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Author(s): Ben Hillman
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THE RISE OF THE COMMUNITY IN RURAL CHINA: VILLAGE POLITICS, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN A HUI HAMLET*

Ben Hillman

The rise of "localism" has been a defining feature of the post-socialist state. Whether from regime collapse or through the introduction of reforms, as the tentacles of the post-socialist states retreated from intimate involvement in daily socio-economic life, the way has been opened for new groups at the local level to assert ownership and control of material resources and social capital. In some parts of the former USSR, the rise of the local led to violent upheavals. While China was mostly spared this, it has still seen a proliferation of new interest blocs at the local level.

The new decision-making freedoms of the reform era have opened up a reservoir of organizational creativity as rural communities search for the tools and mechanisms needed to articulate and defend their interests in the market economy. Increasingly free of Maoist-style conformism and ideological limitations on cultural expression, local communities have gradually begun to mobilize their distinctive social and cultural capital. Evidence of this can be seen in the ways community identities are being rebuilt around clan, lineage and religious affiliations and the effect this has on patterns of community governance. In many parts of China lineage associations have been revived and ancestral halls rebuilt.[1]

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1 In Guangdong, the emergence of ancestor cults has been shown to signify the increased importance of the lineage in social and economic affairs. A study in Anhui found kinship networks and ancestor-worship rituals to play an increasing role in the exchange and utilization of productive resources. In one Gansu village, a community of descendants of

Nowhere is this process of growing community assertiveness more visible than in the recent experiences of many of China's ethnic minorities. These groups have access to unique forms of cultural capital that can be mobilized in the service of community-building and interest formation. The distinctive and creative ways in which ethnic minority peoples have responded to the transformation of rural China highlight the shifting boundaries of local identity and the potential for new bases of authority.

Based on a case study of a Hui hamlet in southwest China, where extensive fieldwork was conducted in 2002–3, this paper demonstrates how one such community reinvented itself through Islam. The case study offers insights into the ways in which rural Chinese communities are struggling to rebuild identity, safeguard interests, defend rights and create opportunities for social and economic development. It is a story of cultural inventiveness, ethnic assertiveness, kinship conflicts, rural politics and local–state relations. While the study centres on a Hui Chinese community, it more broadly exemplifies how rural communities are able to assert themselves within the economic, political and cultural space created by the diminished presence of the state.

The Balong Hui, Islam and Development

Balong is a hamlet of 90 households in the administrative village of Landu in Shangri-la County.[2] Landu is an ethnically complex administrative village of fifteen dispersed hamlets (*zirancun*) variously inhabited by seven distinct ethnic groups: Naxi, Han, Yi, Miao, Bai, Hui and Tibetan. Balong sits between a Yi

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Confucius rebuilt a temple of worship for their ancestor and revived the public performance of ancestral rites. The temple reconstruction represented not only a shift in authority within the village but also a restoration of community pride and identity which had been vilified under Mao. These revived associations are largely self-organized and funded with voluntary contributions from villagers. In Fujian and Jiangxi Provinces, one observer noted that local associations have taken control of road building and other social services such as the provision of sporting facilities. There is evidence that such associations have overtaken state-backed village committees in their economic importance and moral authority. For Guangdong, see Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China's Peasants: the Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); for Anhui, see Min Han, *Social Change and Continuity in a Village in Northern Anhui: A Response to Revolution and Reform*, Senri Ethnological Series No. 58 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001); for Gansu, see Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power and Morality in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and for the Fujian and Guangxi temple associations, see Lily Lee Tsai, "Cadres, Temple and Lineage Institutions, and Governance in China", *The China Journal*, No. 48 (July 2002), pp. 1-27.

2 During the commune era the administrative village served as the production brigade and the hamlets were each production teams. Today's Xiahe Township is the reformed commune. The names of the township, administrative village, hamlet and individuals mentioned in this paper have been changed to protect privacy. Shangri-la (*Xianggelila*) is, however, the county's genuine new name. It was known as Zhongdian County prior to December 2001.

hamlet above and a Naxi hamlet below. The Hui residents of Balong and of the neighbouring hamlet of Shiba are the only Hui farming communities in the northwest corner of Yunnan.[3] Hui was a term given to all people of Muslim descent in China until the Communist takeover, when Muslim groups such as the Uygur and Kazakh were given "official" ethnic minority status.[4] The new government grouped together all other Chinese Muslims and their descendants as the Hui, regardless of whether they actively practised their religion.[5]

The Hui in Balong are descendants of Muslims from Shaanxi Province and have lived in northwest Yunnan for little more than 100 years. They arrived in Yunnan after fleeing the repression that followed the mid-nineteenth century Muslim rebellions. Only a few handfuls of families made it to the Landu area, where a high altitude, a harsh environment and intermarriage resulted in the adoption of many of the economic and cultural practices of the dominant ethnic groups of the region. Today the hamlet's population is approximately 500. The Hui say that they were most influenced by the Tibetans, Naxi and Han in that order. Tibetan, in fact, eventually became their spoken tongue. This, together with clothing and dietary similarities, has led to them being called *Zanghui* or Tibetan Muslims. Since settling in the area they have had relatively harmonious relations with neighbouring ethnic groups. Because the Hui are so small in number, intermarriage with other ethnic groups has been common and many of them have non-Hui relatives in neighbouring hamlets. Several non-Hui have married into the village.

Notwithstanding the extensive cultural and economic integration with Tibetans and other groups in the area, the Hui managed to maintain their Islamic faith up to the 1940s. The community maintained a mosque and a school, which had both a religious and a secular curriculum, up to the time of Communist victory in 1949. The atheistic polices of the Communists, however, posed a challenge to the religious tradition of this very small and isolated community. The Hui eventually succumbed to Communist pressures to lead a more secular lifestyle. Even before the Cultural Revolution, the mosque had been abandoned and all public worship had ceased. The Cultural Revolution gave a *coup de grâce* to any residual religious practices and the mosque was completely destroyed.

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3 In the county seats in northwest Yunnan there are small Hui communities of traders that hail mostly from Gansu and Ningxia Provinces. These Hui are mostly Sufis and have little or no contact with the Hui in Balong.

