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The Hui Migrant Laborers' Urban Experience and Implications for the Development of Civil Society in China

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THE HUI MIGRANT LABORERS' URBAN EXPERIENCE AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CHINA

Billy Yates

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SIT Study Abroad

China: Language, Cultures and Ethnic Minorities, Kunming

Fall 2011

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Abstract

Recent unrest in China by migrant laborers' increasing labor militancy, as well as unrest caused by Islamic groups in China ranging from separatist movements to backlash from discrimination have been the focus of the Chinese government' attempts to main stability within the PRC. In the largest country in the world, rapid changes as the result of economic liberalization and the introduction of global capitalism have had drastic impacts on society, from increasing inequality to the introduction of Western media and ideas. Unrest has been accompanied by developments in civil society as Islamic institutions chafing under Chinese regulations become places of political discourse and migrant labors voice louder and louder demands independent and democratically elected trade unions. The Hui, the third largest ethnic minority in China and the largest Muslims minority have been involved in these recent civil society developments as both migrant workers and as an economically disadvantaged group. Their experience as a Muslim minority frequently subject to discrimination, an ethnic group with well-established Islamic institutions and community centers and their migrant worker identity all contribute to them having a unique role in the development of civil society in China.

Acknowledgements

Research in Yunnan, or anywhere in the People's Republic of China for that matter, is not a task to be taken lightly. In addition, a language and cultural barrier can make research a rather formidable undertaking for a foreigner. However, with the help of some patient and wise advisors, I learned that it could be done. This paper would have been impossible without the guidance of Lu Yuan and Sam Mitchell, whose knowledge on Yunnan and Chinese culture, as well as their vast connections within the academic and Kunming community helped me design and narrow down my focus. Ma Laoshi, a local Hui and expert on the Hui community provided me with a vital link into the Muslim community. My ISP advisor, He Jinsong from the Yunnan Academy of Social Science and his introduction on migration in the region was an invaluable help as I tackled the dual topic of both migration and Islam. Also, Fan Yu, a Yunnan native and Indonesian language major at Yunnan Nationalities University assisted with translation of migrant worker interviews that have been the core of my research. Xiao Zhou, another Yunnan native, assisted with the incredibly important process of wording research questions and served as a jack-of-all trades and a constant source of advice. Without these patient individuals, this research project would have only remained a dream.

Introduction

While in the past decades the global community has acknowledged China as an important engine¹ of global economic growth, the last 3 years have been mired in labor unrest that continues to threaten economic and political stability. Spikes in unrest were subsequently followed by the government's pacification of the turmoil in the form of new legislation better protecting workers. In 2008, the Labor Contract Law and the Labor Dispute and Mediation Law went into enforcement, a landmark piece of legislation and one of the few major developments since China adopted its first labor law in 1994.² The enactment of the law abolished the system of at-will employment for most full-time employees and required employers to offer employees with written contracts, allowing laborers more protection vis-à-vis employers. In 2011, the government further enacted the Work-Related Injury Insurance Regulation that eliminated some of the gaps in injury payments between poor and wealthy regions of China.³ While some will credit the government's updating of labor laws as benevolent gestures by 'big brother,' a view from the bottom up gives a narrative of escalation in state-labor conflict as the primary motivation in the change of laws. It is not the generosity of the Communist Party, but the

¹ Shengxia, Song. "China still engine of economic growth - GlobalTimes." Globaltimes_china business. <http://business.globaltimes.cn/china-economy/2011-04/643746.html> (accessed December 3, 2011).

² " PRC Employment Contract Law / 中华人民共和国劳动合同法 - China Law & Practice ." China Law and Practice Home. <http://www.chinalawandpractice.com/Article/1425355/PRC-Employment-Contract-Law.html> (accessed December 3, 2011)

³"Work-related Injury Insurance Regulations_上海劳动法律网." 上海劳动法律网_劳动者维 · 律师上海劳动律师|劳动法|劳动合同法|劳动纠纷|劳动仲裁|工伤认定|社会保险|辞退|辞职|经济补偿|产假|孕期. <http://zzttl.com/documents-information/work-related-injury-insurance-regulations.html> (accessed December 3, 2011).

struggle and demands of laborers that are increasingly willing to resort to militant means to address pay-related grievances and inadequate working conditions, including strikes and sabotage.⁴ As if labor unrest was not enough to deal with, in the run up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics four deadly bus bombs went off in Kunming and Shanghai. The three bus bombs in Kunming killed 2 and injured 14. The Turkistan Independence Party (TIP), an Islamist separatist group based in restive Xinjiang, claimed responsibility and released a video entitled “Our Blessed Jihad in Yunnan.” While Yunnan government officials were quick to deny that it was indeed domestic terrorism, whether to fend off fear in China’s urban areas or fend off Western criticism, the official reports of the Chinese government leave much room for speculation.⁵ If only to raise suspicion that the incidents were indeed terrorist attacks, any reports suggesting that they were terrorism-related were (and as of December 2011 still are) censored on the Internet in Mainland China.⁶ The incident was only the latest of terrorism that has alienated and troubled China’s Muslim community, a community already facing heavy discrimination. Where does this instability leave Muslim migrant laborers, taking part in both the growing labor militancy along with millions of other migrant laborers while also subject to discrimination and violence as the world’s eyes remain glued to ‘the global war on terrorism’ and it’s coverage on Islamic extremism? Furthermore, as a group under growing pressure, how

⁴ "China takes hands-off approach to labor strikes - World news - Asia-Pacific - msnbc.com." msnbc.com . http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/37932967/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/china-takes-hands-off-approach-labor-strikes/ (accessed December 5, 2011).

⁵ " Police deny 'terrorist attacks' behind recent explosions -- china.org.cn." China.org.cn - China news, weather, business, travel & language courses. http://www.china.org.cn/china/local/2008-07/26/content_16076634.htm (accessed December 3, 2011)

⁶ In addition to news sources that take the point of view that the attacks were indeed terrorism-related, blogs, an avenue that has also voiced opinions alternate to that of the official Yunnan provincial viewpoint, have also been under increasing censorship. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-04-24-china-bloggers-crackdown-human-rights.htm>

can do they play a role in the development of Chinese civil society that looks to address the challenges of citizen empowerment and increasing democratic participation, targeting issues such as discrimination and labor grievances?

I conducting research to better understand the lives of China's Muslim urban laborers, specifically those that had migrated in order for better job prospects that have played an instrumental role in China's growing economy and understand their potential for the development of civil society. In narrowing down this broad topic, I decided to study the Hui minority group, a group with a long history in Kunming and Yunnan, but also a community supporting a constant flow of migrants from other parts of China in search of labor. I researched the experiences of other non-Hui migrant workers for a comparative analysis, and observed that the situation of the Hui as Muslims minorities gave them a peculiar and distinct experience. The Hui (along with 9 other ethnic minorities, primarily located in the northwest) are unique relative to the Han Chinese majority by virtue of their Muslim culture. With this cultural difference comes several other aspects that impacted their ability to find jobs in the urban Kunming labor market: connections to Islamic institutions such as the mosque, shared religion and a sense of immediate community with previously established Hui, and subjection to discrimination by non-Hui employers stood out prominently as distinct differences with the non-Hui migrant experience. These advantages and challenges of the Hui in their adjustment to the city of Kunming speak uniquely to the Hui, and thus have made the Hui migrant labor experience one of particular interest in while also providing a fresh and alternate perspective in terms of China's developing civil society.

In addition to my research findings covering the experiences of the urban Hui migrant laborers, I have added an extended analysis of global events related to Islam as well as current trends in the Chinese economy related to labor for the purpose of connecting the Hui experience with events that play a role on the bigger picture of developing civil society. In a country with an increasing labor shortage and rising labor militancy, but with no true independent trade union⁷ to represent their grievances and lacking in strong community organizations, the Muslim community of laborers are unique in their access to faith-based organization that develop a strong sense of community in Chinese urban areas among Hui migrants. While the Muslim community helps migrants adjust to the city and serves as a community center, The Hui and their urban community organizing structure stand out as a unique pathway for developing civil society in China.

