulting in a clash between the two armies. The Hui leaders were summoned to Beijing, and the all-male delegation arrived to protest against the sufferings of their people. After further clashes, the central government sent down entire regiments complete with bombs and tanks to Shadian in 1975.

The prevailing clashes have become stamped in collective memory as the "Shadian incident." Men, women and children took up arms against the army, and many were murdered in the massacre. Houses and families were destroyed, and the whole village was nearly razed to the

[7] Gladney, Dru. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic.* pg 138

ground by MIG jets. Government estimates of the death toll total to around 800, but other sources maintain that the number is closer to as high as 5000 people. The PRC permitted Shadian families to recount their sufferings during the incident in a report, "A General Account of the Shadian Incident" in 1989. The report has disappeared now, according to a source in Shadian, who also revealed that the townspeople are discussing rewriting the report.

The Incident is frequently brought up by Hui outside of Shadian when talking about history, citing it as one of the primary events that define the Hui, aside from the Panthay Rebellion of 1857. To the several Hui I spoke to at the mosque in Kunming, it was a sign of the struggle of the Hui against the government, spanning back to the days of the Qing Empire, a stamp of their separateness, of their identity. Hui would bring up the valour of the people of Shadian with great pride. One man I spoke to inflated the numbers that died to "millions," and it soon became clear that urban Hui in Kunming in particular were eager to discuss the Incident.

Collective Memory

Shadian, however, was different. The women and young people that I spoke to were unwilling to disclose much about it. The younger people, who were more open, of course did not have any memories of the Incident themselves, and would say that their families rarely talked about those horrible times. Once when we were in San Jie's car going for lunch with her colleagues from work, she brought up the Incident herself. "Did Liansi take you to see the Martyr's Memorial (*lishi tang)*?" referring to a couple of days ago when her teenage son and his friend took us up the hill overlooking Shadian where the government had erected memorial pillars and provided for graves for the fallen. She said she remembered everything about the Incident. She had been nine years old when it had happened; she had lost her fourteen year old brother to the bombings,

"They had not cared that they were killing little children," she said of the army. But she remained silent after she spoke about it briefly.

On another occasion when we were at a *shaokao* canteen, she introduced us to the owner of the little restaurant; a middle aged woman in crutches, "She lost her leg during the Incident. And her brother came back from Kunming where he was studying when he heard about the fighting. He died from the bombings."

The physical appearance of the town has transformed completely, with the construction of large houses and Middle Eastern inspired architecture. Most of the houses had been completely destroyed during the Incident, and the oldest houses- even the rare wooden ones built in the Chinese style- had been built in the 1980's- so that aside from the Memorial, there is no trace of those times.

The stories we heard from women regarding the Incident were in turn, terse stories of incredible loss; the Incident was too close and too painful for it to be an illustration of Hui identity; for them this was a personal loss, where many brothers, fathers and husbands were lost. We did not end up meeting any women who had participated as fighters in the conflict, and those women who had memories as adults were in many ways inaccessible to us because more often than not, they spoke no Mandarin, our primary mode of communication.

Unlike the Hui whom I spoke to who were not Shadianren, people in Shadian did not make the connection of the Shadian Incident with that of a Hui historical trajectory. After all, the government had accused them of instigating a revolt in the likes of the Panthay Rebellion, yet those spoken to regarding the Shadian Incident stressed on the village's retaliation being as a demand to the PRC to redress their grievances *as* Chinese citizens, and not a separatist

movement as it has been defined by scholars such as Israeli[8]. Interestingly enough, the words that San Jie used to describe how the houses were destroyed by fighter planes were "just like in Libya now."[9] This comparison instead points to an alignment with the Muslim world at large; the sufferings of the Hui as akin to the sufferings of their Muslim brethren. This takes the bonds that the Hui have as a national minority to an international level, as one part of a Muslim whole.

Yet conversely, despite the comparison of China to the United States, often those I spoke with stressed on the fact that the government had recognized its mistake, and that it was the doing of the Gang of Four[10], who were rightly punished in 1979. The government had provided reparations for the damages suffered by the local people, and now "by the grace of Allah," their town was prospering. It is this interesting role of the Chinese government, that of oppressor and supporter, that gives the Hui communities that I have studied their unique position in the minzu ecosystem.

The Great Mosque (Da qingzhensi)

The most striking feature of the town of Shadian is a gargantuan mosque- the largest in China- built in the Arab style, towering above any other building for miles. Four impressive minarets pierce the sky, and a magnificent green dome glitters conspicuously in the brilliant glare of the midday sun. At night, the mosque is lit up elaborately, glowing like a beacon in the dark. On weekends, fountains spray water in the square in front of the mosque, and families, little children and young people come to enjoy the cool night breeze. It serves as the town center, and the green Arabesque government building nearby pales in comparison to its significance to the local

[8] REFERENCE IT.
[9] The US-led attack on Libya in April 2011.
[10] Jiang Qing was a vocal proponent of doing away with national minorities completely, and her words fueled further violence towards minority societies and religions.

people. Tell any Hui that you have been to Shadian, and they will ask you if you have seen the mosque. Local people would always speak of it with great pride; it is their prized jewel.

The Great Mosque (*Da qingzhensi*) was completed in 2009, and the reason that it stands central to community identity in Shadian is that the project was borne by the collective effort of the people of Shadian. It is a private initiative, and many of the wealthiest Hui businessmen donated millions to the project. The CEO of a certain company donated 6 million RMB, we were told our first day in Shadian. His villa is in the lane right next to the mosque. The managers of the mosque are all men, and the general manager, Ma Riguang, is an elderly Hui gentleman well respected in town. The mosque employs a team of male caretakers, who I was told were paid a total of 1 million RMB per annum. Female janitors are employed to clean the vast ablution quarters (*shui jian*) for women, but the majority of mosque employees are men.

In the past twenty years, Shadian has witnessed an unprecedented surge of economic development. The most obvious signs of prosperity, aside from the iconic Da Qingzhensi, include imported cars and vast elaborate mansions with Arabic calligraphy mounted on lofty gates and mantel pieces, some complete with private fountains. The main roads are all lined with date trees, and the vast amounts of construction include plans to build a Shanghai-style luxury apartment compound with a shopping complex consisting of international designer brands, offering Hui clients the options to rent apartments of varying facilities and sizes. The cheapest option, according to the saleswoman who worked at the real estate office where models for the apartment building were housed, was 2000 RMB per square meter. According to her, the average Shadian family may find it expensive, but it was still much cheaper than luxury apartments in major cities. These construction projects point to plans to transform Shadian into a major, modernized travel destination for Hui around the country.

Shadian is truly an exceptional case; its wealth is famed in Hui communities throughout Yunnan and beyond. The drastic change from just a few decades ago makes this even more intriguing; a decade ago Shadian had a shady reputation for drug peddling and violence; idle young men whose careers and education had been brought to a halt by the destruction of their town ruled the streets in the absence of law and order. It is now one of the safest communities in the area, with rarely any criminal activity. Memories of even those from the younger generation recall that in their childhood, there were hardly any cars to be seen in Shadian. Now, nearly every household we visited had at least two or even three.

Prosperity- a boon from Allah.

Prosperity is a topic of immense interest to the people of Shadian, who always refer to the opulence of their community as a gift from Allah; it would seem that the rate of affluence is directly proportional to the rate of religiousness. Deng Xiaoping's Gaige kaifang policy allowed for an opening up of China to Western markets. For the Hui, this meant an unprecedented interaction with Muslims from countries as diverse as Malaysia, Syria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Thailand and Egypt. Economic interaction inevitably also meant religious and educational exchange. More and more Hui students left for Islamic education abroad, and brought back Arabic speaking skills, religious ideas and practices from these countries. For women of this region, wearing the hijab or *gaitou* became the norm.[11] Interaction and influence from such parts of the Muslim world had the two-pronged effect of economic progress and the flourishing of religious activity. People that we spoke to in Shadian, however, did not necessarily view this process as a two-pronged result from changes in government policy. Certainly, the opening of China allowed them to interact and trade closely with Muslims from all over the

[11] Will be discussed in further detail in a separate chapter.

world, but as a matter of belief, Shadian*ren* that I conversed with were of the opinion that their wealth *rose from* and was a direct result of their religious devotion. The causes of this new-found wealth is lifted from the hands of the PRC and placed firmly in God, creating autonomy from a dark past, and creating a present that looks forward as the skyline of Shadian changes.

Prosperity- shadows of the Shadian Incident

How did Shadian rise from the ashes of the horror almost forty years ago that razed the town to the ground? The government has granted Shadian economic remunerations for its "mistake," and allows businessmen from Shadian special rights and greater access to Middle Eastern and Malaysian markets.

The Martyr's Memorial that commemorates the Shadian Incident was erected by the government as part of its reparations. Graves of the 800 officially recognized martyrs surround the pathway that leads to the main pillar at the top of the hill, engraved with the names of the deceased. Stone engravings that honor the martyrs always begin with *jingji fazhan,* signaling to the immense change brought about by the PRC after the Incident. There is certainly an implication that although the Incident itself was a grievous event in the history of Shadian, it ended up bringing fortune to the town, almost as if the level of economic development seen today would not have been possible had the Incident never happened.

Further investigation revealed that the Great Mosque, designed by the Hui architect of the Olympic Bird's Nest in Beijing, had received some government funding as well, and the project had been seen as a means of increasing national pride; building China's biggest mosque, so that the project, for those who know of it, particularly those in the PRC, has become an icon for China's might as much as it is an icon for the Muslims of China.

A gendered view of economic activity

For any examination of Shadian today, economic development is crucial; if for no other reason than the term "jingji fazhan" is on the lips of many of the people I met in Shadian, regardless of gender. At any rate, local views on prosperity do not vary according to gender, and the economic changes are not seen as gender-specific. Any efforts on my part to steer the conversation toward a gendered view of economic development was met with the reply, "The wealth of our town is not meant for just men or just women. It is for the whole of Shadian, for every family." Gender hierarchies in economic activity do not therefore have much significance in the context of Shadian; women identify strongly with their families and with the town as a whole.[12]

Yet it is easy to witness that women have a significant role to play in the economic mechanism of the town. In the mornings, women are more visible than men, both as buyers and sellers. Women often work as vendors on the street selling vegetables, or the local specialty fried bread. Each woman has her individual method of making the bread, using different ingredients, and has regular customers. Public transportation consists of open air trolleys and rickshaws, *sanlinche*, that are driven by both men and women. In fact, in some parts of town, women can be seen driving passengers in rickshaws more frequently than men.