4 Under the Nationalist government (1911–1949) the Hui were not considered to be a separate nationality and for this reason still do not have such status in Taiwan today (Barbara Pillsbury, "Cohesion and Cleavage in a Chinese Muslim Minority", PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1973).

5 For a synopsis of the diversity of the Hui in China, see Dru Gladney, "Muslim and Chinese Identities in the PRC", in Dru Gladney (ed.), *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), especially pp. 110-13.

During this time residents were forced to reject religion and some were even forced to raise pigs, an abomination for Muslims. While some continued to pray in private, older interviewees say that many people were too concerned with survival under the Maoist regime to worry about the preservation of Islam, which had already begun to wane after decades of isolation from other Muslims. This isolation continued up to the late 1990s, as roads were few and poor and became impassable every rainy season. Electricity was partially installed at the end of 2002, but the village still lacks telephone communications.[6]

By the mid-1980s there were very few people left in the hamlet who could recite any of the Koranic texts (*jing*). This was of grave concern to a handful of community elders who decided in 1986 to hire an *ahong* (Islamic teacher) to pass on knowledge of the rituals to the younger generation. They were also inspired by a new prayer and study room built with compensation from the government in the 1980s (as reconciliation for the destructive policies of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government gave funding to mosques, churches and monasteries across the country to rebuild). The *ahong* was given the specific task of training six youths to learn basic Arabic and to recite some of the more important *jing* so that they could officiate at funerals and important holidays. The *ahong* stayed for three years and was not replaced. The elders were satisfied that the trained youths could carry on the Islamic traditions, especially since there appeared to be little general interest in Islam outside of a few rituals.[7] Judging from interviews with hamlet elders it seemed that after a generation and a half of non-practice the relevance of Islam had simply dwindled in most people's lives. As one young mother told me, "Until the current Islamic revival all we knew about being a Muslim was that we shouldn't eat pork". And even then many people did. A number of forces would need to come together before Islam would play a renewed role in village life.

Tourism and Opening-Up

Because of political sensitivities regarding the status of Tibetans in contemporary China, the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, of which the Hui hamlet is part, was not fully open to visitors until 1994. This was true also of many other poor ethnic-minority areas in China. By this time the Yunnan provincial government had adopted a development strategy that was based partly on

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6 For a discussion of the impact of geography and trade on Yunnanese Muslims' fragmented identity, see David G. Atwill, "Islam in the World of Yunnan: Muslim Yunnanese Identity in Nineteenth Century Yunnan", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 17, No.1 (1997), pp. 9-30.

7 This is in contrast with the more expansive revival of Islam documented among other Hui communities in the 1980s. See Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Massachusetts: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996); and Raphael Israeli, *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture and Politics* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002).

tourism. With increasing restrictions on the logging industry,[8] the primary source of income in the region, Diqing Prefecture followed suit and began to promote some of its beautiful forests, lakes and rivers as tourist destinations. Tourists to the area steadily increased until over 500,000 visitors were recorded in 1999.[9] By this time the county of Zhongdian was calling itself the "true" Shangri-la and officially changed its name to this in December 2001.[10] Tibetan areas close to the county seat were finding new sources of cash income by selling handicrafts to tourists, leading horse treks and working in the flurry of new bars, cafes and hotels.

The Hui of Balong lived close to two sites of great scenic beauty: Landu Snow Mountain, with its rhododendron forests and alpine meadows, and the White Water Terraces, a spectacular calcium phosphate formation. Their village also sat along one route between Zhongdian and the premier tourist town of Lijiang which passed through the famous Tiger Leaping Gorge. Hui residents were aware of the wealth that tourism was bringing to the region, and local entrepreneurs often spoke of plans to do something to put their hamlet on the map, not least as a staging point for excursions to Landu Snow Mountain and the old-growth forests above. Annual per capita income was well below the national average at 400 yuan per person and residents believed that it could be increased through tourism.

Ma Fu, a local entrepreneur, was head of one of the two largest of the 13 kinship groups (*jiazu*) in Balong. He owned a popular restaurant in the county seat and, from that vantage point, observed that the Tibetans were getting a lot of attention for their grand monasteries and that local Naxi were successfully promoting their villages as the birthplace of Dongba culture. He argued that the Hui should also have a "symbol of their ethnicity" (*minzu de xiangzheng*) and urged that a mosque be built. He proposed that the mosque would serve as a tourist attraction and a symbol of pride for the Hui of the area. Residents were sceptical at first. Ma Fu had just finished cutting a small road to the hamlet with county funds. He had obtained the money through his nephew, one of the county's deputy governors, and because he did not cooperate with others on the project, many thought that he had profited personally from the deal. The mosque project, people thought, was just another scam to line his pockets. Nevertheless, his idea gained momentum, especially among hamlet elders who lamented the loss of many of the Hui-Muslim traditions and believed that the new mosque might inspire interest in their Islamic heritage.

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8 After disastrous flooding during 1997–98 the central government issued a complete logging ban on the Yellow and Yangzi River catchment areas, including Diqing Prefecture.

9 Diqing Prefecture Tourism Bureau Statistics 1997–2000.

10 On the significance for ethnic identities of the county's name change to "Shangri-la", see Ben Hillman, "Paradise Under Construction: Minorities, Myths and Modernity in Northwest Yunnan", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 177-90.

Asserting Ethnic Identity

Across China since the 1980s thousands of communities have rebuilt temples and altars as part of a resurgence of interest in religion, but also as a means to exorcise ghosts of the past. For example, an anthropologist has studied Dachuan village in north China, whose residents claim to be direct descendants of the great sage Confucius. Vilified during the Cultural Revolution and Anti-Confucius campaigns as representatives of a feudal past, villagers there attached great symbolic importance to the lineage temple when it was finally resurrected to honour their ancestor.[11] Despite the cultural and geographical distance between the Han of Dachuan and the Hui of Balong, the reconstruction of both the mosque and the temple served similar purposes. Both promised a restoration of pride in the origins of the community and a more assertive local identity.