In this paper I will examine how the unique experiences of the urban Hui migrant laborer can contribute to the development of civil society in China. In order to do so I took aim at several aspects: (1) the history of Islam in China, specifically in Yunnan (2) past history and trends in migrant labor and rising labor militancy (3) the unique experiences between the Muslim Hui laborers that have migrated to the city in contrast with other migrants, (4) the function of Islam and institutions and their role in Hui migrant laborers' transition to the urban labor environment and finally (5) and lastly an analysis on the potential development of civil society in China based on research on the Hui laborer community in light of international events and China's changing social and economic climate.

⁷ Lee, Ching Kwan. *Against the law: labor protests in China's rustbelt and sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Research Methods

My research took place in the month of November starting on the 6th and ending on the 26th.

My chosen field site was the area immediately surrounding Shuncheng Road, an area that was once the center of the Old Muslim town in Kunming, Yunnan. Today most of the old neighborhood has been torn down and replaced by a large up-scale shopping area, however the Shuncheng area around the mosque still provide many Hui migrant laborers willing to talk about their experience. The campus of Yunnan Nationalities University also provided a helpful environment to learn about from both Hui and Han students.

My research methods consisted primarily of in-depth and casual interviews. In-depth interviews primarily took place in the mosque courtyard and at Hui restaurants in the area. Casual interviews used to relatively basic data often took place at the workplace of the interviewee, ranging anywhere from on the street while they sold meat to in shops where they worked.

In addition, I used participation observation as another research method, attending Friday prayer at the mosque and also ‘hanging out’ at the mosque to meet people and understand the role the mosque played in Hui laborers life.

****Note:** All names of interviewees have been altered in concern of privacy**

Background Information

In order to understand the Hui migrant laborers situation in Kunming, two preliminary topics must deserve brief mention for an accurate historical context (1) a brief history of Islam in China, and (2) the economic development that has precipitated the massive influx of migrant workers to urban areas. Moreover, both have shaped contemporary Hui urban identity and are distinguished in how their histories potential for development of civil society in China.

Islam in China

Although the topic of religion in China often evokes Buddhism (the most popular) and Taoism (China’s only native major world religion), Islam’s history in China has had a long and lasting influence and also shares the distinction as one of the world’s major religions.⁸ As a world religion non-native to China, Islam has had the added effect of blending foreign influence into the culture of China, as well as China’s culture having a peculiar influence on Islam in China, visible in the architecture of mosques and the Hui Muslims celebration of traditional Chinese holiday such as Chinese New Year.⁹ Today it

⁸ Shoujiang, Mi, and You Jia. *Islam in China*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004.

⁹ Dru, Gladney. "Islam in China: Accomodation or Seperation." *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 451-467.

is the third (or fourth, pending accurate statistics on the underground household Christian movement) most popular religion in China and is reported to have anywhere between 500,000 and 1 million practitioners in Yunnan alone. Islam's history in China dates back to the first official delegation headed by Sa'ad ibn Waqqas a maternal uncle of the Prophet in 650 CE. With the rise in trade interaction, Muslim traders came to dominate the import and export system by the Song dynasty. Muslims have held several important positions in Chinese history, from the leader of the construction of the city that would become present-day China's capital of Beijing (after the original capital of the Jin was burnt down) to Zheng He, China's most famous explorer who led China's seven expeditions to the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Islam's early presence in China and Yunnan is characterized by tolerance and relative peace, confirmed by the high rate of intermarriage between the Hui and the Han.¹¹

The history of Islam in China since the 19th century is turbulent and bloody, and the sustained collective memory by Hui scholars and educated members of the Islamic community today demonstrate that the events of the past are not only relevant but leave lasting effects on their identity, relations with the Han, and CCP (Chinese Communist Party) suspicion of the Muslims as threats to stability. Repression from Qing officials in the mid-19th century led to five Hui rebellions, the most famous historical example in Yunnan being the Panthay Rebellion that flared from 1856-1873 that killed over 1 million people as the Hui and other ethnic groups rebelled against the Qing court. In northwest China the Dungan revolt raged from 1862-1867 and resulted in the deaths of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Shoujiang, Mi, and You Jia. *Islam in China*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004.

several million. Although not necessarily for religious reasons but instead with reasons stemming from class welfare and ethnic discrimination by the Han, these Muslim-led rebellions today are reminders of past disputes that are still brought up in the discourse of Hui-Han relations today, especially in reference to the current state of anti-Muslim sentiment and Hui marginalization.

Migrant Labor in China: A Product of Economic Development

Arising from the economic and agricultural reforms in China during the 70s, China has found itself with a mobile, low skilled and in recent years, increasingly militant migrant labor population. The phenomena of the largest nomadic society in the world, China's migrant workers that numbered over 180 million in 2008,¹² has been of academic interest to those seeking to understand the development of capitalism in the People's Republic of China as well as the accompanied developments of labor law, labor activism and the social consequences of urban and rural areas accommodation to the new ebb and flow of labor of mobile labor.

The story begins in both rural areas, where economic reforms de-collectivizing agriculture were carried out, and in urban areas where Special Economic Zones (SEZ) allowed foreign corporations to set up manufacturing factories. With labor freed up from rural areas as productivity increased and the lure of higher wages in cities grew stronger with more and more FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), mass migration to the cities

¹² "China's Internal Migrants." Council on Foreign Relations. www.cfr.org/china/chinas-internal-migrants/p12943 (accessed December 3, 2011).

followed, but not without lagging policy adjustments concerning the huge economic-induced migration.

Even today as migrant workers from rural areas account for 40 percent of the urban labor force, the *hukou* or housing registration system has denied them many of the benefits received by urban residents, contributing not only to inequality, but discrimination and segregation within urban societies.¹³ Even with the CCP's recent attempts to make the urban hukou more accessible, it remains available only to the wealthiest of migrant workers, creating but more divisions in urban society, stratifying the migrant worker class. Hukou troubles aside, migrant workers face a myriad of problems in transition to urban areas; according to the China Labor Bulletin (CLB), a Hong Kong-based NGO, "Migrant workers in general, and female migrants in particular, who generally work in low-paid, labor-intensive sectors, are often subjected to long overtime hours, poor or unsafe working conditions and frequently are owed back wages by employers."¹⁴

How industrial restructuring and economic reforms have brought about growing labor unrest has been well documented by UCLA professor Ching Kwan Lee in her book *Against the Law*, focusing on comparative analysis of workers in the north and south and their divulging approaches to labor activism. And while her conclusions that labor activism has yet to reach the full out solidarity based—organizing necessary for full fledged independent trade unions to develop independently by Chinese laborers, the

¹³ Fan, Cindy. "The Elite, the Natives, and the Outsiders: Migration and Labor Market Segmentation in Urban China." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 1 (2002): 103-124.

¹⁴ ""Dagongmei" - Female Migrant Labourers | CLB." Home | CLB. <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/3448/print> (accessed December 5, 2011).

recent labor shortage adds new light to the prospects of the development of labor-based civil society.¹⁵

At the intersectional points of oppression, the Muslim Hui migrant laborer also stands at the edge of the prospects for developing civil society in China.

Push and Pull Factors for Migration: Kunming as a 'Pull' City

Although rural to urban migration is hardly unique to China, the sheer mass of migrants, the unique restrictive 'hukou' housing registration separating urban and rural dwellers and the rapid economic growth of China as well as fast-changing social relations economic reforms in the 70s has made rural to urban migration an intriguing and contemporary topic in trying to understand present-day China's economy and society. The development of urban centers and the resultant rural drain have had additional consequences given China's long history as an agricultural society; social relations between family members, occupational shifts and lifestyle preferences are all to be expected in China's era of rapid modernization, industrialization and urbanization. Key to this development are the laborers who have been building the new China. They flood cities on the lure of jobs, education prospects and 'modern' living, wishing to take part in contemporary China's immense wealth as seen from their rural TVs. This group has been key in China's rise economically as an being an export-based nation, relying on cheap, low-skilled labor to compete at a comparative advantage with other developing nations.