Many of the small stores in the town cater to women more than men. Aside from the handful of convenience stores, other stores cater to the *qingzhen* lifestyle of Shadian residents, such as Shaokao grills, *qingzhen* dairy stores, and clothing stores. A shopping plaza opposite the Great

[12] The economic roles of men and women, although abstractly viewed in a traditional light by those interviewed-women being caretakers of the home and men being the bread-winners, are not as clearly defined in real life, as is the case in conservative communities in Muslim countries such as Pakistan. In some families, men and women both have jobs, although the man's income may be seen as the primary income for the family.

Mosque offers imported variations of Muslim attire. Colourful *gaitou* stores are sprinkled in every corner of the town, and are owned and run by women.

One of the stores in the shopping plaza is run by a young Hui woman from Xinjiang. She moved with her husband from Xinjiang a year ago when her mother opened a clothing store in Shadian. She runs it with assistance from her husband, whom she married less than a year ago, yet most of the business conducted with foreign partners from Pakistan is handled by her family. Clothing imports- such as abayyas and traditional shalwar kameez[13] -from India, Pakistan, Malaysia and even Muslim designers from England- are an important source of income for private business owners. Hui women from other parts of China, such as Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai, move to Shadian as married women, and start small businesses with their husbands. One such couple had opened a foodstuff store that stocked imported *qingzhen* goods from Thailand.

Younger girls may work as salesgirls, if they are not in school or university, and it is conventional for them to live with their parents if they are not married.

These trading networks with other Muslim countries are an essential lifeline not only for commerce, but education, religion and culture. Clothing prescriptions for Muslim women that Hui women are increasingly following, paves an important avenue that links Shadian, and therefore the national network of Hui families that either move to or conduct business in Shadian, to other countries and Muslim cultures. The *qingzhen* lifestyle, therefore, provides for local, national and international systems to arise, each supplementing and sustaining the other.

[13] *Abayya* is an Arabic word used to describe the long robe that Muslim women may wear over their clothes. *Shalwar Kameez* is a traditional garment worn in the subcontinent- particulary in Pakistan- that consists of a long tunic and pants.

Economy and the industry: factory girls

The need for *qingzhen* packaged goods has resulted in a significantly large beef produce industry, where beef is treated and prepared according to Islamic dietary and sanitary prescriptions. San Jie works at one such plant, *HaoNiu,* where the beef, once it is cured for a length of four to six weeks, is packaged with the *qingzhen* seal clearly visible. The beef is hung in a netted enclosure to prevent insects from infesting the meat, and the plant itself has carefully sealed rooms where the beef undergoes cleaning, washing and other processes. Most of the workers within these purification chambers are young women, although young men work in the beef enclosure. The older women, such as San Jie, work instead in the office, and do not take part in the actual production process. Currently, the women are being trained in computer literacy by Han professionals from Gejiu.

The largest factory in Shadian, however, is a vast minerals factory whose major product is zinc batteries used in *dianche*- a popular mode of urban transportation. Many of the town's young men are employed there in the offices, while many non-Hui people work in the assembly line. I have not conducted research to confirm this claim, but San Jie maintains that most of the factory workers end up converting to Islam, and that many women choose to work at this particular factory because the pay is relatively good; around 1000-2000 RMB per month. The factory also employs Hui women to work in the assembly line or the stock rooms. Women who work in the factory are not provided with day care by the factory itself, but the nature of the community in Shadian, with its close-knit ties, assures that the women can leave their children in schools where the teachers can take care of them.

Public Sphere

At least in Shadian, women are a strong presence in public, more so than men, who are often at work away from the town. They are usually left in control of family and household affairs, and tend to be more active in private enterprise within the town limits. Beyond private enterprise, however, most high-level positions are held by men; they are the owners and CEOs of companies that women may work in.

The role of Hui women in the public sphere is limited in vertical terms perhaps, but they are by no means silenced or submitted to the confines of the house, and are often in control of social events and community organizations. A volunteer organization attached to the Great Mosque consists of some of the male managers of that mosque, along with a group of women- most of whom work as teachers at schools. These women are responsible for organizing charity work in Shadian. Some of their recent activities include getting teams of local people together to sweep the roads for Labour Day, or to organize trips to the local orphanages for Children's Day.

Women are seen, according to Islamic tradition as delineated by a group of managers at the Great Mosque that we conversed with, to be biologically different from men, and therefore have differing strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to be better suited for certain kinds of roles and jobs, just as men are incapable of performing those particular roles. According to this perspective, a woman can gain significant power through her roles as wife, mother and teacher.

Religion and the public sphere

Shadian has a total of 11 mosques, with the largest and most central being the Great Mosque- which in itself was built at the site of an older Ming dynasty mosque, that acts as a kind of core for religious activity, with some of the smaller mosques and attached madrassahs acting as orbits.

Women in Shadian have a greater access to mosques; the Great Mosque has a women's hall adjacent to the men's prayer hall. While it is customary for Muslim women to pray in the home, women are just as comfortable and able to pray in the various mosques. During Friday prayer, most women pray at home, while a small number congregate at the Great Mosque and pray in the corner of the mosque with the ahong's young wife, who greets and directs the women during prayer time; due to the overwhelming number of men who come to the Great Mosque for jumma, the women's hall is also occupied by men for the Jumma prayer. Girls that live in the dormitories of madrassahs pray in their respective mosques, and this holds particularly true for Xida and Taqwa schools.[14]

For Eid-ul-Azha, one of the most important religious festivals in the Islamic tradition,[15] it is tradition for all the men of Shadian to hold the morning Eid prayer at the Memorial on the hill. Women are not a part of this tradition, and stay in the homes as the men interact with each other around the main pillar at the top of the hill.

Religious leaders tend to be male ahongs who have spent considerable time as Islamic scholars in what are viewed as Muslim countries such as Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Pakistan. Although female ahongs do not seem to be common in Shadian, the women of Shadian often have close and personal ties with the wives of these ahongs, who are often themselves teachers at the eleven mosques in Shadian. These women are given an immense amount of respect within the community as social leaders or role models for the local people, and often are not *bendiren* themselves. They may be entrusted with caring for the female quotient of the

[14] More about the sects and education system for women will be talked about later.
[15] Chun Jie, the largest festival in China that celebrates the New Year, is not celebrated in Shadian as a matter of principle, "It is a Han festival" I was told by one young Hui girl. Eid ul Azha is the largest festival celebrated in Shadian.

umma, or directing them in religious matters, prayers, nianjing etc. At an evening nianjing class for older women at a particular mosque, the male ahong taught a group of fifteen women to recite a passage from the Quran with translation. His wife accompanied the women in class, and sat next to an elderly lady to guide her. I later found out that the elderly lady in question had a mental ailment (*sheng bing le*) and the ahong's wife sat next to her to assist her when she had difficulties. Yet I have found that most women are personal friends with these women more than anything else, and often in the spirit of sisterhood, it is the local women who assist and guide the wives of *waidi* clerics who have recently migrated to Shadian.

The wives of ahongs tend to be at the epicenter of vast provincial and national networks amongst Hui communities, stretching from the northwest in Ningxia and the major cities, to as far West as Xinjiang. These networks in turn become essential for trade, business, and most importantly, marriage. Additionally, some of these women are able to use these networks in innovative and enterprising ways to open up private companies. Hongmei, Ma Ahong's wife, has been able to use her connections to form a travel agency, Salam Travel Agency, that operates in Yunnan and caters to the needs of Hui tourists from other parts of China, or Muslim tourists from other countries.

I did not come across any female ahong in either Shadian or Najiaying, despite the fact that women have on occasion been known to take on religious leadership roles in Yunnan in particular. Their responsibilities include leading prayers for women and tending to administrative affairs of their mosques. Gladney refers to encounters with female imams in Bai Hui settlements in the Erhai lake area of Dali, and research has been conducted on independent women's

mosques and female imams in Henan province.[16]It remains to be seen whether the absence of female imam in Shadian and Najiaying was simply a local phenomena, or if certain social or religious changes have led to the decline of female imams.

In Shadian, women would often refer to reputed female scholars from Shadian who had traveled abroad for Islamic or Arabic studies. Female scholars to the Middle East are not as common as men, however. Yet male ahongs often find accomplished scholars as their wives, who are fluent in Arabic and teach at the mosques. The ahong at the Great Mosque, for instance, is married to a young woman who had spent 6 months at the Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan.

It is essential to understand that the religious role that women have in the public sphere varies extraordinarily with location. Najiaying is home to one of the best known girl's madrassahs in Yunnan, and nightly nianjing classes are held for women and children at the mosque. Yet women rarely go to the mosque to pray, and the main mosque allows only for male worshippers; the women's mosque is situated in the alley behind the men's prayer hall, and usually only the dormitory students pray there. The place of worship for women in Najiaying is primarily the home, whereas Shadian offers much greater flexibility for female worshippers.

Education: guomin or isilanjiao

Education in Hui communities tends to follow two trajectories; either through the *guomin* education system, or through the madrassah system regulated by the PRC. I have found that education patterns amongst females differ considerably depending on the community concerned.

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[16] Gladney, Dru *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* pg 33. Gladney mentions in his appendix that female imams were rare in North China, and in fact the only place he actually met female imams was in Yunnan.
See also: Jaschok, Maria and Shui Jingjun. 2000. *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam: A Mosque of their Own.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

The two communities I investigated, Najiaying in Tonghai county, and Shadian in Mengzi county, were quite different from each other in this regard; the latter having a greater distribution of younger women either currently in university, or planning to attend university.