Both projects were made possible by the relaxation of the Party–state's policies towards local religious and cultural expression. But for minority groups like the Hui in Balong, asserting cultural identity also had practical benefits. A constellation of policies towards minority nationalities, including positive discrimination on birth control and school admissions as well as various subsidies and tax rebates, made ethnic-minority status seem desirable. This is evidenced by the dramatic increase in people's claims to be members of an ethnic minority in national censuses since the 1980s.[12]

The new interest in cultural diversity encouraged the Hui of Balong to be more assertive of their community identity. Hamlet elders began publicly lamenting the fact that their people regularly ate pork when outside the hamlet. They complained that even in 1998, after years of reform, young people were obliged to eat it in the local secondary school's cafeteria. The hamlet's students, they argued, were forced to become less and less like Hui. Aware of the mistrust toward his construction projects, Ma Fu saw this as an opportunity to present his credentials as a community leader. He asked the township authorities for a Muslim cafeteria for the Hui students. Though he was told that there were no funds, Ma's efforts sowed a seed in a community that was becoming increasingly assertive of its rights.

This was fuelled by other events between 1997 and 1999 in which the Hui of Balong felt they had suffered injustice. Many felt that the administrative village officials discriminated against the Hui in favour of their own friends and family in the Naxi and Han hamlets lower in the valley. One such example was in 1998 when the administrative village committee authorized an outside contractor to fell

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[11] Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories.*

[12] For example, the number of PRC citizens asserting Manchu ethnicity increased by 128 per cent between the 1982 and 1990 censuses. Mongolian, Yao, Miao and Bai populations all witnessed increases above 40 per cent. See also Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities, Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 243-5.

trees in Balong's forest for the construction of an irrigation project in a lower hamlet. A number of Balong representatives went to the village office to protest, but were told to stop making trouble. Twelve representatives from Balong went to the county government in Zhongdian to lodge a protest against the actions of the administrative village and the inaction of the township. Aware of the steps being taken to go over their heads, the township government sent a police squad to intimidate them. The police accused them of being troublemakers like the Hui in Shadian, a Muslim township in southern Yunnan. This was a serious accusation. Shadian had risen up against the Chinese government in 1975 and as many as 1000 Hui died when the uprising was quashed by the armed forces.[13] Incensed by the accusations and the refusal of local authorities to take their complaints seriously, the people of Balong went *en masse* to protest outside the county government offices five hours away by truck. They were met by Wang Za, an ethnic Tibetan who was then county Party Secretary, and who would later become governor of Diqing Prefecture. Wang Za conceded that the Hui had legitimate grievances and agreed to visit their hamlet.

The county and township heads joined the Party Secretary on his visit to the hamlet, suggesting strong government concern over the Hui protest. They agreed that the county would arrange for a Muslim cafeteria in the township's school canteen. Furthermore, the Hui would be compensated for the trees felled in the vicinity of their hamlet at 100 yuan per tree. Concerning the building of a mosque, it was explained that the county had no available funds and that they would have to wait and see. The officials left Balong the same day confident that the grievances had been addressed.

The successful protest to the county government gave the Hui of Balong a new sense of strength. During interviews residents spoke proudly of their demonstrations. The county's acceptance of their demands also gave a tremendous boost to the personal authority of Ma Fu and the hamlet head, who continued to push for a mosque. Ma again lobbied the county government through his nephew, but the appeal was eventually dismissed on grounds that there was no money for religious monuments in an area that had no electricity or telephones and not enough schools. As a concession, however, the men were given an official document stating that they had government support to seek

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[13] During the Cultural Revolution the Hui of Shadian, like Muslims across China, were subjected to religious persecution. Mosques were closed down and often destroyed. Many were forced to raise pigs, as Mao had said that more pigs meant more manure and more manure meant greater crop yields. Not to raise pigs was therefore counterrevolutionary. Under pressure and humiliation from Red Guards and a propaganda team stationed in their village, the Hui of Shadian finally reacted with violent demonstrations when it was believed that pork bones were thrown into their drinking wells. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was sent in to crush any resistance. Aerial bombings, tanks and infantry killed 1000 Muslims and completely razed Shadian. See Ma Shaomei, *Shadian Huizu Shiliao* (Historical Records of the Shadian Hui) (Kaiyuan, Yunnan: 1989); and Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese,* pp. 137-46.

funds on their own.[14] Several residents believe that the county did not then think them capable of doing so.

Building the Mosque and a Muslim Network

Ma Fu called a meeting of village elders to decide whether he should go in search of funds for a mosque and, if so, who should go with him. Two men were chosen: a kinsman who was the local Hui representative to the County Political Consultative Committee (*Zhengxie Weiyuanhui*) and Yang Lin, the hamlet head. The men arrived in Kunming, the provincial capital, in September 2000 and toured the city's five mosques, but they received donations of only a few hundred yuan, barely enough to cover the costs of their food and accommodation. It was suggested they try the mosques in Shadian, known to be among the wealthiest in southwest China (the Shadian community is home to many wealthy traders). They set off for Shadian the next morning, even though county government officials had warned them not to go, out of concern about their making contacts with the locally chauvinistic (*difang minzuzhuyi*) Muslims in Shadian.[15]

The head of the largest of Shadian's ten mosques promised to fund a new mosque for Balong. The Shadian Foundation would pay for materials and the people of Balong would provide the labour. The Shadian Foundation also promised to supply the hamlet with religious instruction for an unspecified period. One week later three *ahongs* arrived in the hamlet, two from Xinjiang and one from Ningxia whose expenses were covered by the Foundation. The local authorities had not wanted the hamlet representatives to visit Muslims outside the province but, as it turned out, Muslims from outside the province came to them.

The *ahongs* approached their task with missionary zeal. They went from house to house teaching people the word of God and the promise of the afterlife. They organized five-times-daily prayers before the construction work on the new mosque had even begun. They told people that they could find salvation by adopting a clean and pious lifestyle, which involved wearing head coverings (*gaitou*) and abstaining from pork, tobacco, alcohol and gambling. Hamlet elders lent their support to this return to Muslim ways. While some residents continued to smoke in private, a number of men told me that they would not dare bring alcohol into the village or play mahjong, the most popular form of gambling in the area. And while there was no specific punishment for disobeying the rules, a recalcitrant might receive an embarrassing visit from an *ahong*. Some residents followed out of respect for the Islamic teachers and for the elders, and others out of curiosity. But within months there was enough social pressure for every resident to comply in public. Recidivists stayed behind closed doors.

