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Muslims as *"Hui"* in Late Imperial and Republican China. A Historical Reconsideration of Social Differentiation and Identity Construction

Yee Lak Elliot Lee [*]

Abstract: *»Muslime als* Hui *im spät-imperialen und republikanischen China«.* As a minority in China, Muslims have had to deal with a twofold problem: maintaining the boundary of their group and integrating into larger society. The various responses to this problem in different contexts and under different circumstances are evident in various group identity configurations. Based on Stausberg, it is proposed that the ways the identities are constructed refer to the dynamics of various types of social differentiation. The author argues that there were divergent identity configurations among Muslim elites regarding their identity sign *Huihui* in late imperial and post-imperial China, with the former constructed in the direction of religiosity and the latter in the direction of secularity. In the concluding remark, the author suggests a theoretical account of his empirical observation by drawing on elements of Luhmann's theory of social differentiation.

Keywords: *Hui* identity, Islam, late imperial and Republican China, nation state, religionization, ethnization, social differentiation, multiple secularities.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I present a case of Muslim identity that lies beyond the conventional spatiality of the 'Islamic civilization,' and address the dynamics and paths that finally resulted in a form of 'Muslim secularity.' My focus is on the identification of Chinese Muslims, evident in the interpretation of their indigenous name *Huihui* 回回, or *Hui* 回 in the abbreviated form, and how this corre-

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sponds to different types of social differentiation in various Chinese contexts. I will begin with a reinterpretation of the general early naturalization history of Muslims in China, considering processes of social differentiation in various local societies across imperial China. This will demonstrate the emergence of social problems – "reference problems" in Niklas Luhmann's terms (2012, 199-214) – that motivated the specific responses seen in the various examples of identity construction. This will be followed by a more in-depth historical textual analysis of the construction of a Chinese Muslim group identity in several late imperial texts that deal with the group identity sign[1] produced by an intellectual lineage of *Han kitab* scholars[2] in the *Jinling* 金陵 area, i.e., present-day Nanjing. This body of texts was selected because the authors' works are well-acknowledged by Chinese Muslims in general, even up until the present, and some of their ways of demarcating a *Hui*(*hui*) identity were assumed (with various alterations) by Chinese Muslim intellectuals in post-imperial China. For the final part of the historical analysis in this paper, I will trace the contingent discursive development of the ethnization of the *Hui* identity in printed materials, such as newspapers, magazines, and official documents, in post-imperial China.

By focusing on the discourses produced by elite Chinese Muslims regarding the meaning of their identity sign, *Hui*, over the two distinct historical periods of late imperial and Republican China, I will demonstrate that their identities (at least at the discursive level) are subsumed in forms of social differentiation, politics, and the discursive practices of their localized Chinese contexts. Regardless of the contexts, it can be presumed that, as a minority, Muslims have to navigate the tension between two "reference problems"[3]: maintaining the religio-cultural group boundary and integrating into wider Chinese society, be it local, regional, imperial, or national. The various responses to these two problems are constitutive of the configuration of and discourses regarding Chinese Muslims' identities. According to the functional method espoused by Luhmann (1970), reference problems do not imply a causal relation with any particular performance or solution. Instead, they are taken as the reference point for comparing different possible solutions to certain problems (see Bednarz 1984, 348-51). Parallel to this line of thought, the multiple secularities

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[1] Here, "sign" refers to de Saussure's usage (2013), with the "sound-image" of *hui* 回 as the "signifier" and the people – Chinese Muslims – as the "signified."

[2] *Han kitab (han* 漢 هان means Chinese and *kitab* كتاب is an Arabic word for book) were a body of texts produced by Muslim literati of late imperial China who used the Chinese (Confucian) language to translate Islamic literatures written in the Islamic lingua francas and/or to compose directly on Islamic topics. Please refer to the discussion in later parts of this article.

[3] For their discussion of reference problems of secularity, see Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt (2012; 2017).

approach suggests different types of secularity as possible responses to certain reference problems (for more on secularity in the multiple secularities framework, see Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; 2017; Dressler, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Salvatore 2019). As such, whether the response/solution can be identified as secularity depends on the existence of discernible language that spells out the religious/non-religious distinction and differentiation. Following this logic, my main argument is that there were divergent Muslim identity configurations (as forms of response) among Muslim elites of late imperial and post-imperial China, even though the major reference problems were similar. The empirical data shows that the late imperial Muslim identity configuration was constructed in the direction of religiosity, whereas the post-imperial one developed towards secularity.

To better illustrate this point, I will borrow Michael Stausberg's (2010) three processes of social differentiation – *attributive, structural,* and *functional* – to identify possible means of identification in relation to elements of religious traditions that develop alongside each type of social differentiation. For the section that focuses on the identities of the *Hui* in late imperial China, particularly on the identity discourses produced by *Han kitab* scholars, I will demonstrate that *Hui* identities were constructed in structural and attributive terms. These terms were under the constant influence of the structural arrangement and attributive values of various Chinese contexts. The section on post-imperial China will illustrate how functional differentiation, especially the reification or "religionization" (Dressler 2013) of Islam, came into play with the ethnicization of the *Hui* following the Chinese nation-building process from the late Qing into the first half of the 20th century. The importation of notions like religion, nation, ethnicity, and culture, and their corresponding discourses during this period, were decisive in how the *Hui* elites navigated their identity. Although these new notions permitted novelties in the *Hui* identity (the eventual construction of ethnicity in relation to a reified Islam), they did not necessarily guarantee an identity that was neatly aligned with a functional differentiation where religion and its other were clearly demarked. Instead, the empirical data on the creation of the ethnic identity *Huihui minzu* 回回民族 demonstrates the interaction, or even interpenetration, of different types of differentiation within group identity development. Thus, in the concluding discussion, I will suggest that Stausberg's framework has to be supplemented by the concepts of segmentary and center-peripheral stratification/differentiations.

2. Religious Differentiation and Identity

2.1 Differentiation

Prior to the adoption of the Western concept of *religion* through its modern Chinese cognate – *zongjiao* 宗教 – in the 19th century, the modern Western idea of a universal or generic category of "religion" to "designate human relations with the supernatural realm" in contrast to a secular life did not exist in China (Yang 2008, 11). The traditional way to designate a religious tradition is to use the word *jiao* 教 (teaching) as the suffix in the name of that tradition (ibid., 11). An apt illustration is that one of Islam's traditional names was *Hui-jiao* 回教 ("teaching of the *Hui*"); this term is still used today in colloquial Chinese, especially in Chinese polities such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, even this relatively reified conceptualization with the use of *jiao* was neither universal nor standardized prior to the 19th century. Without such concepts, it is necessary to establish a different means of identifying the subjects within this social historical analysis: Islam and Muslims.

As such, before providing a historical overview of Chinese Muslims' identification with the sign *Hui* and the types of social differentiation implied in the negotiations regarding this sign, it is necessary to address some theoretical and conceptual issues. I will refer to Michael Stausberg's three different processes of differentiation in order to address nuances in the differentiation of religion when dealing with historical material without a discourse or terminology synonymous with those of modern Western secularity. Stausberg terms the first type "attributive differentiation," which "refers to the communicative process whereby people communicatively select affairs as special" (Stausberg 2010, 361). Building on Ann Taves (2009), Stausberg refers to the "special" in terms of specific agency and agents, which are conventionally perceived as divine, superhuman, or counterintuitive. In other words, these special things are differentiated and thus can be identified (by modern observers) as 'religious.' The second process is "structural differentiation" (Stausberg 2010, 361-3). This occurs when "different/special/specific" actions, events, people, and places obtain a formal status such that observers identify them as religion(s) in the institutional sense (ibid., 361). According to Stausberg, this happens in a stratified society where religious specialists and religious practices are supported by surplus produce. This institutional innovation is accompanied by the development of new religious content which identifies the existence of a higher ontological reality, to which a lower sphere is subordinated axiomatically. This ideological mutation can be seen in the notion of axial civilizations (see Árnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock 2005). The higher ontological reality is usually associated with a religious institution. The third stage that Stausberg identifies is "functional differentiation" (2010, 363). It is regarded as a very recent devel-

opment in human history and constitutive for modernities, in which religion is converted into one of the relatively autonomous societal function systems alongside economy, education, family, law, politics, aesthetics, and science.