¹⁵ Bradsher, Keith. "An Independent Labor Movement Stirs in China - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/business/global/11strike.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed December 5, 2011).

From 1949-1978, China operated on a socialist system of economics—almost all aspects of Chinese citizens lives were administered by the government including housing, food, consumption and labor, all were government-regulated. With Deng Xiaopeng’s economic reforms in the 1970s, all of this would change.

The first economic reforms took place in the countryside—in 1978, farmers were allowed to allocate their own production of food, freeing up labor from the farms. Since 1958, and the beginning of the hukou system¹⁶ the Chinese government has worked to manage the flow of labor. There are generally two ways to divide migrants to the cities, those with local residency rights, or hukou migrants, and those without local residency rights, non-hukou migrants. The hukou fulfills the purpose as an ‘internal passport.’ This allows the government to control mobility through exclusion of benefits. The urban hukou brings with it advantages such as access to local social services and has to be applied for. The non-hukou population is more often called the ‘floating population’ because of their mobility; they will often work in the city for one season and return home to harvest crops in the rural areas the next. The floating population is lower on the urban social hierarchy, working doing more tedious low-skill labor jobs such as construction or in factories. The implications for these migrant workers as they come to the city are unemployment and poverty as well as putting stresses on already overburdened social welfare systems. Finding affordable housing has become a growing concern as well as accommodating the children of migrant workers in terms of education. While urbanization has made China wealthy off the backs of many low-wage laborers producing products sold globally, the living conditions of migrant workers and the

¹⁶ Zhang, Li. *Strangers in the city: reconfiguration of space, power, and social networks within China's floating population*. Stanford: Stanford Press, 2001.

inability to get by has pushed many migrants to the limits. The system has created pressure on those with rural hukous to return to the country, even as the city offers more in terms of jobs and wealth and the rural areas are increasingly deplete of populations. “It is very problematic,”¹⁷ said Professor He Jinsong, a researcher at Yunnan Social Sciences Academy with a focus on migrations studies. “For people without skills from the country, and especially their kids when they are born in the city but do not have an urban hukou card. For them a cycle of poverty is likely.” A migrant from Sichuan that works at a hair salon that is not an urban hukou card holder described:

“The life in the village is very difficult, so I came to Kunming to find work. If you are young it is a little easier to have a job, but if you are older then it gets very difficult. If I have an apartment then I can get an urban hukou, but right now that is impossible (too expensive). I am just happy to be in the city because here I can find a job. In the village there are none, no possibilities.”¹⁸

The experiences of Kunming’s non-Hui and Hui migrant workers confirm that undertaking migrant labor, regardless of ethnicity is wrought with challenges. On an individual basis, the challenges vary—discrimination based on religion for the Hui but with a community safety net found in the Islamic community, and discrimination based primarily on migrant worker status for non-Hui workers but with dependency on survival based on personal connections developed in the city.

Economic reforms and neoliberal policies since the 1970s have opened up a huge demand for labor at first on the eastern seaboard and increasingly inward to central cities as well. As a once relatively stable, rural agriculturally based society, China has seen a

¹⁷ He, Jinsong. Interview by author. Personal interview. Coffeeshop, October 13, 2011.

¹⁸ Li, Xiaojie. Interview by author. Personal interview. Salon on Wenlin Jie, November 20, 2011.

dramatic rush to the cities. While still majority rural, the increasing urbanization has had drastic social consequences for people all over China; the villages that are left to deal with a disappearing youth as they migrate to the cities in search of work, the cities that deal with an influx of strangers unaccustomed to urban life or culture, and finally the migrants themselves, who hold back homesickness and adjustment difficulties in favor of greater job opportunities in unfamiliar cities.

Kunming is one of those cities. Absorbing migrants from all over Yunnan and much of Western and Central China, Kunming has become a bustling city of over 6 million residents and climbing, with non-permanent residents (primarily migrant workers) accounting for over 1 million.¹⁹ Yunnan ranks first among Chinese provinces in terms of the number of ethnic minorities; diversity has made ethnic minority-based tourism a big industry and moneymaker. Ethnic minorities make up a sizeable portion of the Kunming population, many of them migrants from poorer rural areas coming to Kunming in search of their piece of the new China wealth pie.

Who are the Hui?

“ All Hui under Heaven are on family” - a commonly cited quote among Kunming’s Hui

“天下回回是一家“

¹⁹ "Kunming Population: Population Density, Statistics, People living in Kunming." China Tours 2011, Tour Packages, Vacations, Local Travel Agency & Tour Operator Trusted. <http://www.chinatouronline.com/china-travel/kunming/kunming-facts/kunming-population.html> (accessed December 2, 2011)

The Hui ethnic minority is the third of largest of Chinese 55 ethnic minorities numbering at over 9 million.²⁰ The Hui use Mandarin as the official language and share many Chinese customs, thus reinforcing the commonly held belief that they are among the more integrated minorities in Chinese society. The Hui are descendants of the Persian and Arab traders and are one of 10 ethnic minority groups that practice Islam. Different from other Islamic practicing minorities found primarily on the border of Central Asia, the Hui are found all over China, particularly in cities. The ethnic category of the Hui was used by the commission on identifying ethnic minorities primarily as a catch all for any Muslims that did not have their own other language (such as the Dungan), unlike those with their own such as the the Uigur, Kazak, Tadjik, Uzbek, Kirghiz, Baoan, Salar, Dongxiang, and Tatar, who all predominately practice Islam. The Hui are unique in that although some have physical characteristics that differ from the general Chinese populace (particularly on the bordering areas of Central Asia), and that they generally speak the language of whatever populace they live in (most commonly Mandarin), the majority of the Hui are physically and linguistically indistinguishable from the Han.²¹ They are largely an urban minority, making up the biggest ethnic minority in China's largest cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, but are in competition as the primarily minority China's border provinces where ethnic minorities are more common, such as in Yunnan. Although wide spread over China, the Hui primarily come from Ningxia, Gansu, Henan, Xinjiang ,Qinghai, Guizhou and Yunnan, which has the sixth largest Hui population.²²

²⁰ Shoujiang, Mi, and You Jia. *Islam in China*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004.

²¹ Caffrey, Kevin N.. *China's Muslim frontier: empire, nation, and transformation in Yunnan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

²² Ibid.

In recent years, the growing importance of Kunming , the capital of Yunnan, as a center of life and work in greater southwestern China has attracted more and more migrant workers, the Hui among them. How do these Hui migrant workers experiences compare to those of other ethnic minorities? What unique challenges are presented to the Hui specifically? What are their advantages? In this section I will examine the unique situation of the Hui migrants to Kunming, shedding light on the role religion has in adjusting to the city in everything from finding a job to creating a sense of community.

Discrimination and Community: The Experiences of Migrant Hui Laborers in Kunming

The Dual Function of the Mosque: Religious and community center

For Hui laborers arriving in Kunming, the first stop is often the mosque. Home to 6 well-known historical mosques as well as other smaller mosques, Kunming has a vibrant Muslim community, albeit one that has seen its traditional neighborhood largely demolished. One such mosque, the Shuncheng mosque sits in what was once the center point of a large Muslim quarter of the city, the majority of which was recently demolished as Kunming's rapid development has replaced it with modern skyscrapers and shopping complexes. In addition to the mosques is a nearby, a Hui-serving Middle School on the same street anchors out what is one of the last remainders of the old Muslim community and one of the last old streets in Kunming. The functions of the mosque are varied, but its core purpose is to serve as a religious and community center.