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[14] Balong's hamlet head showed me this document, dated September 2000, at his house in July 2002. It was neatly laminated for preservation and to underline its importance.

[15] This is the view of the hamlet head and his two companions (personal communication 25 July 2003).

The teachings spread to various other areas of village life. The *ahongs* criticized intermarriage with non-Muslims. Late in 2000, a young Balong woman married into a Han village and the *ahongs* said that good Muslims should boycott the wedding. Some villagers went, but others heeded the warning. In early 2001, the same *ahongs* said it was inappropriate for villagers to attend the funeral of a Han relative. The *ahongs* also warned of contamination and told residents that they should not share their eating utensils or cups with non-Muslims.

A revival of Islam was certainly not what Ma Fu had in mind when he set out to build a new mosque, and a rift emerged between Ma and the *ahongs*. According to Ma, it started when the 24-year-old *ahong* from Xinjiang asked him for his daughter's hand in marriage. Ma Fu told the *ahong* that it was her decision and that she did not want to marry him. He told the *ahong* that they no longer lived in a feudal society. An altercation broke out between the men that resulted in Ma Fu giving the young cleric a piece of his mind. He said that this community had practised intermarriage for generations, that his grandfather had proudly taken a Tibetan name, and that people like himself who chose not to pray were not "pigs".[16]

According to Ma Fu, the *ahongs* told other residents that he was a bad Muslim and a bad Hui. They were getting along better with the hamlet head, Yang Lin, who was head of the second largest kinship group in the hamlet. These two kinship groups are larger than the other 11 combined, and the hamlet head (a position created by the state, although unpaid) typically came from one of these two groups. The hamlet head had only intermittent responsibilities and was living in the county seat where he drove a taxi, but after funding for the mosque was secured he arranged for his son to drive the family's taxi and returned to live in the hamlet. When I asked him the reason for this decision he told me that he saw great virtue and potential for his hamlet in returning to Islam. But it is also likely that he believed that his position as hamlet head would now take on greater significance, and he would need to ensure that his leadership was not undermined by other interested parties, notably Ma's rival kin group.

Upon his return, Yang became a vocal advocate of the return to Islamic dress and the ban on smoking, drinking and gambling. Together with fellow kin, he began attending prayers at the old Islamic studies classroom on a regular basis. These prayer sessions quickly took on a social function. Many of the early attendees admit that they did so out of curiosity at first, but the sessions soon became a forum for discussing village affairs and concerns. Whereas attendance began as a trickle, the influence of the hamlet head and the new social importance of the gatherings ensured a steady increase in numbers. During my visits to Balong in 2002–2003 anyone who shared important news with me had usually learned it at the mosque.

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[16] This is Ma Fu's version of the story. Others in the village confirmed the story, but I did not get a chance to speak with the *ahong* as he was subsequently replaced.

Early in 2001, the *ahongs* announced that the new mosque would require a *guansi*[17] (administrator) and a management committee. They arranged for elections to be held in April. Ma Fu, as head of the largest kinship group and campaign leader for the new mosque, expected to be elected to the prestigious new position of *guansi*. However, when locals elected the hamlet head as the *guansi*, Ma exploded at the *ahongs* and accused them of convincing residents to vote for the rival kinship group leader as part of an effort to take control of the hamlet. He admits to calling the *ahong* from Xinjiang a "dog". But Ma had failed to read the mood of his fellow residents, who were increasingly enthusiastic about the rediscovery of their Islamic heritage. Hearing of Ma Fu's accusations, young men from other kinship groups set out to beat him up. Learning of the plan, Ma fled to the county seat with his immediate family. The Shadian Foundation sent an emissary to investigate (their authority had increased in the hamlet with the popularity of Islam) and the offending *ahong* was replaced. The Shadian Foundation apparently did not want the religious revival to come at the expense of Muslim unity. Open conflicts involving *ahongs* would also have attracted unwanted attention from local authorities.

The New Mosque and Hui Identity

When construction work on the mosque was completed in October 2001, hamlet head Yang, concerned about the government's opinion of Shadian, only invited guests from within the prefecture to attend the inauguration ceremony, although he claims that other Muslim organizations from outside the prefecture which had heard about their "revival" (*huifu*) wanted to attend. Political shrewdness was also evident in the architecture of the new mosque. Although other Hui communities in China were building new mosques of a distinctly Arabic style, the Balong mosque follows a traditional Chinese style, with wooden pillars at the entrance, grey roof tiles and gargoyles.[18] The hamlet head and new mosque management committee also decided to name it the Shangri-la Mosque.[19] This was a politically astute decision as the county and prefectural governments were promoting "Shangri-la" as the county's new name. In the book *Temple of*

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[17] In Chinese *guansi* is the term used for the chief administrator of a mosque. This person is not necessarily an *ahong*, which is the Chinese term for *imam* or religious teacher.

[18] The new Arabic style of mosque was popular among the Hui of Dali, the nearest Hui community to Balong, 400 kilometres to the south. The trend towards "Arabization" of mosques in Xi'an City is also noted in Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). See Chapter 3, especially pp. 68-81.

[19] The name "Shangri-la" comes from the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* in which four Westerners crash-land into a strange Himalayan paradise. The county has claimed to be the "real" Shangri-la of the story as a way to promote tourism in the region, see note 5. The new mosque in the neighbouring Hui hamlet of Shiba was named Landu Snow-Capped Mountain Mosque, after the name of the area designated by the county for tourist development.

Memories Jun Jing observed a similar imperative when that the Kongs of Dachuan similarly shunned a locally more meaningful name for their rebuilt temple in favour of one that was more politically correct.