Stausberg outlines these three layers of differentiation within a macro-social-evolutionary framework. This framework loosely ascribes an increasingly diversified process of differentiation to macro-historical events (on the scale of "Big History"), which leaves much space for further investigation. However, this framework seems to underplay transsocietal influences and dynamics in these differentiation processes, especially prior to the modern wave of globalization. By referencing Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (2005), the proponent of the "multiple modernities" framework (Eisenstadt 2000), Stausberg's framework suggests that one should equate societal processes with, and confine them to, civilizational boundaries.[4] However, one should be aware that multiple societies can exist within the physical space that is conventionally attributed to a particular civilization. Even within its sphere of influence, a civilization may have varying degrees of effect on local societies depending on their distance from, and exchange with, the civilization's center of power. Moreover, it is also possible for a society to be influenced by different civilizations. With this diversity of societal-civilizational arrangements (and their respective dynamics), I suggest that different types of differentiation with their associated social/civilizational origins may co-exist and interact. This realization is important for the study of social subjects that emerged from the juxtaposition of different societal-civilizational elements. The subjects of this article – Chinese Muslims – are such social subjects.

2.2 Differentiated Identity

The aforementioned three types of differentiation imply different ways of identifying, and identifying with, 'religion' and, hence, foster different types of ('religious') identity. The first type of identity correlates with attributive differentiation (*attributive identity*). Attributive differentiation allows people in a society to determine something as special, be it sacred, divine, or something similar, which is marked as 'apart' by specific agents. A person or a collective of people may thus identify with and group around that special thing. From the modern observers' point of view, this individual or group, therefore, is 'religious' and demarcated from other human beings because of this.

The second type of identity corresponds to the second layer of differentiation – structural differentiation. In this regard, *structural identity* is intertwined with religious institutions. One obtains such an identity through institutional involvement, which can be recognized as a form of membership, as institutions

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[4] Here the term 'societal' refers primarily to the institutional aspect of society, whereas 'civilizational' refers to the symbolic/ideological aspect of society.

are "rules that constitute community, shaping how individuals see themselves in relation to others, and providing a foundation for purposive action" (Ashiwa and Wank 2009, 8). This institutional involvement can also be understood in terms of involvement in a religious tradition, where a

> tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice. Precisely because it is established, it has a history. (Asad 2009, 20)

This discursive understanding of tradition allows structural religious identity to be an outgrowth of attributive religious identity, with the former drawing on elements from the latter. However, the two do not simply establish a linear historical progression. Rather, structural identity, with its institutional boundaries, enables and/or confines particular formulations or elements to be (discursively) derived from the attributive identity, which further limits the ways of formulating new attributive identities.

The third layer – functional differentiation – complicates its respective identity construct. This relates to a condition for the emergence of the secular, i.e., the process of "disembedding" as understood by Charles Taylor (2016). Disembedding describes the process "wherein people acquire an identity that is independent of any particular social order or community" (ibid., 17), and wherein they are free to define themselves as individuals beyond referencing traditional social institutions. However, I would emphasize that the acquisition of individual identity is relative to the constraints of newly emerged and existing social institutions. As such, an individual identity with *relative* independence from the old institution is formulated. Since religion is largely reconfigured as a social sphere of its own and understood alongside other (secular) spheres in a horizontal relation, it can no longer shape the social subjects' identity as it could in an enchanted worldview (discourse). Instead, it is the individual who, as an agent (in theory), engages voluntarily in the functionally differentiated religious sphere with a resulting *functional* ('religious') identity. However, this conceptualization relies heavily on the society-individual duality, which is overly simplistic in explaining situations beyond the ideal nation state constituted by equal individuals. As the historical data on Chinese Muslims' identity configuration at the turn of the 20th century will demonstrate, the effect of functional differentiation can also cover the formation of a meso-level group identity, but in a more sophisticated manner.

3.   Identifying Muslims in China as *Huihui*

3.1   From Early Settlement to Mongol Rule

Muslims were in contact with and present in China as early as the late 7th century (Lipman 1998, 25). They arrived in China mainly as merchants, emis-

saries, and tributaries. During this early period, the mode of existence for Muslims in China was largely one of segregation. Living within extraterritorialities called *fanfang* 蕃坊 or "foreign districts," which were set up and sanctioned by the Chinese imperial courts, Muslims largely maintained their own social arrangements following the implementation of *shari'a*.[5] The confinement of Muslims' lives to these foreign quarters in the commercial cities of China and the temporary nature of their stay limited Muslims' process of naturalization and assimilation into the larger Chinese societies. It is likely that there were Muslims among the "native-born foreigners" (*tusheng fanke* 土生蕃客) and "fifth-generation foreigners" (*wushi fanke* 五世蕃客) in China in the 12th century (ibid., 28). Muslims were allowed to purchase land for mosques and graveyards; some stayed long enough to be appointed as officials for trade affairs and married local Chinese women. However, all these developments were still related to commercial arrangements as Muslims – and other foreigners – were primarily engaged in commerce in the period covering Tang (618-907)[6] and Song (960-1276) dynasties. During this period, Chinese sources, at most, recognized Muslims on structural terms. There were no specific terms for Muslims in the sense of a unique group of religious adherents. Instead, Muslims were identified under either general categories for foreigners (or for "barbarians" in the more negative sense) – *fan* 藩 or *hu* 胡 – or more specifically with the place of origin of these foreigners, mostly Arabia (Ch.: *Dashi* 大食; Persian: *Tazi* تازي) or Persia (Ch.: *Bosi* 波斯). Of course, there were undoubtedly Nestorian Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and probably Buddhists among the people designated by these categories. Modern and contemporary scholars often have to identify the Muslims among these diverse foreigners through careful study of the contextual information given in the Chinese sources. There is only one reasonably accurate Chinese-language account of Islam from the Tang-Song period. This was written by Du Huan 杜環, a literatus captured at the great Battle of Talas in 751. In *Jing xing ji* 經行記, Du Huan reported on the lives of his Arab captors in Central and West Asia which consisted of practices easily identifiable as the different Pillars of Islam by any modern student of religion. Du called these practices *Dashi fa* 大食法 or the "law of Arabia" (Du 2016).[7] With works like this, it can be assumed that certain institutional or structural features specific to the lives of Muslims were identifiable to subsequent Chinese literati during this period. However, this did not increase Chi-

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[5] Attested to in the mid-9th century in Muslim traveler Sulaimana al-Tajir's account *Akhbar al-Sin wa-l-Hind* (*Accounts of China and India*) (Ahmad 1989, 37–38; see also Frankel 2017, 123 and Erie 2016, 47-8).

[6] All durations of dynasties and biographical/reigning years of historical persons are stated in the Common Era.

[7] An alternative translation of *fa* is method (of how one leads one's life). The original text of *Jing xing ji* has been lost; the surviving portion is in Du Huan's uncle Du You 杜佑's *Tong dian* 通典.

nese interest in learning more about their foreign neighbors. The identity of these diverse groups of Muslims in various commercial cities was shaped by their association with the local mosque, while these foreign groups and their ways of life remained alien to most Chinese. The fact that the Chinese elites kept employing general or even stigmatizing categories to refer to Muslims, and that Islam did not attract positive attention from the Chinese elites, suggests that Muslims could hardly separate themselves from their ascribed identity as (foreign) merchants, considered a degraded class in Confucian social theory (Lipman 1998, 30-1). However, due to the lack of materials produced by Muslims themselves, it is hard to discuss their identity in terms of their collective and individual consciousness, or "subjectivity" as Asad terms it (1993, 16).