Either form of education can serve as a platform for self-development, but the kind of education offered by either espouses completely different philosophies. Families that send their daughters to the cities for higher education worry about the secularizing influences of the Han, and mothers worry about the possibilities of their daughters taking off the gaitou, or becoming involved with a Han boy. The cities are seen as enclaves of potential external influences that may erase the values that Hui families pass on to their children. Middle aged women are not usually university graduates; according to San Jie, life in her youth was hard. Most families in Shadian at the time were farmers, and she along with her sisters would work on household chores, such as chopping firewood and taking care of their sole cow. One of her female cousins was forbidden by her father to attend university, for fear that she would stop praying and wearing the gaitou in the city.

Although it may be true that younger people tend to secularize as they assimilate with their non-Hui classmates due to social and practical constraints[17]- one of San Jie's nephews who recently graduated from an economics institute in Kunming admitted that he did not pray in the city, but refrained from smoking and drinking- it is not always the case. San Jie's daughter is twenty-three years old, and currently studies at Yunnan University. While in Shadian, where donning the gaitou is the norm, she had no intentions of covering her head. It was only after she went to Kunming that she began to wear the gaitou. On further questioning, she revealed that she became increasingly interested in wearing the gaitou after she befriended other female Hui students at

[17] Religious activity is constrained in the city for Hui students and employees. Schedules are often dependent on classes or

university who did wear the *gaitou*. University campuses in Kunming often have strong Hui youth groups, who meet regularly with Hui faculty and staff, organize mixers, pray together for Jumma and plan weekend trips to Hui areas in Dali, Tonghai and beyond.

Like their Han counterparts, many younger Hui have dreams to study abroad. The difference (though not always[18]) tends to be in the countries that they desire to move to. San Jie's daughter plans to teach Chinese for a semester in Thailand, and her personal plans for the future include moving to Malaysia to study Islam with her friends. Malaysia, Pakistan and Egypt- Saudi Arabia for the more religious- are considered top choices. Yet independent decisions for younger women are not always successful; older family members such as mothers intervene and decide for them. San Jie wants her daughter to return to Shadian and send her to a secluded Islamic girl's school at Shigoutou, Yuxi after she graduates, declaring that graduate studies would be too difficult. Marriage also often tends to be a hamper in women's further education, but at times women may travel with their husbands to other countries for higher education.

The Islamic education system enrolls a variety of young female students, many of whom embark upon this alternative education system for a variety of reasons. The students surveyed for this paper were primarily from XiDa and Taqwa schools in Shadian, Kaiyuan Arabic Institute in Kaiyuan and Najiaying Mosque. It is possible to divide the students in several categories, although this by no means excludes the possibilities of overlapping and personal reasons that students would not wish to disclose:

a) Students from Qinghai, Gansu, and certain parts of Ningxia who chose to came to Yunnan's Islamic centers of learning because "the belief (*xinyang*) is stronger here." They use physical

[18] A young preschool teacher at Xida has applied for a graduate program at George Washington University.

examples, such as the prevalence of the gaitou, and the absence of alcohol, as indications that the towns and schools they are in now- more so Shadian and Najiaying than Kaiyuan- provide for a more conducive environment for practicing Islam and learning about their religion.

b) An alternative to the national education system, for many young students undesirable as it depends heavily on *gaokao* scores. Such students often have not performed sufficiently in the test to ensure enrollment in universities. Some families may also not be able to afford the high tuition fees for the less competitive education institutes.

c) More particular to Najiaying, traditional demands of more conservative households that take daughters out of the national education system as early as *chuzhong* to obtain an education deemed more suitable to their lives as future Hui mothers.

d) Students from Xinjiang arrive to circumvent stringent government prohibitions on religious activity in Xinjiang.

e) Those Hui who desire to learn Arabic in order to search for employment or further education in Arabic speaking countries.

f) This is the rarest category, but includes a young Han student from Xinjiang and a Yizu boy from Mengzi currently working and studying in Shadian; those who are in the process of conversion or have converted to Islam.

Islamic education stresses on Arabic language skills and Islamic studies, including *nianjing* (Kirat-ul- Quran, or the recitation of the Quran) and Islamic history. All students are required to wear the *gaitou* and pray five times a day. Stricter schools require students to wear a longer black robe over their normal clothes, and schools that ascribe to the *Santai* sect- commonly known as

Wahabiyyism[19]- demands absolute segregation and the wearing of the *miansha* or face veil. Male and female students have separate classes and separate days off; the boys are given weekends off while the girls are given Wednesdays and Thursdays off so as to prevent any casual interaction between the students.

Santai: Keeping the devil out

Xida and Taqwa schools in Shadian both follow the Santai sect, and an interview conducted with a third year class of thirty female students at Xida proved intriguing. As per Santai prescriptions, all the students wore the *miansha*. Some had begun to wear the gaitou from back home- one as early as ten years old- but most had started since they came to Xida. The students came from all parts of the country- Dali, Weishan, Ningxia, Gansu and Xinjiang. They said that they had chosen to wear the *miansha* on their own, and when asked what they thought about wearing it, they unanimously exclaimed, "*xiguan!*" or "we are accustomed to it." Those that came from other parts of the country such as Xinjiang declared that they had chosen to come here with the support of their parents because it was illegal to wear the *miansha* in their home towns. Their major was Arabic Language, and classes included English, *nianjing* (Quranic recitation) and Islamic faith.

Questions about the impression of Islam in the United States ensued, including the recent death of Osama bin Laden.[20] Although it is useful to note that questions we were asked were all related

[19] Wahabiyyism entered China in late 19th century through Yihewani reform movements, "under Nationalist and warlord sponsorship, and w[as] noted for [its] critical stance towards traditionalist Islam as too accultured to Chinese practices, and Sufism as too attached to saint and tomb veneration. " Gladney, Dru *Islam in China: Accomodation or Separatism?*

[20] Osama bin Laden's death was confirmed on May 6th 2011, during my stay in Shadian, and his body was found in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Hardly any mention was made of his death in Shadian aside from the questions asked in this classroom.

to Islam and not China, it must also be disclosed that most of these questions were steered by their Pakistani English teacher.

Upon being asked about their impressions of the negative stigma attached to the veil, a student from Xinjiang spoke up, “The veil is not a tool of oppression; it is a tool of protection,” or “*baohu.*” The biological differences between men and women were brought up again, with the student stressing that a woman had different strengths from a man, and could not take up his roles and become “like a man.”

A second question yielded even more interesting results, one that was chanted unanimously and enthusiastically by all the students in the classroom. What did they think the role of women should be in their society?

妇女就像昆珍贵的珠宝

不应该把她拿出来让所有人看到

应该藏在家里好好保存

Translated:

A woman is just like the descendent of a precious jewel or pearl
She must not be taken outside to let all the people see her
She must be kept a secret at home, well preserved.

The perfect role for a woman was that of *jiatingzhufu* or “mistress of the house.” Like a pearl that must be protected from being tarnished, a woman, too, must remain within the protection of her home, and perform the roles that she excels at:

相夫教子

贤妻良母

Translated:

Support Husband, Teach/Raise child

A good/virtuous wife and loving mother

Such opinions are perhaps an indication of a Santai[21] education, as Hui women are active in public life in education, work and the home, not only in large cities like Kunming, but also in smaller towns like Shadian. Yet we shall soon see that opinions such as those illustrated by the verses above may not be restricted to simply a sect of Islam in Yunnan; Najiaying, which follows the majority Yitai sect, adheres closely to these traditions in practical life.

On the subject of marriage, despite the confidence with which the verses were chanted, none of the girls seemed willing to apply the philosophy to their own lives. Not a single student declared plans for or a desire to get married when asked. Most said they had not decided what they would do once they graduated; some mentioned a desire to go home, while one student from Xinjiang firmly declared an ambition to become a professor.

Santai education is distinctive in one core aspect from other forms of Islamic education; that in its stress on unity within the *umma*. Prayer times are structured to encourage feelings of this oneness within the female students, who are encouraged to pray together in *jammat* or congregation in the prayer hall. Their manner of performing the prayer was masculine in stance

[21] In *Muslim Chinese*, pg 55, Gladney cites Lipman's observations regarding Wahabiyyism in Hui communities in the twentieth century, "transformed into a nationalist, anti-Sufi solidarity group which not only advocated Muslim unity but Chinese national strength and consciousness." *Santai* therefore has significance within a national framework which *Santai* students I spoke to also seemed to adhere to. A topic they were interested in discussing was terrorism and its impact on national stability.

and motions. In the more common Hanafi sect, women tend to pray alone rather than in *jammat*; congregations are activities for men. It is interesting to note that the masculine form of prayer is used as a way to promote unity among the female *umma*. Although attendance varies depending on the time of the day, *santai* students pray in one body, chanting certain parts of the prayer in raised voices with their legs spread so as to touch the feet of worshippers on either side, so as to "keep the devil out," I was told.

Najiaying Girl's Mosque

The Najiaying Women's Mosque is attached to the main mosque in Najiaying. There are a total of around 300 students, broken roughly equally I was told, between boys and girls. The school is strictly segregated, or *fenkai*, and men are not allowed to enter the women's mosque. The women's mosque, unlike the main mosque, is around 600 years old, built in the traditional Ming style rather than the increasingly popular Middle Eastern style. However, it is affiliated with the main mosque, and administration and management is handled by the all-male committee in charge of the main mosque[22].

Classes include Arabic Language, Chinese Language, Computer skills, Islamic history, Islamic faith, Ahadith, Quranic translation, Islamic law, Kirat-ul-Quran and Physical Education.

The female student body is divided into half-year, first year, second year and third year, and I spent four days predominantly with the half-year students. It was possible to find girls from the first five categories at this madrassah. The geographical range of students was as diverse; local

[22] When I went to request permission to attend classes at the Women's Mosque, I had to go to the male managers of the Main Mosque, who were accompanied by a local Hui government official. A male teacher from the main mosque took me to classes the next day, and had arranged for some of the female teachers to meet me.

girls from Najiaying families along with students from Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and also Ili, Xinjiang. The ages ranged from 16 to 30, with local students tending towards 17 years of age.

Students who live in the dormitory are prohibited from leaving the mosque premises after dark, and classes begin from 7.40 am to 4.30 pm, followed by a half hour for homework. There is a three hour break for lunch and noon-time prayer between classes. Weekends are held free for leisure activity, and is the only occasion that the hostel students have to leave mosque premises for more than a couple of hours. Quran recitation competitions are held at the main mosque every Saturday morning, and are the only occasions in which male and female students participate together. On Thursdays, hostel students are required to clean their rooms and sweep the mosque grounds. For Friday prayers, while most men in Najiaying pray at the main mosque in congregation, local female students go home to pray, while dormitory students pray by themselves either in the prayer hall or in their rooms.