Clearly, however, it was not such considerations but the previous year's arrival of the *ahongs* that inspired participation in an Islamic revival. The *ahongs* gave the residents a sense that they were part of a larger community that shared many of their beliefs, customs, frustrations and hopes. That larger Muslim community also had political and financial resources of the kind that the Hui of Balong could only dream. In Dachuan, the Kong community had similarly used their rebuilt temple to reach out to other Kongs across China to be recognized as part of the broader community of fellow descendants of Confucius.[20] Acts such as these have a significant impact on local identity as the community inserts itself into a broader historical narrative.

Participation in the Islamic revival can be seen as a process of identity formation and as an expression of community assertiveness. This was strongly suggested by the fact that it was the Islamic heritage rather than the actual practice of Islam that inspired the most enthusiasm. Knowledge of the Koran and Islam beyond a few rules and rituals such as abstinence from eating pork remained very limited, even among those who prayed on a regular basis. I did not come across a single Koran in the hamlet when I stayed there during 2002 and 2003, other than one that an *ahong* had brought and was using in the classroom, nor could I find anyone who had read it in either the original Arabic or a Chinese translation. My survey of 30 households in November 2002 included the questions, "What do you know of the Koran and of the teachings of Mohammed?", "What are the most important lessons that the Koran teaches?" and "Is there anything the Koran teaches that you don't understand?" To the first question there were no affirmative responses. To the second question, typical answers included "how to be a good Muslim" and "to do good, not bad". To the third question most answered that there was a lot that they did not understand. Some of the respondents said that they would like to increase their knowledge of the scriptures, while some said that they were too old to study more.

Many of them did not seem to appreciate the difference between identifying with and *practising* Islam. During one survey in Balong several residents remarked that they thought Islam was important because they would not be Hui without it.[21] Residents never distinguished between being Hui and being Muslim. In fact, the people of Balong typically used the term "Muslim" (*musulin*) interchangeably with "Hui". When I asked several Balong youths studying in the county seat—youths who did not pray when outside of the village and whom I knew to be unconcerned about abstaining from pork, tobacco or alcohol—

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[20] Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories.*

[21] Different understandings of "Hui-ness" and the characteristics of Hui identity as distinct from other Muslims in China who inhabit specific territories has been well illustrated by Dru Galdney in *Muslim Chinese.*

whether or not they considered themselves Muslims, they answered my question as if it were absurd: "We are Hui—of course we're Muslims". [22]

Learning to be Muslims

This is, of course, what the donors from Shadian hoped to change. The *ahongs* had organized an Arabic and Koran study group. Twenty students signed up for full-time Arabic language and Koran lessons that were provided free of charge. The *ahongs* began training the students so that they could catch up with students at the foundation's Islamic school in Shadian. The following year the *ahongs* sent these twenty youths there to study for three years on full scholarships. One of the *ahongs* told me that it was his hope the students would return to advance Islam in their community. Some could even return to Balong as *ahongs* themselves. Residents also reported that the *ahongs* have encouraged parents not to send their children to state schools, but to ensure that they study only the Koran. The twenty students' attitudes to the educational opportunity in Shadian, however, were not necessarily inspired by the same religious piety. Many among the first group had been among the minority in Balong who had missed opportunities for formal state education or had suffered some economic or social misfortune. One student was a 21-year-old woman who had left her alcoholic Tibetan husband in the county seat and returned to Balong with her young child. Her parents said that they would raise the child while she studied so that she might have another chance at doing something with her life. An 18-year-old student's father had been murdered when he was two and his family could not afford to send him to school. Now he was free to study, but at his age state education was unavailable to him. Many residents spoke of the Islamic school as a "way out" (*chulu*) of rural peasantry. Some parents thought that their children might earn a respectable and comfortable future living as an *ahong*.

In August and September 2002 a group of visitors from Singapore and another group from Malaysia came to the hamlet offering to take Balong boys back with them to be educated as Islamic clerics. Several residents showed interest and one family agreed to send their four-year-old boy. Another family was told that their nine-year-old was "too old". One woman was keen to go with her three-year-old son (mothers were permitted to accompany their children until they were satisfied that they were in good hands), but her non-Muslim Tibetan husband was furious at the suggestion and the issue was dropped.

While I was in the hamlet, the headmaster of the Shadian Islamic school was in Balong recruiting students for the new semester. Suspecting that I was a Christian missionary, he confronted me. When I explained that I was nothing of

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[22] Gladney suggests that Islam is inseparable from Hui identity as it is "ultimately tied to [Hui] self-understanding". Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality*, Case Studies in Social Anthropology (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), p. 68. Israeli also treats Islam as the *sine qua non* of Hui ethnic identity (Raphael Israeli, *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture and Politics*).

the sort, he insisted on knowing my religious convictions and background. He told me in front of a group of residents that had crowded around to listen to our conversation that there were some things I should know about the Hui in China. First, they were the only nationality not to have been assimilated (*tonghua*) because, unlike the others, they have faith (*xinyang*). This claim was ludicrously far-fetched considering the cultural history of the Balong Hui. Second, the Hui were descended from a line of ancestry that made them brothers with all Muslims. When I suggested that it would be great if we could all think of ourselves as "brothers" I received a few smiles from surrounding residents, some of whom had become my friends, but the headmaster reminded me rather curtly that I was descended from different stock.[23]

It was clear that Balong residents had learned a great deal from the *ahongs* about the plight of Muslims elsewhere in the world. During interviews I found locals, mostly men, keen to talk about events in Palestine and Afghanistan and problems that confronted Muslims in China and overseas. One man said that he hoped his grandchildren would grew up to be like Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein because they were "strong Muslims", but most people were moderate in their views. Many said that, while they thought it was good to have *ahongs* in the village, they did not accept many of the ideas that the *ahongs* brought with them. One woman said that the hamlet head was often directly opposed to some of their ideas and was not afraid to say so. Nevertheless, despite these occasional disagreements, the *ahongs* were revered as holy men, respected for their knowledge and appreciated for the contact with the larger Islamic world that they had brought to the hamlet.