It was in the series of events leading to the decline and the eventual fall of the Song dynasty and the establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) that Muslim identity started to diversify from the general category of foreign traders. In its campaigns against the Liao dynasty (907-1125) from the northern steppe, the Song court had reportedly hired Muslim mercenaries. According to Chinese Muslim legends in different family genealogical writings (Israeli 2002, 283-4; Li Qingsheng 2004; Li Xinghua 2004; Ma 2007), Emperor Shenzong (r. 1067-1085) invited a group of 5,300 Muslim mercenaries, under the command of Sharif 'mir Sayid, or Suofeier 所非爾, to China from Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan and later added 10,000 more Muslims. As the tale continues, Suofeier was said to have earned a reputation as the founder and father of Muslims in China, as he discovered that the Tang-Song Chinese had misnamed Arabia and Islam as *Dashi guo* 大食國[8] and *Dashi fa* respectively. He renamed them *Huihui guo* 回回國 and *Huihui jiao* 回回教 correspondingly. It is highly unlikely that the name change can be attributed to a single person called Suofeier, rather the narrative was constructed retrospectively at a later date (presumably Ming or afterwards), when the term *Huihui* was already in widespread use. Nonetheless, this tale highlights three elements of the trajectory of the self-identification of Muslims in China as *Huihui*. This development is linked to 1) the immigration of Muslims from Central Asia (Suofeier's place of origin), 2) the adoption of the Chinese language (only with a certain level of mastery of the Chinese language can one decide the 'correctness' of one's Chinese name), and 3) at least some Muslims in China becoming conscious of the way they were depicted in relation to Islam (the intention behind Suofeier correcting the Chinese words for Islam and their place of origin). This emerging group consciousness hints at the problem of group boundary maintenance. The historical process of renaming Muslims and Islam with the notion *Huihui* took much longer, from the fall of the Song dynasty, through the Yuan and the accelerated sinicization in the Ming dynasty (1368-

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[8] That is, the country of *Dashi*.

1644), with the state's problem of managing/integrating the 'naturalization' of new populations.

For those from northern China around the end of Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), the use of *hui* to designate a community has its roots in the Chinese ethnonym for the Turkic people of the Kara-Khanid Khanate (840-1212), *Huihu* 回鶻 or *Huihe* 回紇[9]; it was then transmuted into *Huihui* 回回 (Allès 2000, 29) by the common practice of reduplicating words in the Chinese language. In this period, not all Turkic people had converted to Islam. As such, the Islamic connotation of *Hui*(*hui*) was not fully established. Following the Mongol conquest of China in the late 13th century, the Mongols transferred a huge number of Central and Western Asians to China to serve in the Yuan imperial administration and military offices. The majority of these immigrants were Muslim. Since these immigrants were referred to as *Huihui* in imperial Chinese documents of the Mongol courts, *Huihui* started to be conflated with the concept of Muslim. This usage stood alongside *Huihui* being used as a translation of the Mongolian term *Sart,* which referred to a group of people in Central Asia (Yao 2004).[10] Still, the usage was very diverse and ambiguous. In the late 13th to mid-14th centuries, the term *Huihui* was applied to a range of people including Nestorian Christians, Muslims, and Jews of varying Central and West Asian origins. There were a few examples of Chinese literature from around the late 14th century that made deliberate efforts to separate *Huihui* from *Weiwuer* 畏兀兒/畏吾兒 (an obvious transliteration of "Uyghur") and some other central Asians (Bai, Ma, and Li ed. 2003, 103-4). However, these attempts did not gain wide acceptance and did not endure. When Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), the first Jesuit missionary to China, settled in the country in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, he was well aware that the term *Huihui*, although most commonly associated with Muslims,[11] referred also to Nestorians and Jews (Ben-Dor Benite 2015, 504-08). It is only at this point in time that there is solid evidence of Sinophone Muslims (Sino-Muslim or Chinese Muslims in the linguistic sense) beginning to refer to themselves as *Huihui*.

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[9] It is assumed that these Central Asian people might have been related to the contemporary Uyghur ethnicity, particularly because of the similarities of the sound of the ethnonyms *Huihu/Huihe* and Uyghur.

[10] *Sart* is derived from the Sanskrit *sarthavaha*, meaning merchant or caravan leader. According to a comment by Michael Brose during Pleasure, Providence and Purity: An International Conference on Food and Drink in Islamic Societies and Cultures, Hong Kong, April 27–8, 2017, *Huihui* was first used as a toponym (see also Dillon 2015, 13). It is very likely that the meaning then expanded to include different Central Asians.

[11] In Ricci's report, he refers to Muslims with the then-European term for Muslims: Saracens (see Trigault 1953, 106–7; Ricci 1615, 116–07).

3.2 Late Imperial *Huihui* and Islam

The following questions arise: How did Sinophone Muslims employ the term *Huihui* in their self-identification? Did they distinguish themselves from Muslims who did not identify as *Huihui,* and to what extent? There is no single answer to these questions. The presupposed civilizational or empire-wide groupness associated with Sino-Muslims – where groupness is the basis for modern *Huihui minzu* or ethnicity in general[12] – did not take root across the whole civilizational-imperial sphere of China. After the fall of the Song dynasty, there was a significant change in Muslim settlements. The fall of the Song dynasty meant an end to *fanfang* settlements and the relatively autonomous intra-Muslim legal jurisdiction. Muslims moved from commercial city enclaves to dispersed settlements across China. In Yuan China, the application of *shari'a* law among Muslims was pushed towards a relatively private realm with the establishment of the Bureau of the *Qadi*s across the Yuan Empire to deal with matters related to marriage, property, and inheritance (Erie 2016, 48-9). With the dissolution of the Mongol racial class system[13] following the fall of the Yuan dynasty, Muslim immigrants entering China during the Yuan period had to undergo a long process of adapting to the local conditions in their various regional settlements throughout the Ming Empire. This was reinforced by a state-sanctioned program of sinicization (cf. cultural integration) starting from the early Ming dynasty, which included *de jure* prohibition of endogamy between Muslims (or *Huihui* in the exact wording of the legal code) and obligating intermarriage between Muslims and *Han* Chinese (Daming lu jijie fuli juan zhi liu 大明律集解附例卷之六 2017). However, these imperial policies were not evenly enforced throughout the empire. Instead, given China's vast territory, local or regional societies played a decisive role. If we consider the Muslims residing in the northwestern part of Ming China, their economy could not be separated from that of their Central Asian (Turkic/Persian) co-religionists. Conducting the tea and horse trade in this frontier area, many of those whom the Chinese sources called *Huihui* were bilingual, partly because of their Central Asian ancestry. Even when the Ming court enforced harsh regulations on the local Muslim merchants to impose a state monopoly on trade, frontier *Huihui* under the domain of the Ming never stopped interacting with Muslims of the Western Regions (*Xiyu* 西域), i.e., Turfan and beyond. When there were

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[12] For modern *Huihui minzu*, it would be a national 'groupness' instead of a civilizational/imperial one. For an analysis and critique of "groupness"/"groupism," see Brubaker (2009; 2012, 28).

[13] Yuan-dynasty society was divided into four classes along ethnic lines in the following order: Mongols, *Semu* 色目, *Hanren* 漢人, and *Nanren* 南人. *Semu* was a miscellaneous category including peoples from Western and Central Asia. *Hanren* referred to Northern Chinese who were ruled by the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) prior to the Mongol conquest. *Nanren* literally meant Southerners, who were Chinese ruled by the Southern Song dynasty.

agrarian distresses and harsh restrictions on commerce in the late Ming and early Qing periods before the incorporation of Xinjiang, Turfan Muslims even joined these frontier *Huihui* in rebelling against the governmental forces (Rossabi 1979). The eastward spread of *Naqshbandyah* Sufism among existing Muslim communities from western Turkistan all the way into the frontier region of China[14] during this period might be another factor linking these Muslim communities (Lipman 1998, 54; see Fletcher 1974, 20-1). The general structural arrangement of communities in this frontier region both within and outside the domain of imperial China was one that centered on the local mosque or Sufi order and engaged in similar commercial activities with people speaking at least one common language. As such, it is hard to conceive of a 'Sino-Muslim' structural identity in this area that was entirely distinct from that of the neighboring Central Asian Muslims. Islamic practices were a constitutive, if not defining, element in the structural identity of these frontier *Huihui* in the late Ming to early Qing periods. They were under continuous Islamic civilizational influence from Central Asia and were geographically distant from the power center of Chinese civilization, even though they fell within the administrative domain of the Chinese empire.