Daily Routine of Yi Ban

The half-year class consists of around twenty-five students, who have been learning Arabic for four months, beginning in February of 2011. Their daily routine begins with an hour long Quran recitation (Kirat-ul-Quran) class, taught by a twenty-five year old female teacher. Although the older classes have male teachers, this batch is taught completely by female faculty- aside from their physical education instructor. The class begins learning the recitation from the last page of the last chapter of the Quran- traditionally considered the shortest and easiest. Before the instructor enters, the class recites in flow the passage that they have been working on for the past week. Once the instructor settles down, she breaks down each sentence into smaller compartments, and recites the words over and over again as her pupils repeat after her. At the

point where I entered their class, the students could already read Quranic Arabic without the assistance of Chinese phonetics. Each student has a hard-cover ornate copy of the Quran, with the original Arabic text on the right page, and a Chinese translation on the left page.

The older generation, such as those belonging to San Jie's age group, did not have the resources to gain instruction in learning to recite the Quran in Arabic. Even today, many older women may be able to recite the Quran using the Chinese transliteration, but may be unable to recite the Quran in Arabic, a skill that their daughters or granddaughters have the opportunity now to learn. In San Jie's youth, even local ahongs did not have sufficient knowledge about Islamic traditions and Arabic- ahongs in Hui dominated towns such as Shadian did not know how to recite the Quran in Arabic properly, and could not instruct their followers in great detail. During this time[23] ahongs were permitted by the PRC to act in limited capacities as religious leaders. According to San Jie, an ahong would frequently be invited to Hui homes for important life events such as births, marriages or deaths to perform rituals, but did not have a significant role to play in daily life outside of prayer.

After the recitation class, the students prepare for their Arabic Language lesson. This class is taught by a middle aged teacher from Lingxia, Gansu, who moved to Najiaying only a semester ago with her husband and children. She speaks fluent Arabic, but has never studied abroad in the Middle East. The class begins with the students singing a song in Arabic, after which the teacher asks her pupils a set of questions in Arabic. The rest of the class is designated for learning Arabic grammar.

[23] From the thread of our conversation, I have to assume she meant from the time after the Shadian Incident.

At 10.00 am every morning, there is a ten to fifteen minute leisure period; students may leave the classrooms and walk in the courtyard, play badminton or jump rope. Arabic music is usually played on loudspeakers, and within five minutes, the music is changed to a patriotic stadium beat. Students from all five classes line up in the courtyard and commence in a series of exercises to the beat of the music.

After the exercise period, classes resume. Depending on the day of the week, Arabic class is continued, after which class on Islamic faith, or *Isilan Xinyang*, begins. For lunch at 11.30 am, local girls go back home to help their families prepare food, and eat and pray at home. Girls who live in the hostel eat inside the mosque, and then spend their time off resting or studying. At 2.45 pm, students return to their classes to attend theoretical classes on Islam, such as translation, ahadith, and in the higher grades, Islamic history and law.

Concepts taught in classes

Some concepts discussed in classes I attended included economics in Islam, perceptions of heaven and hell, the importance of the guest in Muslim households, and jihad. Chinese translations for words central to Islamic philosophy regarding jihad, such as "brotherhood" (*bo ai*), "struggle" (*fendou*), "mission" (*shiming*), "revolt" (*fankang*) and "holy war" (*Shengzhan*) were of particular focus to the lecture on jihad for the second year students. While the teacher explained the significance of jihad to Islam, and the fundamental differences between the Muslim jihad and the Christian crusade, he did not delve into a local relevance of Jihad[24], nor Islamic prescriptions for the participation of women in the realm of jihad.

[24] I have on one occasion heard of Du Wenxiu's Rebellion been called a "jihad" and while it may be debated as to whether or not the Panthay Rebellion, a collective effort of various ethnicities in Yunnan, was strictly Muslim in nature, it can also be proven that the Rebellion has certain religious significances for certain sections of Hui

Education deemed fit for Hui female students is one geared entirely toward an Islamic theoretical education, with perhaps occasional mentions of notable Hui figures such as Du Wenxiu and Zheng He. When I asked the students if they received education on Hui history, they laughed and responded by saying that was not an appropriate subject for formal education; what they knew about their own history they learned at home. This speaks volumes about the incredible variations that one may encounter in Hui communities throughout the country. As discussed previously, while lineage and history may be considered the defining factors for certain Hui settlements in areas in the south-east, it appears that areas with the greatest density of Hui households in Yunnan, and the most flourishing religious practices, do not retain strong collective narratives of their genealogy, of local history or more than rudimentary facts regarding the Du Wenxiu Rebellion[25]. This inclination toward Islamic as opposed to local consciousness of younger Hui in particular points to changes in self-perception, especially since older generations of their families lament about their lack of interest in historical epochs that defined the lives of Yunnanese Hui, while at the same time looking at pride at their skills in reading the Quran or studying abroad in Islamic universities. While this may certainly not be the case in all Hui settlements or families, this Islamic education ensures a strengthening of Islamic values considered universal, yet also encourages an Islamic internationalism at the expense of local legacy. It is definitely debatable as to whether this form of education, as opposed to the *guomin* education, detrimentally impacts Hui self-identity. At any rate, while there are cases of Hui families taking their children out of *guomin* education for fear of Han influence, I have

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identity. Of course, a topic as volatile as this I would not expect any unguarded conversation around a foreigner such as myself.

[25] According to David Atwill, rebellion forces had spread to virtually every part of Yunnan, and the city of Tonghai- a mere half an hour away by local van- had been captured by rebel forces.

encountered no cases of Hui families taking their children out of madrassah education for fear of diminishing their traditional values.

Najiaying Local families: The local as nexus for international trends

It was observed in category c)[26] that students from local families were often sent to the girl's mosque due to traditional conservative values that prevented them from acquiring higher *guomin* education. Many local students I spoke to had been taken out of the national education system after they graduated from *chuzhong* or middle school, and were entered into the girl's mosque by their families[27]. A local student, Xiaomei, revealed that the reason for this was that most local girls were expected to be married- or at the very least- engaged by the age of 18. Referring to the belief that a mother is a child's first teacher, "*di yi ren jiao shi*," Xiaomei elaborated on the reason that an Islamic education was considered best for young girls in Najiaying, mainly that a mother endowed with an institutional Islamic education could further endow her children with Muslim values. As her place in the family remains predominantly within the household as mother and wife, an education catering to those roles is considered more important than university education.

Students from other parts of China agree that Najiaying is comparatively very conservative, while at the same time asserting that *xinyang* or faith here is much stronger than in their home towns, where social expectations from young girls are not as stringent. This makes an interesting

[26] See pages 20-21

[27] It must be noted, as per the categories expounded on pages 20-21, that there can be multiple reasons for families sending their daughters to the mosque; in some occasions it may be an overlapping of economic, religious and social reasons. Also, it is important to note that boys, too, are occasionally pressured by families to attend madrassah. San Jie's son Lianyang, who personally wants to become a scholar, is now attending school at the Grand Mosque in Shadian, partly due to the fact that he did not score well on his *gaokao* and partly because every generation of his family aside from his father's generation has produced an ahong, and family tradition expects him to follow in their footsteps.

local comparison where, when speaking about *xinyang* to Hui students and families in both Najiaying and Shadian, there seem to be religious epicenters or zones that emanate a kind of pristine environment for Hui society to function freely. Physical identifiers of such localities, that often include Shadian, Najiaying and Weishan, consist of the visibility of mosques; a skyline punctuated by the impressive structure of at least one central mosque; the absence of alcohol, tobacco and drugs; and, more significantly for this paper, the prevalence of the *gaitou*. Places said to have "strong *xinyang*" tend to be those where a majority of Hui women regularly wear the *gaitou.* Conversely, places where the *gaitou* is not the norm are seen as being at the periphery of Hui[28] religious and economic epicenters that, at least in Yunnan, tend to be in the rural areas rather than in the urban areas.

The relationship between conservatism and deep Islamic values in the context of Najiaying are deeply intertwined. *Waidiren* will often comment on the superior Islamic qualities of the town of Najiaying, while at the same time admitting that life for women is not as restrictive in their own towns. Younger marriage age, the inability of most women in Najiaying to gain university education, and the tradition of women remaining at home as *jaiting zhufu* (literally, Household Mistress), are some of the major social differences that the students identified.

Yet epicenters of Islamic activity within Yunnan are not uniform in terms of gender roles either. A classmate invited me once to have lunch with her parents between classes in Najiyaing. Incidentally, her mother happened to originally be from Shadian, and while in the presence of my classmate's father, she maintained that life for women in the two towns was exactly the same. As soon as he left after our meal was over to attend business calls, and I was left alone

[28] Complications to the interchangeability of 'Hui' and 'Muslim' have been discussed amply by scholars such as Jonathan Lipman and Dru Gladney in *Familiar Strangers* and *Muslim Chinese* respectively. As will be discussed further, for my research and the communities I visited, informants tended to use each term interchangeably.

with the women cleaning up the kitchen, she began to speak more candidly about the differences she felt moving to Najiaying. Despite Shadian's reputation as the "Little Mecca" of Yunnan, and its additional image as a conservative Hui Muslim town, Beidi's mother related that Najiaying was much more *chuantong* (traditional) than Shadian had been. Girls in Najiaying were usually married much earlier than in Shadian, where the average age of engagement was 20. Women were also freer to pursue careers or university education, while in Najiaying she was forbidden by her husband to work, "He says he would lose face (*diulian*)." Men in households I was invited to in Najiaying had a greater presence and seemed to hold a greater authority than men in Shadian; an observation that Beidi's mother agreed with.

Yet there is a complication that runs through national comparisons of Hui communities made by those observed during the course of my stay in Najiaying; namely, that places admired for strong *xinyang* were also places where life was restricted in certain ways for women. This complication can also be seen in international comparisons with Muslim countries.