The *ahongs* were instrumental in enforcing the prohibition on tobacco, alcohol and gambling in the village. Initially it appeared that compliance was due to social pressure and the shame of being seen by the community as a bad Muslim when Islamic revival was promising newfound pride and community strength. Over time, however, the new rules became an ethnic marker and a source of pride that even the more recalcitrant were willing to acknowledge. In answers to survey questions that asked about the differences between the Hui and other ethnic groups in the area, the overwhelming majority of answers referred to the superior morals of the Hui as evidenced by their rejection of vices. Many noted that, while the Hui were less well off in monetary terms than were people in other hamlets in the vicinity (especially the Naxi and Han), they lived better because they did not fritter away what little they had on drink and games of luck.

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[23] Some of the villagers who knew me were embarrassed by the principal's confrontational behaviour. One explained that I should be "understanding" because he and his fellow Hui had suffered much ethnic discrimination in the past in Inner Mongolia. Another suggested, more cynically, that he was flexing his muscles in front of villagers by "talking down" to a foreigner.

Some spoke scornfully of these habits as well as the lack of hygiene in neighbouring non-Hui hamlets.[24]

Intra-Hamlet Politics and Kinship Rivalry

The "battle" for the new moral agenda caused divisive ruptures within the hamlet. After Ma Fu's fall from grace and the hamlet head's ascent to become the most powerful man in the hamlet, the two heads of Balong's largest kinship groups were no longer on speaking terms. Support for the Islamic revival also tended to align according to these kinship lines. Many members of Ma Fu's kinship group were less enthusiastic about the changes to village life, especially as these occurred at the expense of their kinship group's supremacy in the hamlet. As of the end of 2002, about half the population of Balong prayed regularly at the mosque, a quarter prayed sometimes and a quarter did not pray at all.[25] Most of those that did not attend the mosque were from Ma's kin group and the rest from other smaller kin groups. Those who did not pray were sometimes sarcastic about the time the others spent on prayer, though in public no one spoke ill of the newly devout. In private, however, one senior member of Ma's kinship group said that it was just like another Cultural Revolution, implying persecution of the less religious. Another said, also in private, that the Hui community had never been so divided since their people first settled the area. While there were obvious divisions and differences of opinion, the village did not appear to be as divided as this man claimed. I observed that many of the younger generation among Ma's own kin had chosen to adopt Islamic dress and to attend prayers. In his successful restaurant in the county seat, Ma himself appeared resigned to the fact that the hamlet was becoming more Islamic and seemed only to resent that he was not able to play a leading role in the change.

With strong support from the Shadian Foundation the hamlet head, Yang Lin, further consolidated his power as head of the new mosque management committee. The committee has already begun to emerge as a new centre of public authority. The committee is made up of 13 members under the leadership of the hamlet head and the *ahong*. Each member represents one of the 13 kinship groups. Residents say that the committee has ultimate authority in the hamlet, and that its decisions are not generally disputed because every kinship group is represented. Even though its functions are theoretically limited to mosque-related

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[24] In an ethnography on urban Hui in Xi'an, Maris Boyd Gillette described efforts by trade associations to ban alcohol in the community. She saw implications beyond the immediate health and economic benefits, describing the movement as an effort to build a civilized society in competition with the official discourse of modernity. "Their Islamic vision of 'civilized society' challenged the government's monopoly on civility and modernization and upset the state's evolutionary hierarchy that defined Hui as less civilized than Han". Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing*, p. 184.

[25] These are estimations that come from observation and from discussions with hamlet residents.

activities, its authority enables it to take on a greater role in hamlet affairs. One committee member said he thought that the committee would be a suitable body to manage future tourism developments such as a village-run guesthouse for the increasing number of trekkers visiting the nearby mountains. The committee also distributes food and money to poorer households.

The growing importance of the committee has parallels in the expanding role that temple groups play in village affairs in some other parts of China. One Guangdong village revived its Committee for the Dragon Boat Festival, an important social institution prior to 1949. The Committee today administers collective property on behalf of the village and collects rents, which are used for public works when village government funds are inadequate.[26] In Fujian, Lily Lee Tsai observed that one village temple committee has taken over road building in the village and manages an annual budget of donations four times larger than the village government's funds. Tsai suggests that village officials were happy to offload these responsibilities and appreciated the initiatives taken by the temple groups.[27] Tsai's work suggests that these community organizations are emerging as complementary to and supportive of village government, but it is worth considering the possibility that new social institutions might also threaten the relevance of village governments.[28]

District Politics and Ethnic Tensions

New pride in Muslim self-help strategies and general disdain for the (non-Hui) cadres of Landu administrative village was highlighted by an incident that occurred while I was in the village. The Han director of the administrative village was rumoured to be "assisting" the business of a woman who ran a small shop on the main road, in return for sexual favours. In July 2002 these rumours were substantiated when the woman's husband came home to find her in bed with the director. The husband stabbed his wife's lover seven times, although the director survived the attack.

The Hui of Balong did not condemn the stabbing. They considered the director's election to the post in March of the previous year to have been a sham. In the lead-up to the election, local cadres were referring to him as director (*zhuren*) before any votes had been cast. He promised to build a road for every hamlet that voted for him, but others were suspicious about how he would know who voted for whom in a supposed secret ballot. On election day, the residents were told to arrive at the administrative village offices at 9 a.m. Three hundred

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[26] Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan, "Power Beyond Instituted Power: Forms of Mediated Spaces in the Chinese Countryside", in Françoise Mengin and Jean-Louis Rocca (eds), *Politics in China: Moving Frontiers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 171-5.

[27] Lily Lee Tsai, "Cadres, Temple and Lineage Institutions, and Governance in China".

[28] Jun Jing similarly observed that the "religious domain of village life is becoming a strong, alternative base of power and authority..." p. 176.

eligible voters from Balong did so. They were forced to wait until 11 a.m. before they could vote, as the contingents from other hamlets had not yet arrived. When polling finally began the Hui learned that the Hui candidate they had nominated was not on the ballot paper. For the single position of director there were two candidates and for the two positions of deputy director there were three candidates. None of them was Hui. The Hui were furious and the great majority of the 300 who came to vote cast a blank ballot in protest.