The situation on the southeastern coast of China was the converse. In Chendai, Fujian there was – and is – a lineage tracing *Huihui* as their forefathers. Originating from *Dashi* Muslim merchants living in the *fanfang* in Quanzhou, Fujian,[15] this lineage retained Islam – which formed part of their ancestors' structural identity – only as part of their textual ancestral narrative within ten-generation time. According to the *Dings' Genealogy*, which goes back to the Ming dynasty, the Ding lineage depicted themselves as descendants of the *Huihui* Sharif Sayid Ajal Shams al-Din 'Umar al-Bukhari (1211-1279),[16] who practiced the *jiao* (teaching) of *Huihui* (Wang 2017a, 36-50), i.e., Islam. In the memoir *Zujiao shuo* 祖教說 ("*On the teachings of the ancestors*"), attributed to the tenth-generation patriarch Ding Yanxia 丁衍夏 (b. 1518), it is recalled that the lineage did not use coffins to bury the dead, never ate pork, used to face west to worship 'Heaven' together, observed a month of fasting every year, and always washed themselves before interacting with the 'God.' However, by the time the memoir was written, people seldom worshiped Heaven, consumed pork occasionally, found Buddhist monks or Daoist priests to perform death rituals, burned paper money for the dead, etc. (Zhuang 1996, 29). Throughout the whole *Genealogy*, there are hardly any further references to the doctrinal content of the Islamic faith. Ding Yanxia mentions that the lineage would recite the "pure" scripture (*qingjing* 清經) in a foreign voice at festivals and funerals

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[14] That is the present-day provinces of Ningxia, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai.

[15] This was one of the biggest port cities along the ancient maritime Silk Road in the Southern Song dynasty.

[16] Sayyid was a prominent governor of southwestern China, appointed by the Yuan court.

without understanding the content. This "pure" scripture is very likely to be the *Quran*. Thus, without sustained Islamic practices and reasonable Islamic knowledge, the Dings' identity would hardly be marked by the *structural* or institutional distinctiveness of Islam. Islam eventually became a vague textual or oral memory. What took the place of Islam was the cultural invention of 'the lineage' (*zongzu* 宗族) that swept across south China (Faure 1989).[17] Due to the agricultural economy in the region, it was necessary to concentrate village resources. In this context, the problem of group boundary maintenance took precedence with 'the lineage' as a response to resource distribution and generation.[18] Through the composition of a textual genealogy, and the emphasis on ancestral veneration through proper ritual performance, there arose a new communal identity structured around the lineage that built upon Confucian values, especially the *attributive ideal* of *xiao* 孝 or filial piety (at least) for the local literati and gentries of the lineage who composed *Dings' Genealogy*.[19] Thus, the communal boundary of 'the lineage' demarcated the Dings from other village lineages, rather than there being an 'ethnic' demarcation from the *Han* or other 'ethnically' different Muslims, or a 'religious' one from other 'religious' groups.

The above examples illustrate the spectrum of identities spanning from a living tradition to a distant memory. The two groups above were located in regions relatively distant from the political power centers of late imperial China. As such, their identity constructions were more dependent on the regional societies. However, the most solid evidence of practicing Muslims incorporating *Huihui* as their identity sign can be found in the imperial centers. Here, Muslims did not just signify themselves by employing the term *Huihui* as a transliteration of a foreign toponym or ethnonym. Instead, they reinvented the concept behind the signifier by drawing on symbols from both the neo-Confucian tradition and the Islamic tradition. The former was the state orthodoxy of governance and the agreed cosmology of the Chinese literati officials in the late imperial period; the latter was the institution that defined the communities of Muslim enclaves in cities.

The earliest surviving written record of Muslims referring to themselves as *Huihui* is a stone inscription, *Chi ci libaisi ji bei* 敕賜禮拜寺記碑 ("Tablet on the Imperial Bestowed Mosque"), crafted in 1613 at the Beijing Niujie Mosque

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[17] See also Wang (2017b) for the lineage construction of *Huihui* in Guangxi.

[18] The 20th century ethnicization of the Dings as *Huihui minzu* cannot be separated from the social, economic, and political incentives given by the People's Republic of China's minority minzu (ethnic) policies (Gladney 1996, 261–91; Wang 2017c).

[19] Dru C. Gladney argues that the Dings' Huihui identity is shaped around the "truthfulness" (*zhen* 真) of their lineage (1996, 261–91). This might have been the case in the 1980s when the Dings had to demonstrate to the state that they were part of the *Huihui minzu*. However, Confucian values, especially filial piety, were emphasized in the late imperial period, and the maintenance of the lineage's 'truthfulness' would itself be an expression of filial piety.

(Yu and Lei 2001, 3-5). On this stone tablet, *Huihui* is written as two distinct Chinese characters which share the sound *hui*. The first one is 回 (*hui*), which appears throughout our discussion on Muslims in China. The other is 輝 (*hui*), which means radiant or to illuminate. The word 回 (*hui*) has a more common usage in Chinese, classical or modern alike, meaning: return, reflect, coming/going back, or echo, etc. By drawing upon these meanings, the stone inscription uses 回 (*hui*) to spell out the basic existential condition of human life from an Islamic perspective: death. Claiming to reference a similar 'ancient' Confucian usage of *hui* as death, the tablet describes death as a *return* to the sole Lord, Allah, who is the source of life. Those who have returned to Heaven after death, because they followed the command of the Heaven(ly Lord) and the deeds of the Sage[20] in their lifetime, are also classified as 回輝 (*hui hui*), i.e., returners to the light. Therefore, it is clear that the community equated their communal sign *Huihui* with believers (*mu'min*) or submitters (*muslim*). The idea of *hui* 回 is also understood in the context of communal worship. By drawing on the parallelism of the Hajj – the "return" (*hui* 回) to the *Ka'ba* – and the communal worship performed in the Niujie Mosque in the Ming capital of Beijing, the *structural identity* of this Muslim community was simultaneously constructed as believers of Islam and pious subjects of the Ming Empire. Communal worship was portrayed as an act that had the personal approval of the empire's sovereign, who was the Son of Heaven. Moreover, communal worship was not just an act endorsed by the political powers which took place within an authorized space. Muslim worship was a positive response to the religio-political power, with prayers for blessings upon the country and the prevention of disasters. This penetration of political power within the mosque institution, and thus the shaping of the *structural identity* of this *Huihui* community, cannot be separated from the fact that they were residing in the imperial political center. Thus, by reinterpreting the meaning of their identity sign *Huihui,* Chinese Muslims simultaneously addressed the problems of maintaining the group boundary of their city enclave and integrating into the empire through submission to the sovereign's power.

3.3   The *Han kitab* Construction of *Huihui*

The blunt political allegiance engraved on the stone tablet, however, did not fully demonstrate the depth and breadth of the influences the 'master pattern'[21]

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[20] Chinese Muslims understood the Prophet Muhammad in the Confucian terms of sagehood (see Frankel 2011, 80–92). "Heavenly Mandate" (*tianming* 天命) and the "deeds of the Sage" (*shengxing* 聖行) on the tablet likely refer to the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* respectively in Confucian terms.

[21] Ben-Dor Benite (2005, 24–5) borrows the concept of a "master pattern" from Pierre Bourdieu to denote the Chinese Muslims' scholarly tradition as an "individual pattern" that emerged out of the larger Chinese scholarly culture, i.e., the "master pattern".