In the Islamic Faith class in the Women's Mosque, the teacher, a lady who had studied Arabic and English in Pakistan for a year, deviated from the topic of heaven and hell to talk about the qualities of a devoted Muslim woman. She chose, perhaps because of my presence, to give the example of the Pakistani women she had been in contact with during her studies. She told her pupils that all Pakistani women recited one page from the Quran after every prayer, and all of them covered their heads and wore the *miansha* or face veil. Of course, the statistical accuracy of such a claim can be easily disputed, but what is important is that Pakistani women- and they are often lumped together with women from Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia- are considered

role models for Hui women aspiring to be more devout Muslims.[29] The teacher went on to describe an incident where her Pakistani friends immediately covered their faces with the corners of their *dupattas*[30]as soon as a group of men passed their way, illustrating their admirable adherence to Islamic ideals of modesty and the veil.

Yet, despite the admiration of Pakistani and Arab women as role models for young Hui women, there is concord amongst the female students and teachers of the mosque in Najiaying, and also women in Shadian, that the position of women in the aforementioned countries is arduous, whereas life for women in China is definitely more favorable. In fact, there were times when I was jokingly told to stay back in Shadian and live there permanently, because my position as a woman in my own country did not provide me with the freedoms available to women in Shadian, who, according to my hosts, could work and marry at their own discretion.

The Veil: What does a Hui woman look like?

It seems that women from Muslim societies that are perceived to espouse the ideal virtues of Islamic teachings, in certain contexts considered role models in both Najiaying and Shadian, are at the same time considered to be victims of oppression. There is a common belief that most Arab women must suffer being in a polygamous marriage over which they have no control. Pakistani women, respectively, are locked within the four walls of their home, forbidden access to work, education, and leisure activities.

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[29] The assumption is made that most Pakistanis can speak Arabic- an indication of deeper affiliation with the Muslim world and Islam, and are well-versed in Islamic traditions and scholarly works. While certainly Pakistan is home to religious institutions integral to an international Islamic network, Islam in Pakistan is as fragmented and complex as it is in any other part of the Muslim world. While many Pakistani women pray and read the Quran, most, like Hui women I spoke to incidentally, have not read and do not understand the translation of the Quran.

[30] Traditional item of clothing worn by women in Pakistan which consists of a long piece of cloth that is either worn to cover the chest or used to cover the head as well, depending on the preferences and conventions of the woman in question.

It is imperative to note that many women believe their rights to be greater than those in the Muslim countries they are embracing in dress, art, architecture and language. Paradoxically, with the increasing trend of the *gaitou*, certain ways of dress are now considered *universal* Muslim attire, in which dress from certain Muslim cultures is becoming the norm in Hui communities. Therefore, while there is an awareness or perception that life for women in these countries may not be altogether desirable, there is still a move toward *dressing* like them as a way of expressing belief in Islam. There is consequently a perception that a Hui woman must look a certain way, with the *gaitou* as the cornerstone to that image.

Prior to 1980, when interaction with other Muslim communities was minimal, the *gaitou* was not a common sight in Hui communities.[31] According to the principal of Taqwa School in Shadian, women particularly in Ningxia often wore a white hat (*baimao*) similar to the ones Hui men nowadays are seen wearing. At the very most, women would use a handkerchief to cover their hair, but the modern *gaitou* did not become visible until after the Opening Door policy, which also granted more Hui the opportunity to perform the Hajj, or the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Although the first Hajj granted by the PRC was embarked upon in 1958, *hajji* numbers were not permitted to rise to the pre-1949 level of 2000 pilgrims per year until 1987. In those days, women who came back from the Hajj would often continue wearing the *hijab*. In the 1980s and 1990s, women in Shadian who wore the *gaitou* could be identified as "Hajji," or those who have made the pilgrimage to the Ka'aba[32]. By 1998, with an unprecedented flux of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia and students to Muslim countries, most women in Shadian had opted to wear the *gaitou.*

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[32] Female *hajjis* often wielded a tremendous amount of respect in their communities, and therefore influenced the trend towards wearing the *gaitou*. In 1937, over 170 Hui Muslims traveled to Mecca for the Hajj, but these relatively low numbers established a more "profound" influence and prestige in these more isolated communities, "the more secluded and remote a Muslim community was from the main ccenters of Islamic cultural life in the Middle east, the more susceptible it was to those centers' most recent trends." Gladney, Dru *Muslim Chinese* pg 54 and 63.

By this time, most ahong in Shadian were trained abroad, fluent in Arabic, and modern madrassah education was flourishing. San Jie recounts that at this time, the community's "understanding of Islam" had developed considerably and the *gaitou* became an expression of "deep *xinyang* (faith)".

The internationalism inherent in Hui *Muslim* dress is often very visible in the display windows of clothing stores at the shopping center in Shadian. Mannequins are often dressed up in clothes imported from Pakistan. A certain shop display exhibited a Muslim family; parents with a little son and daughter, all of whom were dressed in traditional Pakistani attire, complete with an embroidered waistcoat for the boy and embroidered neckling for the girl. Wedding dresses for Hui brides are also imported from Malaysia, India and Pakistan. In daily dress most younger girls who wear the *gaitou* on a regular basis wear Western attire as seen everywhere in China today- many with a personalized flair added to their *gaitou*, pinning one end of the cloth to the side of the head with a brooch to fan the *gaitou* out in a more appealing manner than the simple, triangular appearance of the ordinary scarves. Many younger girls who take more care of their appearance spend a lot of time coordinating their *gaitou* with the rest of their apparel, completely embracing the head scarf as a part of their personal statement.

Many older women wear an abbaya, or long robe, that is sometimes embroidered over their regular clothing. Others still are opting for an even more foreign dress, by frequently wearing traditional Pakistani Shalwar Kameez. The kind of *gaitou* most favoured by women are those imported from Malaysia; a large triangular piece of light material often bedazzled with sequins which is meant to cover most of the forehead and the sides of the face with the use of a clip fastened below the chin. I was told this was the "Malaysian and Turkish style," and that it was popular because it was practical and did not hinder movement.

Today, Hui girls are expected to don the *gaitou* and always encouraged to do so, but the ultimate decision is left to each individual in most cases, although pressure from family and society may certainly exist to influence that decision. It is easier for women to wear the *gaitou* in Najiaying and Shadian as it is now the norm, and San Jie's twenty-two year old daughter, during a trip to her middle school, observed that more and more girls were wearing the *gaitou* as early as middle school. When she was in middle school, the *gaitou* was a rare sight. The average age in Shadian for girls to begin wearing the *gaitoui* is twenty, with the earliest around nine years of age. Those who attend Islamic school or Arabic institutions as they are sometimes referred to, are required to wear the *gaitou*, and many students begin wearing the *gaitou* as they enter these schools, usually at the age of 17. Although they tend to be in the minority, there are young women who do not wear the *gaitou*, such as Wenxi, the receptionist at a real estate office. She is twenty-six years old, and says that she hasn't "felt like wearing it yet." According to her, people in the town will look down at a young woman who dresses in shorter apparel, which is considered more "Han." She pointed to her friend and colleague who did wear the *gaitou* as being "traditional."

One of the most characteristic qualities of a Hui village or town is the prevalence of *gaitou* stores that stock domestic cloth and imported materials. These stores often are the center of social activity for women. In Shadian, where the stores opened from 7 pm to 10 pm every day- closed during the daytime when women had errands to run, or go to work or school- *gaitou* stores are often bustling with life as women of all ages try on different colours and styles in front of the large mirrors hanging in every store.

One particular store that is often preferred by women is called "Bawal Exclusive," a Malaysian chain store of sorts that also has outlets in Najiaying. The owner of the Najiaying outlet is a young married woman who has recently given birth to her second son. Her husband is more

supportive than those of other Najiaying households, and assists her in caring for their new-born infant and tending to the store. She leaves her baby at home in the mornings to sleep while she goes to work at her store, but most other times of the day, either her husband tends to the store or she brings the baby with her to breast-feed. According to her, her customers range from all age groups, and most prefer to buy Malaysian *gaitou* because of the superior material. An imported *gaitou* can cost from 150 RMB to 7000 RMB, depending on the amount of ornamentation on the material.

Faith and the Veil

Responses to the *gaitou* were often very positive, and seen as a matter of pride; an expression of Hui identity, in religious towns such as Najiaying and Shadian, conflated with Muslim identity. The interplay between identity, *xinyang* and dress proves to be one central to the concept of the feminine in both Shadian and Najiaying. The *gaitou* is inextricably linked with *xinyang*, and those that wear the *gaitou* are seen as being possessors of a stronger and untarnished *xinyang*, an immaculate expression of faith that separates and physically differentiates from Han. Those that do not wear the *gaitou*, such as myself, are believed either not to understand the importance of the veil, or not to harbor deep *xinyang*. Despite older practices amongst Hui women of covering their heads only while praying,[33] the concept of "traditional" has changed meaning. A "traditional" Hui woman is one who wears the *gaitou* and is married at a fairly young age, yet the *tradition* of wearing the *gaitou* as it is worn today is relatively new, particularly for the past three generations of Hui women. A woman without the *gaitou* is also assumed to be comparatively less devout in regularity of prayer.

[33] One that is fairly common in urban areas in Pakistan, viewed in Shadian and Najiaying as a considerably conservative Muslim country.

The *gaitou*, as one manager of the Great Mosque in Shadian defined it, was a marker of a Muslim woman's identity; after all, what better way to indicate to other Muslims of one's faith? An oft-repeated statement regarding the veil- one that is common in much of the Islamic discourse regarding the veil- was that "the veil is a tool of protection." The *gaitou* serves as a platform of religious expression and as a form of protection for Muslim women. An intriguing conversation with this same manager from the Great Mosque revealed that he believed that the *gaitou* was not only a means of protecting the wearer, but also a means through which women protected the stability of society. He was of the opinion that a woman who refused to wear the veil risked the whole of society sinking into depravity and adultery. She would be more susceptible to the threat of adultery, and as her husband would be more likely to take on mistresses, the institution of marriage, the foundation of a stable society, would crumble as a result.