The director whom everyone suspected would be elected was indeed elected. Although his job was to head a very poor administrative village with no industry, enterprises or finances of its own, a director can wield considerable power through control of poverty alleviation projects and resources. The local rural township is a *minzu teku xiang* (extreme hardship ethnic-minority township) and within it Landu Administrative Village is considered a *minzu teku cun* (extreme hardship ethnic-minority village). Through both these channels the village director has influence over poverty alleviation project funds from higher levels. Subsidized building materials such as concrete and piping, when supplied, are kept at the village director's house and the Hui of Balong believe that you need to have good *guanxi* (connections) with the director in order to access any. The materials are supposed to be provided equally to all of the hamlets of Landu, but the hamlets of the families and friends of the village officials tend to receive more. This unequal distribution of resources was obvious when I visited the Naxi and Han hamlets in the valley below Balong. In the Naxi hamlet of Lidu, all of the houses had running water and biogas facilities that gave several hours of light and gas for cooking per day. Nearly half the homes had subsidized pig sties that made the collection of fuel easier for the biogas tanks. There was a large irrigation and land-levelling project in the village. A further five households had recently received grants of 1000 yuan each to invest in chicken coops. One such household was that of the deputy director of Landu Administrative Village. Another was that of his older brother, who happened to be the head of Lidu hamlet. The cadres and their immediate relatives got the best deals, followed by their fellow hamlet residents. Three kilometres up the road, Balong had none of these ties and therefore, the Hui believe, none of the projects.

The Balong Hui often expressed to me their frustration at what they saw as injustice and made it clear during my interviews that they expected Islam and their Islamic benefactors to help correct the imbalances. The hamlet head Yang Lin was very confident of this. He said that he once told a representative of the county government, a fellow Hui, that if the state (*guojia*) was unprepared to support his hamlet then he could find the money overseas. He smiled as he told me that he could now find money through a number of channels. One Shadian-introduced sponsor from Singapore, for instance, paid for seven Muslim university students from Kunming to come to Balong during their summer holidays in 2002 to give lessons in Arabic, the Koran and English to village youths. Hamlet residents believe that there are numerous other potential donors in

the Middle East, and that donations are being filtered through the foundation in Shadian.[29] The fact that that some of this funding has overseas origins appears to them to lend more authority and importance to the Islamic revival. At the same time, however, the hamlet head was looking forward to one of the hamlet's own becoming an *ahong*, someone who could be locally "supervised" and not linked to an external authority.

The struggle for control of the mosque and of the rituals that marked the revival suggested that new power structures were gaining a foothold in village life at the expense of the Party–state. The hamlet head and other community leaders were long-serving Communist Party members, but they spoke little of Party affairs and much about Islam during our discussions. Party membership was no longer a key criterion for leadership within the hamlet. The mosque project involved local levels of government in the early stages, but their involvement waned as the Shadian Foundation took over the initiative. The hamlet head told me that he had asked the township for funds to help build washrooms for prayer preparation, but at the same time he sought funds through Islamic channels. He said that he knew the money would never come from the township, but that it was "appropriate" to ask there first so as not to be seen as too "independent".

The hamlet head admitted that some government officials were wary of the Islamic revival and its implications for political stability, a key criterion for promotion among local government leaders.[30] But he and others in the community were confident in their dealings with the township and county governments. They insisted that their Islamic renaissance was in line with the government's tourism-led development strategy. The Hui preferred to speak of their Islamic revival as an ethnic or cultural revival rather than a religious one. The political imperative of this cultural inventiveness was mirrored in the Dachuan Kongs' insistence that their Confucian Temple was a monument of historical and cultural importance. To that end, the Kongs established an annual festival to celebrate the legacy of Confucius, and invitations were extended to the whole county. In Balong, the hamlet head and elders made a similar commitment to inviting non-Hui and non-Muslims to the mosque opening and mosque-related festivities. The celebration marking the anniversary of the mosque was made an annual event and invitations were extended to the public.

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29 It is of course impossible to verify this, but it remains significant that residents believe it to be true.

30 On cadre evaluation and promotion see Maria Edin, *Market Forces and Communist Power: Local Political Institutions and Economic Development in China,* PhD Dissertation, Uppsala University, 2000.

The establishment of an annual festival and the inclusion of the non-Hui public demonstrate the inventiveness of the revival.[31] This inventiveness is central to the community's ability to shape its own future. Islam has provided the Hui with new ideas and visions of their community and their future and, in many ways, represents a competing vision of modernity. It has reset the parameters of acceptable conduct and fired the imagination of a community redefining itself in relation to nearby villages, the region, the nation and even the world. The Balong Hui have learned lifestyles from other Muslims in China and abroad and this has given them the empowering opportunity to reject "backward minority status".[32] The same theme is given extensive treatment by Maris Boyd Gillette in her study of the Hui community in Xi'an. Gillette observes that the Hui in Xi'an "combated the racial stereotype that the Hui were 'feudal' and poorly equipped for modernization". Islam gave them an opportunity to "turn 'tradition' into an economic asset, and [challenge] the CCP's monopoly on 'progress' by appealing to an alternative set of criteria in evaluating society".[33]

Since the beginning of the revival in 2000, relations between the Hui of Balong and other ethnic groups in neighbouring hamlets have undergone more change than at any previous time in the past half century. In 2000 Hui men began wearing hats and women scarves both inside and outside the hamlet, but especially when outside. No one wore the Muslim headpieces prior to the *ahongs'* arrival in 2000. Some men, especially among the students in the Arabic and Koran class, also began wearing long white robes as an ethnic marker, an assertion of difference.[34] No Muslims had made their identity so visible in the region since the 1940s. The garb met with mixed reactions among neighbouring

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31 Jun Jing made a similar observation about the festival that villagers "invented" to mark Confucius' birthday: "The festival was an invention because it merged what traditionally had been an exclusively Kong activity of worshipping their own ancestors with a commemorative event open to the wider public. It marked a transition from exclusion to inclusion, from a lineage-based ceremony to a popular public event". Jun Jing, *The Temple of Memories,* p. 145.