of Chinese civilization had on the Muslim episteme. Political allegiance could not be the sole element of a purely (or functionally demarcated) political identity as pious subjects of the empire, as there was not a political sphere autonomous from Confucian cosmological references; such cosmological interpretations were inseparable from the elaborate literati tradition. It was through this tradition that some Muslims found the means and discursive resources to construct the *Huihui* identity as being simultaneously Islamic and Chinese (Ben-Dor Benite 2005, 12-9), not just as religious members and political subjects on an institutional level, but addressing the *attributive* level of what marks *Huihui* as *special* in relation to the ultimate. This was facilitated by the mutual influence of Sufi texts and the neo-Confucianism of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). There was a network of Muslims learned enough to be called *Huiru* 回儒, or Muslim scholars/literati, with extensive knowledge of the Chinese literati tradition, including the 'three teachings' – Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (Murata 2017, 34n3).[22] These scholars acquired their Islamic training through "scriptural hall education" (*jingtang jiaoyu* 經堂教育), the mosque-based education that was common in late imperial big cities. Scriptural hall education was modeled after traditional Confucian education to provide Chinese-language Islamic educations for young Sinophone Muslims starting from the mid-Ming (Lipman 1998, 45-51). Their curriculum included translated Sufi works like *Mirsad al-'ibad min al-mabda ila 'l-ma'ad* مرصــاد العبــاد مــن المبــدآ إلــى المعــاد (*The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return*; Razi 1982) by Al-Razi (d. 1256) (Frankel 2011, 36-9). The *Huiru* produced a corpus of works referred to as the *Han kitab*. Among those who produced the *Han kitab* texts is an epitomic figure, Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 (c. 1590-c. 1658), who devoted a chapter to the meaning of *Huihui* in two of his books, *Zhengjiao zhenquan* 正教真詮 (*Real Commentary of the Orthodoxy*) and *Xizhen zhengda* 希真正答 (*Orthodox Answer to the Very Real*) (Wang 1999, 197-201, 487-9). According to Wang, the essential meaning of *Huihui* is realized only when one understands the deepest meaning of "Returning Returner."[23] Adding more nuances to the understanding of 'return' than death, which we found on the *Chi ci libaisi ji bei* inscription, Wang understands 'return' in terms of the doctrine of the "Origin and Return" (*al-mabda' wa-l-ma'ad* المبــدآ والمعــاد), which relates to the idea of the "Unity of Being" (*wahdat al-wujud* وحدة الوجود). On the surface, 'return' is understood as death and resurrection. In this way, Wang warns people to properly conduct and cultivate their lives within the 'orthodoxy' – consisting of both the teachings of Islam and Confucianism (and the Buddhist and Daoist teachings that are endorsed by Confucianism) – so that one may physically return to where one came from

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[22] Or even the Teaching from the West, i.e., Catholicism and the knowledge brought by the Catholic missionaries, in the case of Liu Zhi (Frankel 2011, 163-75).

[23] Murata (2017, 139) translates Wang Daiyu's chapter title "*Huihui*" as "Returning Returners."

before creation. This, in turn, refers to the Creator. Thus, 'return' implies the 'origin.'

A deeper sense of 'return' is portrayed as several epistemological levels including the realization of an origin, the search for it, and union with the one and only Origin. Wang equates the realization of the existence of and the search for an origin – by transcending worldly desires and the phenomenological truth – with reaching Buddhist Thusness (Skt. *tathata*; Ch. *zhenru* 真如), Confucian "Supreme Polarity" (*taiji* 太極)[24] or the Daoist "Gateway of the Manifold Secrets" (*zhongmiao zhi men* 眾妙之門).[25] It should be noted that Confucian 'Supreme Polarity' implies a potential for polarizing into *yin and yang* (Adler 2015), and the subsequent creation of the phenomenological world. According to Wang Daiyu, in order to unite with the Origin, which is the stage of the "Non-Polar" (*wuji* 無極),[26] one must go beyond the three teachings and abandon one's subjectivity by attaining the "no-heart" (*wuxin* 無心).[27] According to Wang, when one reaches this stage of "Non-Polar," one communes with the Origin; and one will even recognize (*ren* 認) the Origin as the "True Lord" (*zhenzhu* 真主), *Allah*. This is the ultimate level of *Hui* (Wang 1999, 199). Wang's description of a gradation of the levels of truth in relation to the meaning of the 'return' likely corresponds to the Four Doors hierarchy of spiritual progress in Sufi theoretical writings, namely *shari'a, tariqa, haqiqa*, and *ma'rifa*. Conducting one's life according to the 'orthodoxy' of the three teachings and transcending the phenomenological world through the three teachings corresponds to abiding by the Divine law (*shari'a*) and the spiritual techniques of a particular order or school (*tariqa*) respectively. The stage of 'Non-Polar' is highly analogous to a general understanding of *haqiqa* as communion with the undivided Truth. Whether Wang maintains a distinction between the stage of 'Non-Polar' and the ultimate *Hui* of the recognition of God, and thus suggests the ultimate level of spiritual knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), is a matter of interpretation. Regardless, Wang identifies Islam as the single path to these later stages. His reason for elaborating on the meaning of *Huihui* seems to be to demonstrate to Muslims, especially those who are out of touch with their tradition, that the basics of being *Huihui* are fully compatible with the Chinese 'orthodoxy' on the orthopraxy of life. However, being fully *Huihui* means spiritual superiority that goes beyond the orthodoxy of Chinese literati. To put it another way, *Huihui*s' Islamic tradition grants them the potential to master supreme spiritual knowledge, so only those who have attained or set out to attain such knowledge are living up to the name of *Huihui*. Therefore, Wang identifies the *Huihui* as being Muslim in the *attributive* and not merely *struc-*

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[24] Reasons for translating *taiji* as "Supreme Polarity," see Adler (2015).
[25] Using D.C. Lau (2001) translation of the term *zhongmiao zhi men*.
[26] Reasons for translating *wuji* as "Non-Polar," see Adler (2015).
[27] The 'no-heart' is probably inspired by Buddhist language (Murata 2017, 24).

tural sense. The spiritual or mystical truth permitted by the tradition of Islam marks Muslims as *special*. In this way, *Huihui* is an *attributive identity* of these *anomalous* (epistemic) relations with the *ideal* – the Origin/God.

However, this *attributive identity* of *Huihui* did not exclude people of other descent or traditions, at least in theory. Some sources claim that Wang engaged in extensive debates and exchanges with scholars of other traditions, i.e., Confucians, Buddhists, and Daoists; the *Xizhen zhengda* records many of these dialogues. An anecdote states that Wang even took an abbot from a Buddhist monastery as his disciple in 1650 (Murata 2000, 21). Thus, knowledge about *Huihui* and about the essence of *Huihui* was open to anyone who wanted to seek the truth in the cosmopolitan scholarly culture of late imperial China. Those within the high literati culture were not necessarily confined within a single tradition despite the presence of explicit conceptual demarcations of various traditions – as the word *jiao* implies. In late imperial China, distinctions were made between varying "system[s] of beliefs and practices", or what Wilfred Cantwell Smith would define as "religions" (1991).[28] However, from the example of Wang Daiyu, it is obvious that the search for transcendental knowledge crossed boundaries between different traditions. Wang's understanding of *Huihui* was so influential that an important *Han kitab* scholar from the metropolitan area of *Jinling* (present-day Nanjing), Liu Sanjie 劉三杰 (fl. the end of 17th century; Leslie 1981, 88) appropriated many of his wordings when explaining the meaning of *Huihui*.

In his "*On the Pure and True Teaching*" (*Qingzhen jiaoshuo* 清真教説), Liu Sanjie, however, spelt out the meaning of *Huihui* explicitly as an alternative name for the Pure and True Teaching (*qingzhen jiao* 清真教), a name employed by Chinese Muslims to refer to their religious tradition (Liu 1984).[29] The use of the suffix *jiao* and the content of *Qingzhen jiaoshuo* indicates an effort to systematize the understanding of Islam in a single piece of work, rather than addressing scattered concepts related to Islam like in Wang's works. The deliberate use of the suffix *jiao* suggests an attempt in this *Jinling Huiru* intellectual lineage to more explicitly abstract the whole system of teaching from the individual. In this sense, and in the works of other Huiru like Ma Zhu 馬注 (1640-c.1710), a concept of a reified Islam did exist before post-imperial China. The *Huihui* identity was not just strengthened by its association with a reified Islam; another historical contingency – ethnic origin making – came

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[28] I thank Katerina Dalacoura for drawing my attention to the theoretical dimensions of the reification of religion and Islam in particular.

[29] *Qingzhen jiao* is the name for Islam in Chinese that has been used by Muslims since the 17th century or earlier. This usage was probably an appropriation of earlier translations of names of other Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, by their adherents in China. There was perhaps an even earlier usage of the term *qingzhen* in Buddhist or Daoist contexts (Frankel 2011, 170, 222n56). This name denotes the purity and the truthfulness of one's tradition, Islam in our case.

into play. In the post-imperial period, these two developments were further systematized through secular discourses.