Hui restaurants that are heavily concentrated in the area serve as another place for public discourse. On an official level, Kunming also hosts the Yunnan Branch of the Islam Association of China, founded in 1984 and with an office is in the Shuncheng Mosque complex. As far as open areas for discussion and community development however, Hui residents are far more likely to be discussing current events in one of the many ‘Qingzhen’ restaurants located near the mosque or in the open square of the mosque itself.

From the mosque, new arrivals are able to access a number of services, most importantly information on the “daily functions of life: eating, living, and working.”²³ From the informal gatherings of long-time residents and those newly arrived, to the students that fill the classroom with hopes of learning Arabic, the Shuncheng mosque complex feels worlds (and at time decades) away from the new modern shopping and apartment complexes nearby. The mosque as a community center brings together Hui from around the neighborhood and provides a crucial centerpiece to a Hui population that is increasingly being spread out over the city following the loss of much of the Old Muslim town. It is here that Hui who have just arrived meet native or long-time Kunming Hui, easing the adjustment pains, many of which are not only based on the extraordinary distance traveled, but that of the rural to urban culture shock. Although from an official standpoint mosques serve the religious needs, they also extend themselves into the sphere of public services in assisting with labor, housing and general adjustment in a way that is exclusive to the Hui Muslims. These services, traditionally provided by the Chinese government from 1949-1978 but significantly reduced by the diminishing role of the state

²³ Sha, Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Shuncheng Mosque, November 12, 2011.

due to economic reforms, have become important aspects of faith-based institutions stepping in where the government either does not care or lacks funds to assist migrant laborers.

Cultural Consumption Trials

“To the ruler, the people are heaven; to the people, food is heaven” - Ancient Chinese Proverb

Food plays an important role in Chinese culture. This is a cultural trait generally shared with the Hui people, but with an important difference: like Muslims around the world, the Hui eat halal or in China what is known as *qingzhen* (清真), or pure foods. For Muslims in China, the search for such ‘pure’ food varies in difficulty; in Kunming, an abundance of Hui restaurants have been established and serves both a Hui and non-Hui clientele. The biggest culinary challenge is in fact the search for pork-free (and thus lard-free) foods outside of the Hui household or restaurant. As a result of the CCP’s official stance regarding and respecting minorities, universities in areas with high Muslim populations have accommodate Muslim students with the addition of a separate canteen. This accommodation however has not always gone smoothly, as one Hui I spoke to expressed frustration:

“When I started out at school in 1999, there was no Muslim canteen. My Muslim roommates and I went to ask the administrators. They were reluctant, but we pushed on, because being Muslim means eating *qingzhen* food. We had no place to eat. The university did not understand us. We were persistent and

we kept asking and eventually they set up a small part of the canteen for Muslim students. We thought this was a big improvement but later learned that the cooks preparing the food were not Muslim, and not versed on how to properly cook *qingzhen* food.”²⁴

Even though the Han have lived by the side of the Hui for centuries and most Han understand that Hui do not eat pork, consideration and true understanding of this concept is remarkably still lacking, evidence of a larger cultural disconnect between the Hui and the Han. One Hui student described this difficulty:

“In class our Han teacher was explaining why Hui people do not eat pork. She replied that because Islam was from Saudi Arabia, and the environment in Saudi Arabia was too harsh to raise pigs. There is little willingness on the part of Han to understand Hui people and customs. Marx, Lenin and Einstein, all of them geniuses admired by the Han, did not eat pork, yet Han people still don’t understand.”²⁵

For Hui with an understanding of Islam and Hui heritage, the problem has led to awkward and at times difficult dealings with the Han majority, even in the supposedly more liberal university setting. If even enlightened professors are unable to speak accurately on the traditions of the Hui, then the prospects for the everyday Han to understand the Hui minority are slim. Of the 10 Han I spoke to regarding the Hui tradition of not eating pork, not one responded correctly.²⁶

Smoke-free in the tobacco province

²⁴ Hu, Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Shuncheng Mosque, November 5, 2011.

²⁵ Xu, Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Shuncheng Mosque, November 11, 2011.

²⁶ Brief questions asked about the Hui with Han participants took place from November 8- November 30, 8 participants while in Kunming and 2 while in Lijiang. The most common answer was that the Hui had special reverence toward the pig, either as sacred or as an ancestor.

Although culinary-based, the cultural importance of such consumption habits in China can hardly be understated. The preparation and consumption of food in China are done communally and with thousands of years of history and culture behind it. To understand the cultural barrier that food separates for the Hui and the Han majority then cannot be fully understood without a understanding the extremely high regard the Han Chinese place on food and drink as essential components in Chinese culture.

In addition to abstaining from pork, the Hui generally abstain from cigarettes and alcohol (although the younger generations are more likely to decide for themselves whether or not to continue the traditional abstention), two important parts of Chinese culinary culture. In a country where 70% of the men smoke and smoking is seen as a social custom, the usage of tobacco adds but another cultural barrier between the Hui and the Han. Yunnan is in fact the tobacco capital of China; for Hui college students in Kunming where over 40% of college students smoke, the problem is especially pronounced.²⁷) Smoking is not only important economically (revenues from tobacco production contributed 50% of total tax revenues collected by the Yunnan Provincial Government²⁸ but importantly as a masculine social custom. From a traditionally top-down government influenced-society, anthropologist Khorman notes that the image of smoking has been portrayed to the Chinese people has been that of the “PRC’s largely

²⁷ "Kunming Yunnan Tobacco-difficult-40% of smokers college students." Free Paper. <http://www.f-paper.com/?i1029502-Kunming-Yunnan-Tobacco-difficult-40%-of-smokers-college-students> (accessed December 1, 2011).

²⁸ ("Tobacco Atlas Online." *Tobacco Atlas Online*. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.tobaccoatlas.org/>>

male leadership exchanging and smoking cigarettes,” leaving the custom of smoking tobacco as an one of utmost social acceptance and masculine custom.²⁹

Hui determination based on visual appearance

Besides from what they eat and drink, dress serves as another divisive issue for some Hui, as younger urban generations are more likely to trade in traditional Islamic gear for mainstream Chinese or western style. Many Hui continue to wear traditional Islamic clothing when attending mosque, resembling their brethren in the Middle East despite geographical and cultural differences. Outside of the mosque however, the Hui population in Kunming may look just like any other Han Chinese. With the exception of the donning of a taqiyah (cap for men) or a headscarf, the Hui are inseparable from the Han based on looks alone. Many prefer to wear the cap and headscarf as a sign of Islamic heritage, the head covering being the most obvious visual marker of the Hui in China. In accordance with the teaching of the Prophet Mohammad, the Koran calls on women to cover themselves modestly, ranging from a full on hijab to the simple headdress, the most popular option among Kunming’s Hui women. The Prophet Muhammed once said that "The distinction between us and the polytheists is the turbans over our caps,"³⁰ and in today’s modern Kunming it can be said that the cap instead differentiates the Han and the Hui.

²⁹ Khorman, Andrew. "Depoliticizing Tobacco’s Exceptionality: Male Sociality, Death and Memory-Making Among Chinese Cigarette Smokers." *The China Journal* 58 (2007): 86. Print.

³⁰ "Praying Salah bare-headed is AGAINST the Sunnah!." Central Mosque. www.central-mosque.com/fiqh/bareheadagsunnah.htm (accessed December 1, 2011).

The Consequences of Different Customs: Misunderstanding and Discrimination

What do the above consumption-based cultural differences as well as dress differences between the Han and Hui have on the social adjustment of the Hui into urban Chinese life, and furthermore what are there implications on labor?