Ruiyang, a thirty year old student at the Najiaying Women's mosque, had spent her college years in Shanghai and came to Najiaying in February of 2011 after a change of heart. Born to a traditional Hui family in northern China, she was a firm atheist. She claims that after she read the *Gulanjing* (Quran), she was moved by the beauty of the words, and was reborn as a Muslim. In strong contrast to how I usually saw her- in a traditional black *gaitou* and long robe- she showed me pictures of herself in her early twenty's on a cell-phone wearing provocative clothes. She was a firm believer in the modernizing power of Islam, and viewed the *gaitou* as a necessary component to this. She believed, in fact, that to pray, read the Quran, work and "protect herself" was a Muslim woman's jihad.

When in the outside world

Students at Islamic schools are enthusiastic about the veil, and will often say they chose to wear it on their own (*ziji jueding*), yet this is complicated since the *gaitou* is mandatory at these schools. Young students interviewed will often comment on the difficulty of becoming accustomed to the veil in the beginning, but after several months, a majority of the students commented that they were now used to wearing the veil, and intended to keep wearing it in the future. One student who wore the *miansha* stressed that the *miansha* was a personal choice, and although it had been cumbersome in the beginning, she would continue wearing it.

Yet Wenxi and her friends at the real estate office admitted that younger people are not as stringent about restrictions in dress, alcohol and tobacco when they leave the premises of the town. Hui youth like to leave Shadian in the weekends for Gejiu or Mengzi. While boys secretly go to bars to drink alocohol and smoke in these towns, girls also may take off their *gaitou*, particularly if they are going with friends to KTV. The reason, Wenxi's friend claimed, for this was that Hui girls preferred to be anonymous and blend in with the Han, for fear of being looked down upon; if they wore their *gaitou* to such places, they would immediately be identified as Hui, and therefore ought not to be there. Of course, trips to KTV are concealed from parents, "our parents do not have the same opinions."

Spending time with local students at Najiaying women's mosque revealed that girls from local families usually took their *gaitou* off as soon as they were away from the gaze of their teachers at the mosque. Beidi and Dangdang are both seventeen year old girls whose families live in Najiaying, "I'll tell you a little secret. We take off the *gaitou* when we go out to have fun," confessed Beidi. Similar to young people in Shadian, I was told that young people in Najiaying

would leave the town and go to nearby Tonghai or Yuxi to have fun. This included alcohol and tobacco for the boys, and taking off the *gaitou* for the girls. The two girls staunchly believed that the girls in the dormitory also secretly took off their *gaitou* when they left for the weekends, although they had no real proof. My conversations with some of their classmates indicated that there were also some students who genuinely wanted to continue wearing the *gaitou*, so while their guess may be true, it may not be entirely accurate. Beidi and Dangdang maintained that "all of us don't like to wear the *gaitou*." If a student is caught without the *gaitou* by a teacher from the mosque, she is fined 20 RMB, so local girls who take their *gaitou* off after school are always wary.

Dangdang's family is initially from a town in Sichuan where Hui are not many in numbers. She recounts that her family moved to Najiaying two years ago when her mother started wearing the *gaitou*. Prior to this, her family had been one typical to the area; the women did not wear the *gaitou* and most family members drank alcohol freely. Yet after her mother began wearing the gaitou, the family began facing difficulty in being accepted by their non-Hui neighbours. Their problems got to the point where the family chose to migrate to Najiaying, where they could practice Islam with greater comfort. Her family is now considerably religious, and while Dangdang wears the *gaitou* in front of her mother, she takes it off secretly when she is permitted to leave the house with her friends.

Marriage

The realm of marriage is one of immense importance to Hui communities which have established entire networks throughout the whole country, "intensive and extensive marriage networks" specifically to search for Hui partners for their children "to maintain their ethnic identity"[34]

[34] Gladney, Dru. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* p.230

Intermarriages with Han, although quite common in the northern cities of China such as Beijing as early as the 1980s, are highly discouraged amongst the Hui. Even secular Hui in urban areas such as Kunming today, where intermarriage is increasingly common, prefer marriages within the Hui community, as a way of maintaining their lineage. While it is considered more acceptable for a Hui man to marry a Hui woman, families are more reluctant to accept intermarriage if the woman is Hui. This is perhaps a consequence of the patrilineal social structure of both Chinese society and Islam.

Historically, the Muslim merchants of Yunnan traveled to far-flung communities populated by Dai, Yi and Tibetans, and married local women, hence giving birth to fledgling Hui communities in those areas. The women would convert to Islam, and their children would also be Muslim, yet they would retain their cultural heritage, such as language and dress, so that subgroups of the Hui, such as the Dai Hui and Zang Hui came into being. Intermarriage has therefore been an important tool for the expansion and dissemination of the Hui. For more religious Hui families in urban areas, these marriage networks are particularly useful, as they help maintain "ethnic" lineage as well as ensure offspring to be Muslim. Intermarriage is acceptable as long as the non-Hui bride converts to Islam. Of course, this is not always the case, yet especially for a Hui woman intending to marry outside of the Hui circuit, her family will demand the potential groom to convert to Islam, and respect the *qingzhen* lifestyle. In some cases, whole families are expected to convert to Islam as a precondition to accepting the marriage. Hui communities are able to expand in this manner.

Interaction between young Hui boys and girls is encouraged in the urban setting, so as to lead to Hui marriages. In Shadian and Najiaying[35] as well, young people are permitted to embark on romantic endeavors, with the expectation that an adolescent relationship will result in an engagement. Most young people I interacted with were in such relationships, or looking for potential relationships. They are usually introduced through friends or family, and the decision to remain with a man as his betrothed often rests on the young woman in question. Such relationships are acceptable in Shadian and Najiaying[36], and young people are increasingly using technology to assist in their quest to search for an appropriate match, often as far away as Ningxia. Many had found fiancés through online matchmaking websites such as *renrenwang*, or other agencies that catered specifically to Muslim Chinese needs. Advertisements for matchmaking agencies are plastered on walls along the street in Shadian. What is important to note is that these agencies usually advertise themselves as *Muslim* and not specifically Hui.[37] However, this practice is merely a technological update to the centuries old Hui networks in place throughout China. Online relationships are usually accepted by the young woman's family, and often results in engagement and then marriage.[38]

While intermarriage with non-Hui is problematic within China's context, when considering the greater Islamic circuit that the Hui are but one portion of, marriage to non-Chinese Muslims, though rare, is accepted and supported not only by the woman's family, but also by the whole

[35] In Najiaying, such relationships are acceptable as long as an immediate engagement follows.
[36] When I informed Wenxi, our real estate friend, that in Pakistan young people were usually not permitted to become "boyfriend girlfriend" without incurring the wrath of the family, she was shocked, "If you're not allowed to have a boyfriend, how do you expect to get yourself a husband?"
[37] although all the young women interviewed who had used these agencies more often than not ended up with Hui suitors, as opposed to any of the other nine Muslim minorities.
[38] The acceptance of online relationships is unusual for traditional Muslim society however. While parents traditionally remain instrumental in the marriage and courtship process, potential suitors met through the internet are unacceptable and usually treated with suspicion. Looking for marriage online would be considered unthinkable by traditional Pakistani families, for instance.

community. In the whole of town of Shadian, there are currently two women who are or have been married to non-Chinese Muslims. One such lady is a widow who moved to Shadian ten years ago to study Arabic. After the completion of her studies, she went to Iraq for further education, and met her husband there. He died a year ago of an illness, and she moved back to Shadian with their four children, the eldest being twelve years old. She does not have a job with which to support her family, and the town of Shadian- in particular her school friend- is currently aiding her. She is not only accepted by the community, despite not being a local, but is also viewed as an inspiration to the other women in Shadian who are acquainted with her.

Another young woman, Ayesha, is famed in Shadian for having married a Pakistani businessman. They met through the internet, and Javaid flew to China a year ago to marry her. They currently live with Ayesha's parents and a three month old son named Abdurrahman. In his 1991 treatise, Gladney observed uxorilocal practice amongst Hui in northern China in the case of Han/Hui marriages, with the Han husband moving into his wife's natal Hui home[39]. I have heard no mention of such a practice within Shadian or Najiaying, perhaps because Hui/Han marriages are rarest in these localities. Gladney explains this practice as one of convenience, where the Han husband moves in with his in-laws as the easiest way to observe *qingzhen* stipulations. What is interesting about this particular Muslim couple is that they have also resorted to uxorilocal practice as a matter of convenience for the Hui wife, more so for cultural (and I guess business) reasons rather than to accommodate a *qingzhen* lifestyle per se. From the cultural context of Javaid, such a practice is considered a blow to a man's honour, as traditional Pakistani custom stipulates that the bride must leave her natal home- whole marriage ceremonies revolve around this exodus.

[39] Gladney, Dru. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* pg. 211

Here one can see a similarity between two very different forms of intermarriage; one with a Han and one with a non-Chinese Muslim. Despite adjustments that the couple have made to their lives in order to facilitate their marriage, problems have already arisen within their marriage, as Javaid does not speak the language. While both communicated with each other in broken English, the language barrier was proving to be too great a challenge. Although he voices admiration for the Muslim fervor of his new home, claiming that "we are all exactly the same," he was also clearly regretting this marriage. He stated firmly that, "there is no comparison in the world for Pakistani girls. I have realized it only now; Pakistani girls are unparalleled." This makes it evident that "Muslim" is not the only defining factor of Hui. There are clearly greater nuances in Hui identity than the Islamic internationalism espoused by towns like Shadian and encouraged in the Islamic education system. The Hui of Shadian are in some ways as embedded in a Chinese landscape as they are in an Islamic religion. Being Muslim alone does not guarantee complete unity at close quarters with Muslims from other parts of the world; cultural, linguistic and historical differences are evidently equally important in the definition of "Hui."

A tale of three Engagements

As mentioned earlier, engagement age is relatively younger than that for urban Hui, roughly around twenty years for Shadian and as early as sixteen for Najiaying. Engagement and Marriage ceremonies are an important aspect of private and public life, bringing the whole town together for a bountiful feast. While I did not have the opportunity to attend a wedding ceremony, the townspeople in both Shadian and Najiaying graciously invited me to three engagement ceremonies in total. Each occasion was different from the other, albeit with certain commonalities regarding custom.