One generation later, the diasporic memory of the foreign origin of Muslims was exploited in a new methodological construction of the *Huihui* identity. Liu Sanjie's son, Liu Zhi 劉智 (c. 1660-c. 1739), spending most of his life under the reign of the Qing Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722), was very much influenced by his time. In this period, a new scholarly methodology of philology became prevalent among Chinese literati in the *kaozheng* 考證 or "evidential studies" movement (Elman 2001). Employing this new *kaozheng* method, Liu Zhi added a new dimension to his discourse on *Huihui* in his passage "On *Huihui*" (*Huihui shuo* 回回說) (Liu 2000). In addition to understanding *Huihui* as signifying an *attributive* religiosity, a concept inherited from Wang Daiyu via the academic lineage of Liu's own father, Liu traces the philology of the notion *Huihui* as a creative transmutation from the Chinese misrepresentation of his in-group as *Huihe*. According to Liu, the people of the Pure and True Teaching were followers of Muhammad's teaching and were called *mumin* 穆民 or *mushi* 穆士[30] in their native land of *Tianfang* 天方, or the Heavenly Square (which is the *Ka'ba* and by extension Mecca and Arabia). Because these Muslims shared the same teaching with the people of *Huihe*, a 'country' between China and Arabia, the Chinese in the old days jumbled their name and referred to these Muslims as Huihe as well. Only later did Muslim scholars arriving in Song and Yuan China rename themselves *Huihui,* the meaning of which is specified in Liu Sanjie's work and other Confucian philological/philosophical works.

This historicized nominal myth establishes an imaginary ancestry for Chinese Muslims tracing back to the 'original' community at their religious sanctuary – *Tianfang*. In this period, numerous ethno-religious communities throughout the diverse Qing Empire undertook 'orthodox' descent construction projects in an effort to legitimize their existence. This trend was very likely unintentionally inspired by a similar project undertaken by the ruling minority, the Manchus (Frankel 2016, 37). This project was at one of its heights during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor who sought to establish himself as a hegemon among the *Han*s, Tibetans, and the Mongols by drawing on differing elements from their respective traditions. Liu Zhi's *Huihui shuo* was one of a number of Chinese Muslims' scholarly attempts at creating a common descent for *Huihui*.[31] However, it differs from earlier texts in two ways. Firstly, it contains less

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[30] *Mumin* may be a direct transliteration of "believer" – *muʾmin* مؤمن in Arabic. *Mushi* could be an abridged transliteration of Muslim, taking the first syllable of Muslim, or a contraction of *mumin* and *xinshi* 信士 – believer.
[31] The other genre of literature in descent-making is the colloquial novel, which is exemplified in the *Huihui yuanlai* 回回原來 (*Origin of the Huihui*) (see Ma 1998, 53–72). The earliest existing version of the text attributes its authorship to Liu Sanjie.

of the neo-Confucian speculative philosophical language that was heavily employed in the earlier texts of the same scholarly lineage. The positivist turn in Liu's *Huihui shuo* indicates a drift away from the use of normative (religious) language in the construction of *Huihui* identity. Still, this did not result in a modern ethnicity of *Huihui* in 18th century China. As *Huihui shuo* concludes by recalling the worthiness of *Huihui* in the eyes of Chinese emperors of different dynasties, it can be inferred that one of the major purposes of the text was to legitimize the existence of Chinese Muslims in the empire by employing the literati discourses and methodologies of that time. The legitimacy of Muslim constituencies in the Qing Empire within the *Han* cultural sphere[32] still relied heavily on them abiding by the orthodox ritual-politics, which continuously dominated the official literati discourse on governance of the empire (van der Veer 2016, 118-22). One only has to recall the famous Chinese Rites Controversy, in which Kangxi Emperor expelled Catholic missionaries who followed the Pope's ruling that Chinese ancestral worship was 'idolatry' to understand the ritual-politics *Huihui* faced by the time that Liu Zhi wrote his *Huihui shuo*. By employing the language of scholarship and maintaining the orthodox *Jinling Han kitab* understanding of the identity sign *Huihui,* in line with both the Islamic and neo-Confucian traditions, Liu prevented the *Huihui* identity from being seen as unacceptable from the imperial perspective. Secondly, in *Huihui shuo*, there seems to be an explicit effort to create a common descent of *Huihui* that is distinct from the linguistically different *Huihe* by historicizing the role of *Huihui* in China, while still drawing on elements from the same institutional tradition shared with the *Huihe*, Islam.[33] It is hard to tell whether Liu Zhi distinguishes Chinese Muslims from his contemporary Central Asian Muslims, and Uyghurs in particular, as the transliteration of the Uyghurs starting from the Ming dynasty had occasionally taken the form of *Weiwuer* 畏兀兒 /畏吾兒 instead of *Huihe*. As Liu had never travelled beyond Eastern and Central China (Frankel 2011, 5-10), it was very likely that he distinguished the *Huihui* from the 'imaginary' *Huihe* (cf. the actual Central Asian Muslims at the

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[32] There was a pluralistic mode of governance within different "cultural spheres" (*bu* 部) in the Qing Empire in which the discourses on legitimacy to rule and be ruled varied. For example, from Kangxi Emperor to his grandson Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796), the imperial court had a project to promote "martial value" (*wu* 武) in order to "forge a more closely aligned set of cultural preferences among the diverse peoples they ruled–Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs as well as Chinese. Rather than seeking to draw their Inner Asian subjects into the orbit of Chinese civilization, the Qing rulers sought to promote values associated with the cultures of Inner Asia among their Chinese subjects, in a process that was just the reverse of the sinicization routinely claimed as inevitable. The purpose was to bring together diverse traditions within a single polity, in other words to unite and rule their multiethnic and multicultural empire" (Waley-Cohen 2003, 326).

[33] Instead, the actual historical situation was similar to that of the late Ming where the *Huihui* residing on the northwestern frontier identified more with their Central Asian co-religionists, which might have blurred the distinction further.

time) mentioned in Chinese historical texts. The linguistically different *Huihe* in the *Huihui shuo* were therefore a creation of Liu's "evidential studies." One should not conclude from this single text that there was an empire-wide distinction between the *Huihui* and their Central Asian co-religionists.

It is evident that the *Han kitab* construction of the *Huihui* identity drew heavily on the 'religious' elements – both attributive and structural – of the Islamic tradition and underlined its compatibility with the 'master pattern' of the Chinese empire. This demonstrates concern about the dual problem of maintaining the religio-cultural group boundary while also integrating into the empire. The response to these two problems converges in the "guiding idea" (see Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012; 2017) – of orthodoxy. The orthodoxy of the Islamic tradition understood by the *Huiru* is interpreted in the framework of the imperial orthodox cosmology. This language of orthodoxy represents an alternative to that of secularity in response to the same reference problem. Although there were emerging trends of referencing a reified Islam and historicizing *Huihui* existence in China as demonstrated in Liu's writing,[34] they cannot be seen as a transition to a secular identity configuration. Essentially, these two trends were not aimed at 'disembedding' the person from the system of Islam and attributing agency to the *Huihui* in their history-making (history-making is seen by many as an integral part of defining secular human agency; see Asad 2003, 67-99). Instead, the *Han kitab's* efforts to systematize the Pure and True teaching – as seen in the *Qingzhen jiaoshuo* – were deliberate efforts to excavate and illustrate an 'authentic' form of Islam. With their historicization of the *Huihui,* the *Han kitab* scholars trace this 'authentic' form of Islam all the way back to the first transmitter of the final and pure *Dao* (道 "the Way")[35]: Prophet Muhammad. The intention was the purposeful construction (via scholarly exploration) of the *Daotong* (道統 Transmission of the *Dao*) of Islam among the *Huihui* with the *Huiru* as the embodier of this *Daotong*.[36] The *Huiru's* identification with *Daotong* and orthodoxy – using the language of the Chinese imperial state, which is a "religious state" (Lagerwey 2010) analogous to the "church" in Christendom – confirms the possibility that "the [reference] problems in question are not 'resolved' in the direction of secularity but through the imposition of religious authority" (Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012, 889; 2017, 22).

In the following, it is suggested that the increasingly positivist logic behind the shift in both scholarly methodologies and ethnic-origin discourses was constitutive in constructing a modern ethnic identity for *Huihui* in post-imperial China. In addition, the tension between Chinese history and Islam in the de-

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[34] The *Huihui yuanlai* has similar historicizing features as well (see footnote 32).
[35] One of the attributive ultimate concepts in Chinese cosmology in denoting the cosmic principle.
[36] Cf. the idea of the *ulama* as heirs to the Prophets.

scent creation of *Huihui* was very much alive throughout the Republican period. However, the modern formulation of *Huihui* as an identity among the generic categories for ethnicity and religion depended largely on the political context and authorized discourses.