32 In the 1950s, for purposes of social control, the Chinese Communist administration produced a taxonomy of ethnic groups within the state's borders. In all, 55 distinct minority groups were identified (chosen from among more than 400 claims of separate ethnicity) and each was placed along the line of human social development. The societies of ethnic minorities were seen as living proof of the lineal progression of human society from slave society to feudalism to capitalism to socialism, and finally, to communism. The notion of the backward ethnic minority "catching up" to the superior Han is reinforced today by state education and the media. On this point see introductory chapters to Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

33 See Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing*, p. 18.

34 Charles F. Keyes, "Ethnicity", in Thomas J. Barfield (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), pp. 152-4.

ethnic groups. One local Naxi innkeeper said that he did not know why the Hui had started wearing hats, but that religion was their own business. He said that they were not "pushy" like the Christian missionaries who had stayed at his inn. For one thing, the Hui are not interested in sharing Islam with their non-Hui neighbours. Islam was for the Hui and not the Han, Naxi or Tibetans. In the nearby town, where a local produce market is held twice a month, Naxi and Han vendors claimed that the Hui strutted as though they were better than everyone else. When I asked a group of Hui women about these attitudes, they argued that the Naxi and Han were merely jealous of them because they were more civilized (*wenming*) and better educated. These women spoke disparagingly of the local Naxi and Han and frequently criticized their poor manners and their vices.

For this Hui community, the revival of Islam appears to have reversed the trend in their relations with other ethnic groups from a hundred-year-old process of assimilation to a more recent process of segregation. The Hui freely admit to their cultural and economic borrowing from local Tibetans, Naxi and Han. Tibetan became their mother tongue, although young people today speak a dialect of Mandarin Chinese with a lot of Tibetan vocabulary and sentence patterns mixed in. The young men take their cattle into the summer pastures each year alongside Tibetan and Yi friends. They also have, until recently, freely intermarried (in and out) with other ethnic groups. Today, in contrast, the *ahongs* try to arrange for marriage partners from Shadian and other Muslim areas for several of the hamlet's young people to prevent them from finding their own non-Muslim mates. The *ahongs* also insist that food should not be shared with non-Muslims.

Dru Gladney observed that Islamic resurgence in Na Homestead meant decreasing interaction between the Hui and other ethnic groups.[35] This is because, while the Hui could give others tea and food, they could not receive these in return for fear of contamination. Eventually, the inequality of exchange resulted in avoidance of contact. There was some indication that a similar change was taking place in Balong. While I did not observe serious concern over contamination through such contact with non-Muslims, two families that I visited said that they were considering adopting stricter rules about food. They admitted that they had not been concerned about such things before the *ahongs* came. While residents were still only experimenting with such Islamic practices, if these become more widespread there will be significant implications for relations with nearby hamlets.

Conclusion

There is no single explanation for the recent revival of Islam among the Hui of Balong. It is not simply a result of relaxed state policies that "lifted the lid" on religious suppression. The revival was a tool for those who wanted to see

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[35] Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China,* p. 55.

themselves and their community do better. The economic potential of tourism was the initial inspiration for the revival project. Hamlet elders were supportive in the hope that pride in their heritage would be restored. A more open political environment enabled community leaders to travel in search of funds. With the funds came religious teachers who brought with them a different agenda, part of which complemented community interests and part of which did not. The content of the Islam that arrived in Balong was adapted or rejected by different people as it suited their reinvention of cultural heritage and collective identity. This variation in receptiveness was also influenced by the dynamics of factional struggle within the hamlet.

Islam has offered the Hui alternative visions of the future, but the mobilization of ethnic identity within this Hui community is not anti-state. If anything, the revival demonstrates the community's resourcefulness and creativity in integrating its interests with state policy. Community leaders were adamant that in promoting Islam and building a new mosque they were expressing their rights as Chinese citizens in accordance with Chinese law. Not only did community leaders use local state contacts in their efforts to construct Shangri-la Mosque but they also had a vision about how it would complement state policy. An inscription at the entrance to Shangri-la Mosque reads "Love the faith and love the country, united we progress".[36] Other signs referred to the promotion of "spiritual civilization" (*jingshen wenming*), a slogan that comes straight from the Party propaganda bureau.[37] Raphael Israeli has argued that China's Muslims have historically had to choose between rebellion or assimilation, but my research in Balong comes to a different conclusion. In mobilizing their ethnic identity, the Balong Hui have demonstrated an awareness that being Muslim and being Chinese (*Zhongguoren*) are not mutually exclusive categories.[38] In fact, Islam offered a strong sense of community from which the Hui sensed they could better articulate their interests and rights as minority constituents of the state.

The Islamic revival has been a socially meaningful experience for the Hui of Balong. While the word "revival" suggests a return to the past, it is best

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[36] "*Aijiao aiguo tuanjie jinbu*". Susan McCarthy also notes that Yunnan Hui discussed religious development in terms of minority nationality development that reinforced rather than challenged Chinese state citizenship. See Susan McCarthy, "Ethno-Religious Mobilisation and Citizenship Discourse in the People's Republic of China", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (September 2000), especially p. 111.

[37] In a similar vein, Min Han reported that an elder responsible for building an ancestral monument in his Anhui village exclaimed, "Let this old lineage make a new contribution to the present socialist construction of spiritual and material civilization". Min Han, *Social Change and Continuity in a Village in Northern Anhui*, p. 201.

[38] Raphael Israeli, "Muslims in China: Islam's Incompatibility with the Chinese Order", in Raphael Israeli and Anthony H. Johns (eds) *Islam in Asia*, vol. 2 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984).

understood as an invention, a means through which Balong residents have been able to reshape their community and negotiate their collective interests. Those collective interests included a restoration of pride, greater community autonomy and increased economic opportunities. This is not to deny the spiritual value that Islam offers, but it was not a spiritual quest that brought the people of Balong closer to it. Like other rural communities across China, Balong was experimenting with ways to make sense of the changing world and to equip themselves better to compete in it.

Despite what appear to be its unique cultural, historical and ethnic characteristics, Balong's story is not atypical in contemporary China. Across the country there is an increasing number of examples of rural communities that are reinventing a heritage, be it through religion or lineage, to promote group solidarity, rebuild identity and safeguard the interests of the community. Here as elsewhere across China, the changes taking place within this community reflect a combination of cultural inventiveness, ethnic assertiveness, intra-village rivalries and competition for resources. It is a collective repositioning on the shifting ground of rural politics and community–state relations.