Dinghun at the Mosque

The engagement ceremony was held at *Baifangzi* mosque in Shadian. It started late in the morning, with the young couples' families, friends and acquaintances partaking of a sumptuous banquet prepared by the mosque. The young couple had met through a local matchmaker who happened to be San Jie's younger cousin. Students of the mosque, both young girls and boys, participated in tending to the guests, with the boys usually serving each table, carrying trays full of fresh bowls of noodles, meat and vegetable dishes and various condiments. The madrassah students refilled each guest's cup with tea, and cleared the tables after each round of guests left. The female students were more involved with the guests, most of whom were women and children from the town, participating in conversations, while the male students were present strictly in the capacity of helping with the proceedings. The female students ate last of all, sitting together at three round tables at one end of the mosque's courtyard. The male students were further removed, sitting together at the steps of their dormitory building, waiting to wash the dishes. There was no formal speech or ritual performed during the period which I attended, save that the young couple rose from their places at the tables and stood in front of the guests for a moment.

Dinghun at a villa

This second engagement ceremony at Shadian was far grander; with a line of cars blocking the road to the venue. The whole town attended the engagement ceremony of the niece of one of the wealthiest men in Shadian; a large extended family that owns a sizeable villa compound where each brother owns one villa. The family had set up an outdoor pavilion where the feast was held; a private hall within their property limits had been set up with tables where food was also served. The young woman who was getting engaged was in her early twenties; wearing a formal black

abbaya or robe and an ornamental *gaitou* draped elegantly around her head. She was an English major at Yunnan University who worked translating Chinese and English texts. She had met her fiancé one month ago in Kunming through mutual friends, and had decided to return to Shadian for their engagement. She stood at the gates of the villa complex, greeting guests and making special arrangements for her female friends. As I was escorted by her close friends, we were taken to her father's villa further down the pavement within the compound. The future bride's house was bustling with people, closer relatives and friends relieving themselves from the heat by eating watermelon. Her close friends and younger female relatives stayed in her room, waiting for the other guests to finish eating, while younger boys and girls in other parts of the house sat together and chatted. Here too, as at the previous engagement, young madrassah boys served food and tea to the guests. The eldest relatives of the bride-to-be sat on stools in front of the main house, whose doors were kept open for guests to enter.

Dinghun at Najiaying:

This last engagement ceremony varied significantly from the previous engagements that I attended. I was invited to attend this event by Beidi, my classmate at the Women's Mosque whose seventeen year old *biaomei* was getting engaged to her boyfriend.

Preparations for the event began early in the morning, and the event lasted far past 10 at night. The gates of the house were kept open all day, and friends and relatives entered and left throughout the course of the whole day. While the men sat at the gate, the women prepared the ingredients for the feast. In the evening, guests started filtering in for the feast. Close female friends and relatives of the girl stayed in a secluded room to the side, while she stayed outside in the family courtyard for most of the event, tending to guests and helping the older women in the kitchen. At regular intervals she would take a bowl of sweets and offer it to all the guests. It is

customary for the brother of the bride-to-be to gather all his friends and serve food and tea to the guests. As the women cook *miantiao* in the kitchen, the brother and his friends carry trays of bowls back and forth from the courtyard to the kitchen.

Later in the evening, the elders of the town- the most venerable and devout men of Najiaying- filed into the courtyard and occupied the tables set out for the guests. They chanted verses from the Quran in a strong, rising rhythm for about half an hour and in a moment of silence at the end, raised their hands in prayer, and were the first to be served food. Once they finished eating, other guests came to the tables and partook of the feast. Closest relatives of the bride-to-be eat at the very last, and as each round of guests leave, the hosts prepare a small bag of choice meats for every person as a parting gift.

The centrality of ceremony to the role of women in social affairs

At each engagement ceremony, women were the driving force to the events, either as guests or as hosts. At the engagements in Shadian, the women were always more involved in interactions amongst each other, and it is often women who operate as matchmakers for younger relations or friends. In Najiaying, the bride-to-be's father was busy with the preparations, as was her brother and his friends, yet it was the women who were directing the young boys, preparing the meals and ushering guests to the dining tables. It appears that engagement ceremonies, when held at the home, are held at the girl's house rather than the boy's, and the fiancé must enter the girl's home. It remains to be investigated exactly how much tradition dictates these customs, and what the system of financing these celebrations are; whether the girl's family shoulders more of the economic burden, or to what extent Muslim customs, as stipulated by the Quran, are actually put

into practice. It does appear, however, that women, particularly in the context of the preparation of ceremonial feasts, are central in bringing the community together.

Arranged Marriage?

Although young girls are expected to get married early, and parents are greatly involved in the process, it would be misleading to equate this custom to an inflexible "arranged marriage" system. Perhaps stating that the age within which a girl must marry is fixed is more accurate; she may choose her own partner, and depending on the family and community, is usually given free reign on searching for one, albeit with help from friends or family.

Despite reservations regarding the "*chuantong*" nature of their local town, students at the Najiaying Women's Mosque who were engaged by the age of seventeen due to family pressures also were eager to get married to their fiancés. One seventeen year old student, Dandi, had been engaged once before to a young man her parents had chosen for her, but when she grew to dislike him, she had the freedom to break off the engagement. Although she expressed desire to become an elementary school teacher- a dream that is impossible as her family stipulates that she must attend Islamic school and prepare for marriage- she is now looking forward to her marriage with her current fiancé.

Parents may get more forceful as their daughters grow older; the reason that San Jie wanted her daughter to return home after graduating from Yunnan University was for her to get married. Lianyi feels obliged to obey her mother, although she has no desire to get married, and would prefer to continue her studies.

I have come across only one case of an arranged matrimonial contract; one of the students of the half-year class in Najiaying was crying throughout class one morning. When I asked Beidi and

Dangdang why she had been crying, they said they believed it was because she was getting engaged to a man her parents had chosen for her whom she did not like. Yet there is no way of confirming this opinion, as I did not have an opportunity to talk to the girl in question. According to Beidi, “parents want a boy who is rich, but their daughters want a boy who is handsome, so that is why there are disagreements.”

Conclusion: "Ai Guo Ai Jiao"

In communities with strong religious roots such as Shadian and Najiaying, there is a firm insistence that there is a difference between "Hui" and "Muslim." Secular Hui who live in the cities and drink alcohol are considered worlds apart by Hui in Shadian and Najiaying, who explain that they are Hui but not Muslim. Yet despite the insistence of the differences, "Huizu is a *xiaoshu minzu*, and Muslim is somebody who believes in *Isilanjiao* within his or her own heart," I have found that in daily life, the two are more often than not, conflated within the same identity; questions I would ask about the Hui would always, without exception, turn to conversations regarding Islam.

Ben Hillman's study of Islamic identity revival in a small Hui hamlet in Balong is particularly insightful, since the revival was funded by and supervised by the Shadian Foundation. His findings, too, point to a conflation of "Hui" with "Muslim" as the town shifted gears towards a more religious community; the banning of alcohol and tobacco, the construction of a mosque, the training of ahongs and the prevalence of the *gaitou*. Such practices began to be viewed by the previously non-religious Balong Hui as an "ethnic marker" and a "source of pride". One of his informants claimed, "We are Hui, of course we are Muslim."

Other scholars have grappled with this two edged aspect of Hui identity, and come up with a variety of explanations. Wang Jiaoping defines the Hui in three categories, "Strong religious type, middle religious type and weak religious type,"[40] making levels of religious affiliation levels of differentiation amongst the Hui of Yunnan, and thereby weaving lineage and vertical religious diversity into his argument. Those such as Jonathan Lipman argue that "Sino-

[40]Wang Jiaoping *Concord and Conflict: the Hui communities of Yunnan society* pg 163-167

Muslims" do not necessarily have to choose one aspect of their identity over another, and that the two, "Sino" and "Muslim" are well placed within the single sphere of their identity.

At the other end of the spectrum, scholars such as Raphael Israeli argue that the Hui have desired separation from China in both times of relative freedom and oppression due to their essentially "Muslim" identity.[41] It is true that Hui revolts have occurred throughout the years in Yunnan, Gansu and other parts of China, yet it is as true that "in every one of the Muslim rebellions Israeli mentions, some Muslims fought against their co-religionaries for the forces of the reigning dynasty."[42]

The time I have spent in two of the most religious Hui communities in Yunnan point to a more nuanced existence than Israeli's hypothesis would have one believe. The dichotomy between Hui and "other" is not clearly defined, as is the dynamics of Hui identity within the vast diversity of Hui communities in China. My interactions with women revealed that the "other" was often the "Han," but on separate occasions was either "*xiaoshu minzu*," or women from Muslim countries. All three forms of "other" creates a fascinating commentary on the self-analysis of Hui women in the face of difference. While the Han and other *minzu* serve as a foil to Hui Muslim identity, Islam is a standard that can be achieved by viewing the positions of women in Muslim countries. This consists of a dialogue weighing the position of these Muslim women from Islamic countries as *di* (low), which diametrically opposes their possession of *shenke* (deep) faith. Being *Sino*-Muslims, and ultimately deeply rooted in the culture and history of China, recent interaction with Middle Eastern and South Asian countries has provided an exchange through which Hui women

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[41] "during the late Ch'ing, the opportunity arose to realize the dormant aspirations of Islamic fulfillment which included, *interalia*, secession from the host culture" Raphael Israeli, *The Muslim Revival in 19th century China* pg 120

[42] Lipman, Jonathan *Review of Muslim minorities of the People's Republic of China*, Raphael Israeli. Pg 154. Lipman states that "The unity of Muslim action that lies at the core of Israeli's book simply did not exist."

are now negotiating and comprehending their position within the limits of the PRC, using an Islamic framework.

Hui women in the religious communities of Shadian and Najiaying are aligning themselves with an Islamic modernity, while at the same time believing their position as women in China to be higher than that of those in the Arab world that is their model. This modernity allows for a break from the past, situating women in a prosperity and a world system that not only separates from the Han, but in fact lifts them higher than the Han by way of possessing a perceived superior world culture.

The position of Hui women in Shadian and Najiaying is examined within the framework of Islam, by the assistance of popular Quranic verses and ahadith, such as "Heaven lies under the feet of your mother." Role models for women are not prominent Hui figures such as Lady Du, but are in fact Fatima and Ayesha, daughter and wife of the Holy Prophet respectively. An identity placed within a system outside of China allows for the Hui to break free from the nationality hierarchy in the PRC which places the Han at the top.