For many Hui looking for work, these cultural factors come into play, as well as some factors that are beyond their control, namely historical and media-based influence. Many Hui reported feeling discrimination against by potential Han employers. While casual relations in public are generally ones of mutual respect between the Han and the Hui, their shared past has been one of turbulence. Though historical, awareness of past Muslims rebellions, particularly the Panthay Rebellion in Yunnan, is an important part of Yunnan's history. These past histories, as well as well as media coverage of well-known contemporary issues (notably the Uighur minority separatist movement in Xinjiang) have led to discrimination. Without wearing traditional Muslim dress, it is possible to get a job without an employer knowing that you are Hui, but while wearing Muslim dress, the situation becomes more complex. The influence of state and global media in recent years has hardly brought about positive perceptions of Muslims globally. One remarkable connection to American media has been coverage of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and the following War on Terror. The incident was widely reported throughout the globe as well as the global chase for Osama bin Laden. The connections of the worlds 'Muslim' 'war on terror' and 'osama bin laden' as paraded prominently by the American media has had effects far beyond the national borders of the US. When

discussing employment with one young Muslim Hui about finding work in Kunming, this global influence of media was exemplified as she quipped:

“If I were a hijab I will have no way to get a job. They will think I am a terrorist, like Osama bin laden. This is what Han people see on the news and they believe it.”³¹

Her bitter experience about job prospects are shared by other Hui interviewed that said that their chances of getting a job were smaller when competing with other Han applicants at Han owned businesses. As much of the old Muslim town has been torn down, so too has much of the traditional middle class livelihoods usually occupied by the Hui as a result of foreign multinational corporations having set up eager to take advantage of the growing domestic consumer base of urban China. The Wangfujin complex is one such example, sprawling carelessly across the street from the Shuncheng Mosque. The two sides of the street contrast sharply; Wangfujin being home to Starbucks and Hagen Dazs, and characterized as a popular shopping spot for well-off Kunming residents, while the other side sits the mosque, traditional butcheries, *qingzhen* restaurants and an Islamic school. During the day one can buy Islamic art, dress and food in a cluster of shops as well as spices from other provinces directly outside the mosque gate. The vibrancy of colors, headdresses and foods from far off, clash with the concrete, clean and ultra modern shopping complex and give visitors the impression that one is not in a single city but two distinct cities.

³¹ Ma, Xiaojie. Interview by author. Personal interview. Hui Restaurant on Wenlin Jie, November 10, 2011.

The removal of most of the old Muslim neighborhood to make way for the new high-end shopping district and rapid modernization has narrowed the traditional job opportunities for many incoming Hui in their traditional occupations, while at the same time causing the Hui to be spread thinner across Kunming. With the destruction of most of the Old Muslim town, many Hui in Kunming have still managed to do much of the jobs they do in other urban areas: selling grilled meat, working with jewelry, leather work and working in small restaurants, all jobs whose tradition come from an Islamic custom that placed restrictions on diet and hygiene. However, overall these relatively well-paying skill-based crafts have in the immediate vicinity of the traditional old Muslim town been replaced by the service industry jobs in the shopping mall and at fast food chains. Herein lies a discriminatory issue in that much of this kind of work is preferential to the Han because of visual component to the job (i.e, the homogenous look of the Han Chinese, devoid of Islamic headgear). To work in these service sector job requires an outward appearance that is familiar and acceptable to most Han. Thus, the observation that wearing a hijab or taqiyah can be a detriment in finding a job seems only fitting in the need to match the market of the customers looking to the homogenous, globalized and repetitive nature of the 21st century service industry that China has embraced since economic liberalization.

This seeming rebuttal of the emerging service industry to the Hui has made their traditional skill-based jobs all the more important as a source of livelihood. What kind of jobs to the Hui still find? “Only the hardest jobs,” voiced one Hui meat seller, a sentiment echoed by an official at the Shuncheng Mosque as well. Most popular nightspots in Kunming, from Kundu to Nanping Jie all have an abundance of Hui kebab sellers,

working long into the night. At this job, Hui are not only acceptable in wearing the cap, but expected to. As individual entrepreneurs, many with their own capital (grill and utensils) these Hui have carved a niche in urban labor. The traditional jobs such as jewelry work and butchering lamb and beef do however appear more and more at risk as neoliberal economic reforms increasingly open China up to foreign investment and as rapid paced modernization outpaces traditional skill-based jobs. In its replacement, many migrant worker Hui have found work in the same field as many migrant other migrants, low-skill service jobs, working in factories, picking up trash, and construction of China's relentless building projects.

Migration to the City and the Search for Work: A Han and Hui Comparison

The Hui migrant labor experience, although mired in discrimination but also characterized by an Islamic network ready to accept Hui from afar into the community and assists with housing, food, and labor provides a contrast to the conventional experience of migrant labors from rural China. On finding a job in the city, one non-Hui migrant worker named 'Wang' described her experience as one initially lacking community:

I have to 'run around' to find jobs. At first, I did not know anyone, I just had to ask around and hope I could find work. I found a job helping a family do chores, then one at the restaurant then selling various things on the street. Even though I have been here for a long time (over 20 years) I still run around to find a job. But now, I have friends here they help me find work, they have connections. Finding a job is very difficult.³²

³² Wang, Taitai. Interview by author. Personal interview. Outside of Yunnan Nationalities University, November 14, 2011.

Work connections through friends and family has been a crucial aspect for all migrant workers looking for work, both of which many Hui find more accessible than non-Hui via the Islamic community. Informal connections and *guanxi*(relationships) prove extremely useful, especially for those who have just arrived. Many migrants look to those that have come from the same town (*Laojia* 老家), forming an instant connection based on geography. For Hui migrants, the Islamic community then has proven to be an advantage compared to other migrant workers. A Hui originally from Gansu named ‘Liu,’ who started out selling Islamic dress and has now owns a store on Shuncheng road describes his experience as one with minimal difficulty:

It was easier for me to get a job then maybe others. If you don’t know anyone, of course it is difficult. I didn’t know anyone here, but because we are Muslims we always help other Muslims. It is one of the three important parts of Islam. Kunming is a special place, it is very diverse, lots of people from other provinces come here to find work. It is good for my son to grow up here, here he also can learn Arabic. “All Muslims are one family”,³³

In addition to owning the shop on Shuncheng Lu, the shop owner is a devout Muslim, who proudly told me that he “prays 5 times a day” and is committed to his son receiving a proper Islamic education. His Muslim identity then has helped to establish an extensive community network, one that includes the mosque, the school, and other Hui restaurants and shops. In a word, he has become a community member, invested in his neighborhood and the institutions that define it. By contrast, although she has been in the

³³ Liu, Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Shuncheng Lu Islamic Accessories Store, November 12, 2011.

city for an equal amount of time, 'Wang' remarks that she has no serious attachments to any neighborhood institutions. Getting her daughter to college and making money are the most important. While this is also important to 'Liu', his spirituality plays a large role in his assignment of priorities, and his Islamic faith has stressed the need for a more active role in civic life and concern for community.

The ability to connect with people willing to help you, as well as the ability to make friends and develop a sense of community place a unique role in Chinese urban labor relations and has an impact on the success of finding a job or even whether the migrant decides to remain in the city. More than one migrant described failures to do so, citing "loneliness and homesickness", as well as an inability to adjust to urban "Kunming life." At the end of the day in a strange city without friends or work, many migrants simply wish to return home.

In addition, migrant workers generally face discrimination from city natives, remarking on their "backwardness" and their clinging to "village" ways. Here it is a clash of culture not just between urban and rural, but what some see as modern and old. The peculiar history of the Hui has lent itself to additional stereotypes. One fellow Han student at Yunnan Nationalities University told me that "Hui are greedy and only care about money, some will even go as far as to theft," while another Han student countered her in saying that the Hui "aren't especially greedy, but just are very clever at making money."³⁴

Islam Today: Uyghur in the West and the Implication for Kunming's Muslims

³⁴ Feng Xiaojie, Lin Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Yunnan Nationalities University courtyard, November 14, 2011.