4. Towards the Post-Imperial Controversy of *Hui*

4.1 Introduction of *Minzu* Discourse and Concerns about Exclusion from the Chinese Nation

The modern history of secularity of Islam in China – its reification as a religion – cannot be separated from the negotiations regarding the ethnization of the *Huihui* following the Chinese nation-building process starting in the late Qing and continuing into the first half of the 20th century. This historical development was filled with tensions between the demand for group rights and the need for societal/national unity, alongside the novel need to respond to modern guiding ideas, such as rationality, that correspond to the larger functional differentiation. The new development of the *Huihui* identity in this period was reflected in two newly imported (families of) concepts, "religion" and "ethnicity/race/nation" or *zongjiao* 宗教 and *zhongzu* 種族/*minzu* 民族 respectively in Chinese. The possible way of conceptualizing religious traditions was fundamentally altered when Japanese linguists in the mid-19th century coined the term *shukyo* 宗教 (Ch. *zongjiao*; Josephson 2012), combining the traditional Chinese characters 宗 (*zong*) and 教 (*jiao*)[37] to capture the modern Western concept of religion. This neologism was then exported to China for its modern usage – as "a distinct religious system in contrast to secular life and differentiated from other religious systems" – in the late 1800s (Yang 2008, 11).[38] The Chinese use phrases with the word *zu* 族[39] to communicate and translate concepts related to ethnicity, race, and nation. Like *jiao* in *zongjiao*, *zu* had a similar fate as a "return graphic loan" – i.e., a sign coined overseas using the same (classical Chinese) signifier, but where that signifier's place of origin has readopted the foreign-coined sign – from Japanese (Liu 1995, 33), causing a huge discursive change to the word. In the late 19th century, the Japanese used *minzoku* 民族 (Ch. *minzu*) to translate the idea of nation from modern Europe.

[37] The original meaning of *zong* 宗 is lineage or ancestry, whereas *jiao* 教 means to teach, a teaching, or the teaching depending on the context.

[38] In classical Chinese, *zongjiao* was first used in the Buddhist context referring to the specific teachings of a sect or a school of thought. See Chen (2002, 45–54).

[39] In classical Chinese, *zu* originally meant kinship group, and gradually extended to a larger communal meaning. Belonging to a kinship group does not guarantee any natural claim to political power, such as the self-determination required for nation-building.

Modeling their nation-building path on that of the Germans, the Japanese understood *minzu* as a similar concept to *das Volk* in German – as a collective of people biologically related (race or ethnic group or *zhongzu* 種族 in Chinese) based on a common language, history, and cultural attributes (Wang 2015, 54-8; Lipman 1998, xx; Dikötter 1992, 61-125). However, the role of religion for these people varies in different *minzu* discourses. In the following section, the notion of ethnicity and race are taken as similar categories (Brubaker 2009), corresponding to the ambiguity of the Chinese vocabularies. Regardless, I consider nation to be a concept that denotes a group identity with a 'natural' claim to political power such as the self-determination required for nation-building.

This Japanese ethnic-national idea of *minzu* was highly appealing to members of the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmeng hui* 同盟會) in Japan during the first decade of the 1900s. Led by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the late-Qing revolutionists aspired to establish a Chinese nation state based on a single *minzu* model, in which the *minzu* was first and foremost *Han*. However, this idea caused doubts and worries among those who supported the revolutionary cause but who did not fit naturally into the available identity discourse provided by their *Han* revolutionist counterparts. Among those who criticized Sun's revolutionary discourse were Chinese Muslim students residing in Japan. Modeling themselves on the Revolutionary Alliance, 36 Muslim students (including one female student and one imam) established the Muslim Educational Association of Students in Tokyo (*Liudong qingzhen jiaoyu hui* 留東清真教育會) in 1907. The aim of the association was to mobilize the Muslims in China culturally and politically through reforming Muslim education by expanding its curriculum to include modern science, patriotism, and political instruction. The most notable effort of the association was their publication, the first modern Chinese Muslim periodical – *Muslim Awakening* (*Xinghui pian* 醒回篇) in 1908 (Matsumoto 2003, 270-4). This single-issue magazine provides valuable insight into the association's understanding of *Huihui* identity through their interpretation of *zongjiao* and *minzu*. Through this, it is possible to see the early attempts by modern Chinese Muslims to formulate a group identity that had an either *zongjiao* or *minzu* configuration, whether deliberately or not, in response to the political situation that they were in. Faced with the *Han* revolutionists' popular racial/ethnic political premise that a great nation was a nation comprising a single *minzu*, in this case the *Han minzu*, two antitheses to prevent exclusion stood out among other plausible reformulations: 1) rejecting the single *minzu* formulation and claiming that a multi-*minzu* nation could be modernized and strengthened; 2) following the single *minzu* formulation and reformulating one's identity to fit into that single *minzu*. These two plausible antitheses to *Han* nationalism can be seen in *Muslim Awakening* (Yu, Lei, and Li 1992).

Surprisingly, Bao Tingliang 保廷梁 (1874-1947), who was both a member of the Revolutionary Alliance and a Muslim, turned to the first solution.[40] In his article "Urging My Fellow Men to Assume Responsibility in Fostering Education" (*Quan tongren fuxing jiaoyu zhi zeren shuo* 勸同人復興教育之責任說), Bao argues that religion is able to alter one's racial consciousness such that those who originally belonged to different races can perceive themselves as belonging to the same race[41] (ibid., 53). Although he assigned *Hui*/Muslim to a racial (*zhongzu*) category, for Bao, *zhongzu* was a convenient label for a collective of people. Islam was key to constituting the *Hui* identity. By equating *Hui*s' supposed religious (*zongjiao*) identity with *zhongzu* identity, and stating that any *zhongzu* was a constituent element of the Chinese nation, every Muslim national could participate in the Chinese nation-strengthening process.

The reformulation of the *Hui* identity in order to fit into the single *minzu* paradigm can be found in the writing of Huang Zhenpan 黄镇磐 (1873-1942), the association's secretary. In his article "On the *Hui* people" (*Lun huimin* 論回民), he stresses that "*Hui* is not the name of a race (*zu*) but a religion (*jiao*)" (ibid., 58). Huang traces the name *Hui* back to the *Huihe* people and repeats parts of the original myths that were circulating during the *Han kitab* period. However, in addition to recounting the foreign origin and the biological propagation of Muslims in China, he argues that there were many local Chinese converts to Islam over the millennia. These all contributed to the assimilation of Muslims in China, as Huang states: "After more than a thousand years they multiplied and, as demonstrated by Hong Jun, were melted in this big oven and have become of the same kind (*tongzhong* 同種) [as other inhabitants of China] – therefore how can they be called a different race (*zu*)?" (ibid., 58).[42] Thus, biologically speaking *Hui* are the same as other Chinese. He even further confines the *Hui* identity as a religious one by employing the old Chinese Muslim notion: "struggle for religious issues but not for state [power] (*zhengjiao bu zhengguo* 爭教不爭國)," which implies the functional differentiation between politics and religion.

These two formulations led to two distinct directions of formulating the *Hui* identity in relation to the modern notion of religion: the first – reformulating *Huihui* as a *minzu* that was shaped by a religious factor – made *Huihui* more than a religious identity and enabled them to operate in (non-religious) social spheres related to the building of the Chinese nation. The second formula restricted *Huihui* to being a religious identity – Muslim – operating within the functionally demarcated religious sphere. In this second formulation, the *Hui* are supposed to engage in the political sphere as *Han* or Chinese nationals.

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[40] Biography of Bao, see Wang (2015, 131 n.3) and Xu and Ha (2011, 66–73, 109).
[41] The biological connotation of race was implicit in the notion of *minzu/zhongzu* in the popular discourses of that period.
[42] The translation is found in Cieciura (2016, 113).