Theories about this national hierarchy have been postulated by local and foreign scholars,[43]where the place of minorities in China as the "primitive" and "exotic" marked category enables tue Han to realize their modernity. Although convincing arguments of the feminization of minorities such as the Mosuo and the Dai have been made in the past as the "exotic and sensual" other, the Hui do not fall within the parameters of such arguments, being more or less an ordinary sight in many Chinese cities all over the country. In other words, there is nothing "exotic" about the Hui,

[43] See Gladney, Dru. *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities and other Subaltern Subjects* pg 63.

whose perceived difference from the Han often consists primarily of a curiously different dietary regulation that prevents the consumption of pork.

Yet as a minority, the Hui have been considered "backward" and "feudalistic," and as with other minorities in China, the Chinese character for "Hui" was preceded by the radical denoting "dog." Closer ties with the Middle East have brought with it a sense of modernity to Hui communities[44] and to Hui women, who see themselves as proponents of this modernity. Hui women, transformed from the "primitive" and "backward," are then considered as superior to Han woman, because their faith in Islam affords them to be "cleaner" (*ganjing*) than their Han counterparts, as a young student in Najiaying defined it to me.

Yet the modernity of the Hui Islamic culture is situated *within* the greater Chinese structure; pride in an Islamic identity is intertwined with an emphasis on a *Chinese* national identity, married by the twin pavilions of "*Ai jiao"* (love religion) and "*Ai guo*" (love country), that create the hallmark of this ideology. School books for Hui children pronounce patriotism as a religious duty for all Muslims. This delicate balancing act creates a Hui identity that oscillates between assimilation within the borders of China, and that of dissimilation through rediscovery of Muslim roots. A future that is built from these roots gives birth to a Hui, Islamic, modernity, which associates its mothers, wives and teachers as the genesis of that modernity.

[44] Noted by Gillette, Maron in her study of modernization amongst urban Hui in Xi an who were pushing for a ban of tobacco and alcohol in their quarters as a sign of their superior culture.

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RESOURCES

Human Resources

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Interviews were conducted on an informal basis with the people of the towns of Shadian and Najiaying.

Students of First year and Second year at Kaiyuan Arabic Institute

Students of Third Year at Xida school in Shadian

Students of Half-year to Second year at Najiaying Women's Mosque

Students of Taqwa school in Shadian

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ITINERARY

1. Kunming to Shadian: 1st May 2011. 101 RMB bus ticket.

   There were considerable logistical problems in getting to Shadian, which ended in a rift between me and my contact, who remained unclear and increasingly ominous about the situation in Shadian till our last meeting. He had insisted on staying with me for twelve days in Shadian, recommending traveling by private vehicle with him and his friend, and when I expressed discomfort at the idea, he grew annoyed and gave me the phone number of a private van that supposedly ran from the East Station in Kunming to Shadian. When Lesley and I arrived, the van was not to be found at the station despite multiple calls to the driver, who simply told us to go to the ticketing hall. At the end, we finally decided to take a bus to Gejiu, and got off the bus while it was passing Shadian. We were fortunate enough to be assisted by a young couple who offered to drive us to the restaurant where we were to meet Hongmei and her husband.

2. Shadian to Kunming: 14th May 2011. No cost.

   San Jie arranged for a free ride back to Kunming after a lengthy debate regarding the convenience of taking the bus from Gejiu or Jianshui. A family of Dongxiang tourists from Qinghai graciously offered us seats in their hired tour van.

3. Kunming: 14th – 16th May 2011.

4. Kunming to Najiaying: 16th May 2011. Tonghai bus ticket 42 RMB.

   I traveled to Tonghai from the South Station, and met with Albert at the bus station in Tonghai. We made a couple of trips to Najiaying via local van (4 RMB one way) before I settled in at the hotel the Mosque management had arranged for me.

5. Najiaying to Kunming: 21st May 2011. Tonghai to Kunming bus ticket 42 RMB

   I took the 7 am van back to Tonghai from Najiaying, and spent the afternoon helping Albert at his English school, then took a bus back to Kunming from Tonghai.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. The role of *Santai* in madrassah education for girls in Hui rural communities

2. Wahabiyyism in modern Hui communities.

3. The social, economic and cultural dynamics that gave birth to the Great Mosque in Shadian.

4. Xinjiang students in Yunnan: tracing the reasons and processes through which Hui and Uighur youth move to Yunnan from Xinjiang for Islamic education.

5. The role of the ahong's wife in establishing and maintaining inter-Hui networks

6. Muslim tourism in Yunnan; the tourist trail for domestic and foreign Muslim visitors.

7. Hui identity amongst the Zang Hui in Diqing prefecture- how does interaction with Tibetan culture affect gender roles in Hui communities?

8. Han conversations to Islam: Han Muslim versus marriage into Hui families.

9. *Nu ahong*: the female imam as a religious or social leader for the female *umma*

10. Arabic language acquisition: how Hui students learn Arabic in Chinese

11. The effects of the destruction of the Muslim Quarter in Kunming

12. Alcohol and Tobacco bans in Hui communities: how prohibition is established, and how it is evaded.

13. Urban/ rural marriage customs in Hui communities.

APPENDIX

There is simply too much that I saw, heard and felt for this appendix to do justice to my experiences, yet I am eternally glad that I chose to go to Shadian despite warnings of danger. Before I left, my contact Ali became increasingly fearful, getting irritated that I wanted to go with an American friend, and insisted that our phone conversations were possible being tapped, and the two of us would be followed by government officials in Shadian. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that none of what he said was true. Shadian was by far the safest and friendliest town I have been to in China, and the friends I have made in both Shadian and Najiaying will remain with me eternally in my memory.

Leaning out the windows of her dormitory room, Angel breathed deeply into the fragrant, moist air caressed by raindrops on trees, "You know rain is a gift from Allah." She turned around with girlish joy to face us as we sat on her bed. Her light brown eyes are the only part of her face usually visible to the outside world, yet they are alive with a luminosity that is hard to miss. It is almost startling to see her without her veil; the animation of her voice and the energy in her eyes makes one forget almost that the face is not visible. Impulsive and ambitious, she came to Shadian to learn Arabic from Xinjiang, after dreams of becoming a dancer were displaced by two years spent working at the International Airport of Dubai.

Stumbling across us as Lesley and I made our way to the public bathrooms at the Great Mosque, she had invited us to her dormitory in Taqwa School, where she dodged the male students outside playing basketball with a panicked bashfulness. Her religious fervor, heightened since her days as a dancer in school, raises in pitch often to almost a frenzy. Reprimanding me for my failure to pray five times a day, she said, "I know, when you feel like you cannot hear Allah while you pray, bow down and close your eyes and wish for it with all your might." Her pure energy was exhausting, but there was also something unruly and unbridled in her *xinyang*, something so innocent and natural that I ached a little to think that I was not like her.

These past few weeks have been more than an opportunity for field research; they have afforded me the ability to befriend Muslim women from all sorts of backgrounds, and all sorts of ages. I always came as something of a surprise to them, expecting an entirely different kind of creature from my own brand of strangeness whenever I mentioned I am Pakistani; women with large, dark eyes, devout, and veiled completely from view were the images conjured in their minds. Every time I admitted embarrassedly that none of the women in my family wore the *gaitou*, and that I rarely prayed because- well, I simply could not think of a reason that made sense- I was met with friendly disbelief.

But I am grateful that so many women chose to open their homes and their hearts to me, and that despite my ineptitude as a Muslim woman- I have neither the strength nor the resolution that many of my friends possess- I was made to feel a part of them. Encounters with Ruiyang, a woman with a ferocious intelligence and an equally ferocious desire to improve herself as a Muslim woman, "I take the example of my friend, Ma Laoshi, but I keep on finding that while her faith remains a constant, mine wavers because of my laziness," revealed a world of rediscovered faith, where the desire to bring the word of God to the reality of a chaotic existence created a kind of thirst in her; a thirst that I have rarely seen.

Of course, my extremely limited grasp of Mandarin did not enable me to explain my lapses in faith; something which I find impossible even in my mother tongue. For Ruiyang, it was clear; all I needed to do was to read the Quran, and the beauty of the words would melt all my doubts.

It was times like these, when I felt like I wanted to talk about why I was the way I was, and ask them how it was so easy for them, that I felt particularly frustrated by my inability to explain abstract ideas in Mandarin. Yet Ruiyang was patient, and always willing to use my little red dictionary in times of particular confusion. I am afraid I was not able to explain anything about myself with the amount of clarity that my Hui friends explained matters of faith to me.

But for the larger part, I don't think it particularly matters if I was understood or not; the familiarity of being in Shadian, and even Najiaying, with the call to prayer resounding through the bright sky, surrounded by people with a genuine desire to be kind, meant more to me than any amount of explanations possibly could. And of course, words no longer held meaning when the tranquility of watching people live their lives would take over.

I have had the opportunity to pray with *santai* students at Angel's school who plant their feet firmly against each other to keep the devil away. I was bewildered by the force of their prayers, and at the beginning, not realizing that they belonged to a different sect from me, I wondered if I had really forgotten how to pray, since it had been years since I had prayed at all. Rebellious teenagers at Najiaying Women's Mosque confided in me as they took off their hijabs provocatively to meet male friends at a *shaokao* restaurant. And once, in the middle of the day, an old woman, bent with the burden of being alive, beckoned Lesley and I to follow her to an empty house, where she told us of the death of her sons in a quivering voice, and with tears that I could not see but knew were disappearing quickly into the deep wrinkles of her face.

I did not choose to do this ISP for the sake of writing this paper; I chose to do it so that I could find solace in the vastness of the world, the smell of rain streaking past a speeding rickshaw, and the bright eyes of a loving mother scolding her daughter for being *tiaopi* (naughty). I have become disillusioned and embittered by life in my own country in these difficult times that throb like phantom scars, and yet, being with Muslims so strange and familiar to me, I have found a semblance of peace that I want to carry with me to a home that I never part with; a home that is slowly stretching beyond the crevices of an isolated despair. .