While the Hui are China's most populous Muslim minority, the Uyghur may very have the most notorious reputation. Living primarily in Xinjiang, the largest administrative district in China occupying a full 1/6 of China's land, the Uyghur are a Turkic people also found in neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Having not completely consolidated jurisdiction over the entire Xinjiang area into what is today's Peoples Republic of China until the 19th century under the Qing Dynasty, many Uyghur feel they have been wronged by the government and have legitimate claims to the land.³⁵ With no less than three revolts since the mid-19th century,³⁶ the Uyghur have recently resurfaced in international news after the July 2009³⁷ riots that killed over estimates over 200-600 people, the majority being Han. What started from an ethnic conflict between Han and Uyghur coworkers at a toy factory resulting in 2 Uyghur being killed in Guangdong, erupted into protests in the streets of Urumqi, the capital of Xinxiang thousands of Uyghur and culminating breaking out into a riot with looting and killing. Fueled by the July unrest, late August and early September saw a series of syringe attacks³⁸ blamed on Islamic extremists on civilians. In reaction to the attacks, thousands of residents held protests for several days, resulting in the death of five people. Closer to home an the TIP claimed responsibility for a bus explosion killing one and injuring 10 in Kunming during the run-up to the Olympic games in Beijing . This act of

³⁵ Eranosian, Nancy. "Chinese National Unity vs. Uyghur Separatism: Can Information and Communication Technologies Integrated with a Customized Economic Development Plan Help Avoid a Cultural Collision?." 2005. Tufts University. Digital Collections and Archives. Medford, MA. <http://hdl.handle.net/10427/35274> Available from Tufts Digital Library, Digital Collections and Archives, Medford, MA. <http://hdl.handle.net/10427/35274>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "BBC NEWS | Asia-Pacific | Riots engulf Chinese Uighur city." BBC News - Home. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8137824.stm> (accessed December 4, 2011)

³⁸ Ibid.

terrorism was accompanied by a threat of “Jihad in Yunnan,” even as the Chinese government in an attempt to regain stability and calm fears denied that it was indeed a terrorist attack.

While the unrest in Xinjiang may be physically hundreds of miles away from Kunming, and ethnically different from the Hui, my interview research unexpectedly brought the events directly into the lives of the the Hui migrant laborers looking for jobs in Kunming. The employment discrimination they faced by stereotypes as “Islamic extremists” is well felt. The repression of the Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjaing as a sort of ‘China’s War on Terror’ has had indirect impacts on the Hui. Who for many of the Han Chinese are the only Muslims they have encountered. This stereotyping is then amplified by global media, particularly American produced regarding the US War on Terror in the Middle East. With access to television and online media like never before, anti-Muslim propaganda has reached audiences with an unforeseen reach. Although American news broadcasts are not nearly as popular as American music or movies, their influence can also be strong. When discussing Chinatowns in the US and the generally favorable attitude to Chinese people in the US with my Chinese host mother in Kunming, she was quick to remark that of course Chinese were liked in the US, especially because they were “not like those Arabs!” continuing by gesturing with her hands the September 11, twin tower attack. The subtle influences of global media (and state media) reporting have helped to develop a climate of prejudice towards Muslims that I encountered all too often among Kunming’s non-Hui urban residents. While not to generalize Han attitudes towards Hui, it must be addressed that a strong prejudice does exist among the many of the Han, having particularly negative effects in the scenario of Hui applying for jobs

when the employer is Han and stemming too from what they see as preferential affirmative action programs and other advantages given to ethnic minorities. Although perhaps unintentional on the part of reporters, it is a true testament of the broad and influential reach of globalization that the slanted reporting of American news media³⁹ in New York City can have an effect on a Hui Muslim's job application success prospects in Kunming.

2004 Hui Migrant Riots in Henan

Ethnic and religious discrimination, and their general economic marginalization have been a real source of conflict in China, and not just in Xinjiang, as many believe. In Henan Province in October 2004 an ethnic battle between Han Chinese and Muslim Hui minorities using farm implements left over 100 dead, including 15 policemen, by one account. Hui men often complain that they and other Muslim minorities have few "real jobs," and are limited to owning restaurants in the local "Minority Street," where they serve patrons kebabs and bread. Started when a Hui refused to reimburse a Han after a traffic incident, the inferior economic opportunities available to the migrant Hui. Beginning with a small conflict divulged into full on riots surfaced the marginalized social and economic position. Can this violence, born out of injustice and discrimination be transformed into more meaningful development of civil society? Although a tragic incident, it also demonstrates their awareness of their disadvantaged position, an issue that would serve as a powerful impetus for developing civil society within the community. The case of the Hui

³⁹ "Fox News attacks prominent Muslim leaders as a "'Who's Who' of controversial figures'". Media Matters. mediamatters.org/research/201011120032 (accessed December 1, 2011)

riots in Henan show that the frustration is there, but what will matter for effective development of civil society will take self-organization, a tool they already have utilized in their religious organization.

Prospects for Migrant Labor Hui Participation in the Development of Civil Society

What is civil society? According to the London School of Economics, civil society refers to the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values.⁴⁰ Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development of non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups. Civil society, while lacking a universal definition, has almost universally been thought of in the context as a promoter of democracy. In addition, New Left scholars have promoted civil society as having “a key role in defending people against the state and the market and in asserting the democratic will to influence the state.”⁴¹

China's drive in the direction of economic reform and modernization in the past 30 years has shaped new opportunities for citizens to participate. While the government took care of all services from 1949-78, the new neoliberal policies have made it so the Chinese people are seeking ways to organize their own institutions to respond to social

⁴⁰ "Centre for Civil Society." London School of Economics. www2.lse.ac.uk/CCS/home.aspx (accessed December 1, 2011)

⁴¹ Ziadeh, Radwan . "Struggling for Civil Society." Lecture, The Struggle for Civil Society in the Arab World from Stanford University, Stanford, May 12, 2010.

needs and express grievances and concerns in a way which influences the policy-making process. Crucial have been the influx of NGOs that serve needs on everything from education to the environment.⁴² However, the most important of civil society institutions have been those that challenge the fundamental power relationship as opposed to those that are charity based in nature. Two of the most agitating elements of civil society, as witnessed dramatically in the Solidarity movement in Poland⁴³ and recently in the Arab Spring⁴⁴ uprisings has been those related to trade unionism and religious institutions.

What role do the urban Hui laborers have in developing civil society in China? Although unaddressed in academic circles, the unique experiences of the urban Hui and in light of the events in the Arab Spring have both positioned the Hui to play a potentially large role in the continuing and exciting development of civil society in the world's largest non-democratic regime.

Migrant worker mentality

Many of the urban Hui are migrants, coming from poorer, rural areas in search of better job prospects.⁴⁵ While this group is without a doubt one of the more marginalized, there has been an increasing militancy and demanding of rights by migrant workers in China

⁴² Young, Nick. "Nonprofits in China » NGOs and Civil Society in China." Harvard Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations. <http://hausercenter.org/chinanpo/2009/05/ngos-and-civil-society-in-china/> (accessed December 4, 2011).

⁴³ Frentzel-Zagorska, Janina. "Civil Society in Poland and Hungary." *Soviet Studies* 42, no. 4 (1990): 759-777.

⁴⁴ "Islam and the Arab Spring - Encounter - ABC Radio National (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)." ABC.net.au. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/islam-and-the-arab-spring/2915022> (accessed December 4, 2011)

⁴⁵ "Ningxia Hui." United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/chinadata/ningxia.htm> (accessed December 4, 2011)

specifically in retaliation to this marginalization and social and political exclusion. Feeling directly the consequences of growing inequality between the rural and urban divide, but also in the urban areas they settle, along with the rural hukou bias, the lack of socially mobile jobs, they have come out as one of the strongest demanders of wage increases and reform of social welfare.⁴⁶

The Islamic Advantage: Established Institutions and Community

The Islamic community centers and mosques are some of China's oldest and most established realms of civil society⁴⁷ providing a guarded social space that can work as a buffer government influence. Although Islam in China is highly regulated,⁴⁸ the realm of the mosque, especially those farther away from Beijing, has gained a degree of unofficial autonomy that situates it as a potentially strong faith-based organization in the development of civil society. By providing a space in which Muslims not only gather for worship, but also speak about community issues even delving into politics, the mosque is then one of the few public-community based centers in China where such mass dialogue can be conducted. In the development of civil society, Islamic centers such as the mosque have then become crucial for the dissemination of ideas and the empowering of

⁴⁶ Dongfang, Han. "China's main union is yet to earn its job." China Labor Bulletin. www.clb.org.hk/en/node/101085 (accessed December 1, 2011).

⁴⁷ "What is the role of Mosque? By Muhammed Khako ." Al-Jazeera: Cross-Cultural Understanding. <http://www.ccun.org/Opinion%20Editorials/2008/April/2%20o/What%20is%20the%20role%20of%20Mosque%20By%20Muhammed%20Khako.htm> (accessed December 4, 2011)

⁴⁸ Wong, Edward. "Wary of Islam, China Tightens a Vise of Rules - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/world/asia/19xinjiang.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed December 4, 2011)

community members in having a stake in their community. This discussion in an institutional setting, though not necessarily challenging the state influence, inevitably questions policies in a way that gatherings in cafes and restaurants that lack the approval and organizational structure that discussions in the mosque have.

Spiritual growth and responsibility in the context of the atheist CCP

In the CCP's careful strategy of granting religious "freedom"⁴⁹ while officially being though state sanctioned the officially atheist Chinese government has pacified and stabilized the hundreds of millions of religious Chinese citizens. By granting limited autonomy, the CCP has allowed religion to be legally permissible while still under the eye of the communist party. The states influence on Islamic institutions vary, from limitations on the number of pilgrims available to go to the Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia (with official state accompaniment), to the fact that many longtime clerics have been forced to enroll in Chinese patriotic programs and undergo annual licensing procedure.⁵⁰ The Chinese government only allows mosques that have been sanctioned by the Chinese Islamic Association, a body that acts as another government entity intrusion into spiritual life. In an example of the kind of religious freedom the CCP promotes, in 1995, the Chinese Islamic Association decreed: "No scripture studies or Arabic classes

⁴⁹ Constitution of the People's Republic of China - The U.S. Constitution Online - USConstitution.net." Index Page - The U.S. Constitution Online - USConstitution.net. <http://www.usconstitution.net/china.html#Article36> (accessed December 4, 2011)

⁵⁰ "Muslims in China." Facts and Details. factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=82&catid=3&subcatid=8 (accessed December 1, 2011)

are to be held without permission.”⁵¹ Religious freedom then, is a narrow concept devised by the government to maintain stability in a changing social and economic climate.

Despite the official government regulations pressed onto Islam, after visiting the mosque I found that criticism of the government and policies were fairly open. Many people were more than happy to voice their opinions on the government and their own marginalization as Muslims. Sitting in the safety of the walls of the mosque, after interviewing a group of elderly men in the mosque square, a Islamic worker described his frustration:

The government does not understand us and they make very little attempts to understand Muslims. It is our Islamic duty to attend the Haj, but the government cheats us out. They limit who can go, and then they raise the prices so that few can afford it. This is oppression of our religious duties and just another example of the corruption of the CCP.”⁵²

Such critical discourse about the communist party in a mosque that was sanctioned by the government and led by an imam also sanctioned by the government, shows that despite the governments efforts to maintain its control over religious life, that for many Muslims the strong spiritual beliefs in Islam and the feeling of safety in the mosque area are important pieces of any development of civil society in China.

Labor and Social Discrimination: The Backlash

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Wu, Xiansheng. Interview by author. Personal interview. Shuncheng Lu Mosque, November 18, 2011.

The discrimination faced by Hui laborers, as both Muslims and as migrant workers adds another element in the prospects for developing civil society. Social and economic pressure has in the other countries been a primary force for the development of social movements.⁵³ Although the Chinese government has put increasing effort into maintaining labor stability by raising wages, the recent labor shortage and outbreak of strikes in China has signaled evidence that a ‘Lewisian moment’ is fast approaching, the economic point in which industrial wages begin to rise quickly at the point when the supply of surplus labor from the countryside tapers. This has particular complexities in China, where independent trade unions are illegal giving workers few outlets to voice grievances, while migrant labors especially have become more and more vocal in expressing desire to join an independent trade union. Independent trade unions are one of the most crucial components in civil society—both empowering workers to democratically elect their union representatives and at the same time, allowing workers to begin collectively bargaining, pushing for higher safety standards and wages and thus economic justice as well. Independent trade unions provide an outlet to directly challenge the state-corporate status quo. While independent trade unions are still illegal, the existence of faith-based institutions such as the mosque are important, especially those that serve primarily migrant worker population; for these migrant workers who look to the mosque in assisting with adjustment to the city and look at the mosque-attending community for connections in labor, the mosque takes on the dual role as a religious and community center. While the development of such services into those offered by independent trade unions have not materialized, the changing economic landscape and

⁵³ Mauss, Armand L.. "Social Problems as Social Movements." In *Social problems as social movements*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975. 38-71

the growing number and of upset, discriminated workers without a permanent home in search for a job can potentially open up the services of the religious institutions into a broader reach to address more and more community problems. As labor-related grievances become more and more common, they will become true community problems, and will demand a place to be addressed; the mosque courtyard, an established community space of political discourse and criticism of government and economic discrimination seems like a likely place avenue for these problems to find a home

External Labor and Islam: Civil Society Developments and Challenges to CCP Stability

A key component of the global Islamic community has been the dispersion of Islamic scholars throughout the world. From Egypt to Malaysia, Islamic communities have built increasing solidarity through the building of relationships on the concept of international brotherhood and common religion. China, the country with the eighteenth largest Muslim population with more Muslims than Syria and Malaysia, is no exception. Increasing contact with the greater Islamic world, whether through the facilitation of Arabic study (an important aspiration for those seeking to become imams or obtaining a better understanding of the Koran) or for cultural purposes. With this travel and cultural exchange comes the inevitable development of relationships between Muslims of different nations and the sharing of ideas. This has become a source of worry for the CCP, who regularly deny what they deem as radical imams from preaching in China. However, even the CCP's attempt to control the religious exchange internationally can never be 100% successful. The unique geographic orientation of Islam, one that faces to Mecca in the heart of the Middle East has made a looking towards the Middle East a

religious necessity for Chinese Muslims. While the CCP may see it as a positive point in training translators to meet the needs of diplomacy in dealing with the largest energy-producing region on the planet, they take quite a different stance when regarding the recent political uprising in the region known as the Arab Spring.

Both the Arab Spring, the toppling of multiple governments in a matter of months in Muslim countries beginning with Tunisia and still being waged in Syria and Bahrain today, and the Uyghur riots in Xinjiang have been highly censored through the state-run media and online searches as well by the CCP. Both events have been seen as threats to stability and have been met with disapproval from the central government that has sought to guide China through peaceful, stable economic development. But not even Internet filters and TV censorship can keep the Hui Muslim community in the dark from the democratic Muslim uprisings around the world. The regulation of Islam in China, though strict, has not managed to stop criticisms of the government in their very owned government sanctioned mosques, the community and spiritual center for Hui Muslims. Islam's contribution to the Arab Spring, while debatable to extent is undeniable; Islamic political preaching, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's "Allah is the source of political authority" have proven to have a rousing effect in the toppling of oppressive state regimes in the Middle East.⁵⁴

The Hui, as the largest Muslim population in China have many differences with the Muslims in the Middle East; they are integrated into Chinese society, speak Chinese and generally look Chinese. Chinese people are far more satisfied with their government

⁵⁴ "Islam and the Arab Spring - Encounter - ABC Radio National (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)." ABC.net.au. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/encounter/islam-and-the-arab-spring/2915022> (accessed December 4, 2011)

than Egyptians or Tunisians were, pre-Arab Spring, even if they were unelected. Their identity is that of Chinese Muslims, and despite discrimination, loyalty to the state remains strong. The frustration levels against the state are not as strong, many enjoying official ethnic minority privileges such as being allowed to have more than one child and affirmative action at universities. This has also been a crucial source of conflict for Han and Hui relations as the Han often view their treatment as preferential and unfair. How the CCP remains to stabilize the Muslim population in order to maintain a 'harmonious society' is a development will be a hot topic to watch in the coming years.

Although influence of the Arab Spring has yet to be seen in the form of collective action, social networking and increasing global communication and mobility have been shown to spread ideas through even the most oppressive regimes. Even while influence in the form of collective action remains absent, the beginning development of civil society that has increasingly empowered Chinese citizens to find their own solutions to problems as opposed to state reliance can be viewed as crucial foundation building processes for civil society.

The Chinese government's swift response in censoring Arab Spring related content can be interpreted not only as a method to stamp out any possibilities of labor unrest, but also any Muslim unrest. The pre-emptive and aggressive censorship and subsequent propagandist framing of the events in the Middle East by the CCP demonstrates not only the vulnerability of the CCP, but larger concerns over growing unrest in the country. Whether Hui Muslims or migrant laborers realize it or not, their potential influence on state instability is well noted by the Chinese government, evident

by the sheer speed and comprehensiveness of the media censorship on the Arab Spring. Certainly the dramatic improvements in quality of life economically for the majority of Chinese in the past 30 years have kept any Arab Style-like revolution off the minds of most, but the short-lived Jasmine Spring⁵⁵ protests show that at least some segments of the populations have been pushed to the edge and are willing to seek change through non-traditional methods. While any sort of collective action is not immediately likely, the development of civil society has helped build the foundation for public discourse and criticism of the status quo. The Hui Muslim migrant laborers and their dual stakes as members of both faith-based and labor-based organizations that are fundamental to the development civil society has put them in a prime position in the continuing building of this groundwork. As income inequality and discrimination grow, so too will civil society as it fills the gaps of social problems that the state fails to address. Lacking representative bodies to voice this frustration provides another aspect of life in China in which civil society to cover.

While increasing joblessness and a labor shortage seem contradictory several factors in Chinese society have made such a seemingly conflicting labor market possible.

In 2010, up to 25% of recent college grads were unable to find jobs.⁵⁶ This comes as the result of multiple roots; the government push for more and more college graduates has created a flux of graduates where jobs requiring degrees remain absent. The structure of the Chinese economy, still largely based on the low-wage, low-skill manufacturing

⁵⁵ "China Cracks Down After 'Jasmine Revolution' Protest Call - TIME." *Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2052860,00.html>>.

⁵⁶ "China's Surprising Unemployment Problem - Forbes.com." *Forbes*. <http://www.forbes.com/2010/09/07/china-economy-unemployment-leadership-managing-rein.html> (accessed December 4, 2011).

export-orientation model has led to a serious skill mismatch for graduates. The consequences of the 'only child' generation have given Chinese graduates high expectations as they often benefitted from full devotion of parents resources. Expectations are often met with disappointment upon college graduate and the realization that they will only make marginally more than migrant workers working factory jobs.⁵⁷

While unemployment for college graduates and a labor shortage for migrant workers at first may seem like diverging concerns, both face the future prospect of massive structural unemployment, a condition that is much more difficult to fix than unemployment caused by fiscal crisis. Second generation migrant workers are more likely to make demands, leading to higher and higher wages. These higher wages have also been marked by increasing expectations, ones that will be hard to meet within the current structure of the Chinese economy that relies on cheap exports as a source of growth, thus finding themselves in a similar situation with college graduates. Wage increases, however, have a limit. At the point in which wages outstrip productivity, many migrant workers too will find themselves facing structural unemployment.

Rising unemployment,⁵⁸ dissatisfaction with job prospects in both rural and urban China, increasing poverty among urban populations,⁵⁹ rising inflation,⁶⁰ outsourcing of

⁵⁷ "What Is a College Degree Worth in China? - Room for Debate - NYTimes.com." The New York Times . <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/02/what-is-a-college-degree-worth-in-china> (accessed December 4, 2011)

⁵⁸ JOHNSON, IAN. "China's Migrants See Jobless Ranks Soar - WSJ.com." Business News & Financial News - The Wall Street Journal - Wsj.com. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123359977495740199.html> (accessed December 4, 2011).

⁵⁹ "Urban Poverty in China is on the Increase." Eldis. <http://www.eldis.org/id21ext/u7sh1g1.html> (accessed December 4, 2011).

⁶⁰ "China Steps Up Campaign to Fight Inflation." The New York Times . <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/15/business/15yuan.html> (accessed December 4, 2011).

factory jobs to places with lower labor costs such as Vietnam and Cambodia,⁶¹ and a labor shortage⁶² characterized by rising militancy and an unwillingness to take jobs for wages that do are unsatisfactory has made fear of social unrest a top concern for the CCP.

In the context of labor relations, labor as a source of social instability is a reality that China will grapple with in the coming years. How it leads to developments in civil society has yet to be clearly articulated, although an increasingly frustrated and militant workforce has led to a climate in independent trade unions, crucial components to civil society, has emerged as a demand by laborers. The Hui migrant workers, with an abundance of already established Islam-based community organizations, as recipients of double discrimination as both Muslim minorities and migrant laborers, and finally as a group with strong connections to the Muslim nations that have recently undergone democratic revolutions in the Middle East are thus poised to play a role in the expansion of civil society and the foundation for democratic progress in China.

⁶¹ "Textiles in South-East Asia: Good darning, Vietnam | The Economist." The Economist - World News, Politics, Economics, Business & Finance. <http://www.economist.com/node/18775499> (accessed December 4, 2011).

⁶² "Defying Global Slump, China has Labor Shortage." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/27/business/global/27yuan.html> (accessed December 4, 2011)

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Appendice A: Research Challenges, Triumphs and Experiences

Recommendations for Further Study

Buddhism's role in Social Justice in China

Migrant Laborers and China's one trade union

Government policy towards ethnic minorities as a source of Han-Minority conflict

Islam and social unrest in the PRC

Helpful Contact info:

Professor He Jinsong, a professor on migration at Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences
13888834358

Ma Laoshi, a local expert on the history of the Hui in Kunming

1) Getting access to the Muslim community

As a whole I found the Hui in Kunming to be extremely friendly and willing to speak about their experiences. However, the extent to that I could enter the community and conduct interviews were greatly expanded by a local expert and member of the Hui community, Ma Laoshi. Through his help I could be introduced as an American student interested in the Hui, greatly expanding the number of Hui residents I could speak with. He is a trusted community member, and without him I can't imagine being able to have as many Hui be as comfortable speaking with me. As an American and an outsider, some

Hui were not as comfortable speaking with me. Criticism of the US government's policies in the Middle East was frequently vented towards and at me as an American. Overall however, most Hui understand that I have little control over my governments actions, a situation they can relate to as minority in China.

2) Sensitive Questions

Social unrest in relation to Islam and labor is a highly controversial topic in China. Attempts to probe at this topic brought repeated failure as it made interviewees uncomfortable or even unsafe. To get around this, I learned that the framing of questions was crucial, as well as building a longer relationship before asking these kinds of questions.

3) Looking Muslim (or at least from Xinjiang)

One unexpected advantage I experienced was attributed to my darker skin and wider eye folds—to many Hui and Han Chinese I look like I am from Xinjiang, the home of many Muslims. This was a convenient genetic advantage that I think made the acceptance into the Muslim community smoother, and one I cannot imagine possible if I looked outwardly Caucasian.

My research experience

I feel extremely privileged and grateful to have stayed on the edges of the Hui neighborhood. Daily observations provided me with a great opportunity to understand the life of the urban Hui migrant workers, and their welcome and warm-hearts will be forever

remembered.