4.2 Reification of Islam through Education and Modern Organization

The link between these two seemingly diverging ways of formulating the *Hui* identity was the reification of Islam, or *Huijiao* 回教. This new reified understanding of Islam, or religion in general, is evident in the other articles in *Muslim Awakening*. It differs from the late imperial understanding of Islam as a *jiao* – a set of embodied practices embedded in the politically authorized cosmology, where this understanding was produced by corresponding institutions, e.g., the 'scriptural hall education' and the imperial bureaucracy. The collapse of this late imperial episteme, especially that of the traditional imperial polity and the traditional education in the Late Qing Reform (1901-1911) with the rationalist "religion vs. superstition" discourse and respective "destroy temples and build schools" campaign (Goossaert 2006; 2008, 209-12; see also Nedostup 2009), formed the historical context for these young authors' understanding of Islam. For them, Islam was a set of systematic principles and practices, best exemplified by the Five Pillars of Islam (Zhao 1992), which could be isolated from the corresponding institution. Therefore, it was possible for them to advocate an "internal conversion"[43] of Islam into its modern institutional forms, including the establishment of a national institution for the monitoring of the development of Islam, the adoption of modern media (printing press, newspapers, magazines, etc.), and the founding of standardized institutions for the preservation and transmission of religious knowledge (Yu, Lei, and Li 1992, 44-50). This went alongside advocating reforms of *Huihui* education to confine religious education to the transmission of the Five Pillars in order to assure Muslims a place in paradise, and make room for civic national education. This was aimed at transforming Muslims into "Chinese nationals" capable of contributing to the survival of the modernizing Chinese nation (Zhao 1992).

To be religious, therefore, no longer meant having an identity that was subsumed in the *structural* engagement and *attributive* embodiment of that religion. Rather, Muslims in the modern context became associated with a relatively voluntary involvement with the reified religious institution/sphere. The language of secularity above penetrated the modern Chinese Muslim reformist ideas that supported the mushrooming of modern Muslim educational institutions and Islamic associations throughout the Republican period (Aubin 2006). The creation of these associations was "intimately linked to nationalist ideas, and both concurred in the invention of a Muslim citizen" (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 88).

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[43] See Geertz (1993, 170–89) on "internal conversion."

4.3   Political Negotiation between Religious and Ethnic Identity

In 1912, with the establishment of the Republic of China, the *Muslim Awakening* authors' concern about the *Hui* being excluded from China was eliminated *de jure*. Building on the 1911 Revolution framework, the new republic recognized the *wuzu* 五族, or the "five ethnicities/nationalities."[44] The *wuzu* concept was derived from the idea of the peoples who inhabited the five different "cultural spheres," or *bu* 部, of the territory that the republic inherited from the Qing Empire. These "five cultural spheres" were Manchuria, China proper, Mongolia, Tibet, and the "*Hui* land" (*Huibu* 回部). In turn, these corresponded to the five *zu*: Manchu, *Han*, Mongol, Tibetan and *Hui* (Cieciura 2016, 114-5; see also He 2006). Logically, the *Hui* would have meant those people who inhabited *Huibu* – Xinjiang – of the former Empire, who were mainly Turkic Muslims. However, as demonstrated earlier, Chinese Muslims in China proper had been included under this name as well. This ambiguity had played a role in the "*wuzu gonghe* (五族共和 unity/republic of the five *zu*)" slogan gaining support from many Chinese Muslims throughout the country during the 1911 Revolution. Very likely for the sake of a larger basis of legitimacy from Muslims across the country, the revolutionists did not specify *Huizu* 回族 as people from a specific region, such as Xinjiang. This ambiguity is reflected in the *Provisional Constitution* of the new Republic in its reference to the ethnic concept of a *Huizu* with no specific reference to the *Hui* Land. It is also worth noting that under this Chinese (multi-ethnic) national framework in the *Provisional Constitution*, freedom of belief was ensured (Shangwu Yinshuju 1916). With this constitutional setting, parliamentary political participation was to be proportionally shared among ethnic groups, whereas political participation for religious groups was limited and their political representation within the state apparatus was largely restricted.[45] Thus, the issue shifted from whether the *Hui* should be incorporated into the nation state, as argued in *Muslim Awakening*, to whether they constituted a legitimate entity for political participation. Since the status of *zu* signified such an entity in the new republic, the debate shifted towards whether the *Huihui* were eligible for such status.

4.4   Religious *Hui* and Ethnic *Hui* as Different Groups

In the early period of the Beiyang government era (1912-1928), the government was not too concerned with rationalizing or making theoretically coherent

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[44] It is likely that the *wuzu* national framework was part of a strategy by the forefathers of the Republic to inherit the whole territory of the Qing Empire. Until 1921, Sun Yat-sen still favored a *Han* nation in which the *wuzu* were all acculturated to *Hanzu* (Sun 1970, 889).

[45] This might not be the case for Christianity, as many of the new political elites of the republic received education from Christian missionary schools and universities. Many converted to Christianity, or at least expressed sympathy/admiration for Christianity.

the discourses on religion and ethnicity by instituting a (theoretical) distinction between the two concepts, at least with regard to Muslims. With the dual nature of *Hui* – signifying both ethnic Turks (Uyghurs, Karzakh, etc.) and religious Chinese Muslims – some, who were called *Hui* due to their religious identity, engaged, deliberately or unintentionally, in nation-state (ethnic) politics as well as retaining power in the religious sphere, through the discursive fluidity of *Hui*-ness. For example, a Chinese Muslim named Li Qian 李謙, who was appointed by the Khan of Kumul as the Full Representative of the Eight Khanates of *Huibu* (Xinjiang) to the capital of the republic, managed to use his identity as a religious *Hui* to gain support for his political agenda from both Muslims of the inner provinces and people in Xinjiang, only the latter of whom his official position was supposed to represent (Fang 2010; Hua and Zhai 2012). This tendency was evident in the discourse of the state-endorsed Association for Common Progress of the Five *Zu* (*Wuzu Guomin Hejinhui* 五族國民合進會). According to the minutes of the general assembly of the association, the five *zu* were just generic categories of convenience; important members of *zu* like the Kazak in northwestern China and *Miao* in southwestern China were all welcome to join the association at any time (Huang 2006). In these state-endorsed *minzu* discourses, the effects of geography, religion, and political difference were all equalized and minimized before the mythical history of the Great Chinese Nation – the descendants of the original inhabitants of the plain along the Yellow River. It was said that these descendants migrated in different directions at different historical moments and eventually developed into separate lineages of people throughout Eurasia (Wuzu Guomin Hejinhui 五族國民合進會 1914).

This paramount weighting of national unity did face two criticisms: first, concerning the group rights of the *Hui* people; second, concerning the conceptual conflation of religious and ethnic identity from the perspective of modern rationality. These eventually combined into discourses calling for a distinction to be made between the religious *Hui* (Chinese Muslims) of the inner provinces and the ethnic *Hui* (Turks) in Xinjiang province, assigning the right to religious freedom and legitimate political representation to these distinctive groups respectively (Shou 1912a; 1912b; Gonghe guomin 1912; Yin 1985; Cieciura 2016, 115-26). However, with the emergence of East Turkistan nationalism, the republic's central government's diminished political control over East Turkistan (Wang 2013, 25-46); and with the adoption of a Western ethnic (presumably 'scientific') understanding – referring to the *Huizu* as *Tujue* 突厥 (Chinese transliteration for Turks) or *Weiwuer* 維吾爾 (Uyghur) – in Xinjiang (Wang Riwei 1937), the discourse identifying *Hui* as ethnic Turks in Xinjiang became less relevant. Instead, the question shifted back to the problem of identifying Chinese Muslims within the inner provinces as religious adherents or an ethnic group.

4.5 *Hui*: *Han* Believers of Islam

After the Nationalist Party's Northern Expedition (1926-1928), which resulted in the domination of Chiang Kai-shek's faction, Chiang's government officially adopted a hardline assimilationist vision of the Chinese nation as an ethnically homogeneous whole dominated by *Han* culture, which regarded its *Hui* citizens as *Han* believers of Islam. There were cases where civil organizations with names that included *Huimin* 回民 or "*Hui* people" had to be renamed as "*Hui-jiao*" associations on the administrative orders of Chiang's government (Wan 2015). The underlying formulation of this *Hui* identity can be conceptualized as a form of "hyphenated Chinese" (Lipman 1996): The 'religious range' of the *Hui* identity – that of being Muslim – was subordinate to the 'political range' of being a Chinese national. The forcing of this language of functional differentiation to confine the expression of *Hui* to being religious did not prevent Chinese Muslims from engaging in the political realm with their religious identity. Nationalist/patriotic imams and religious students, who were under the influence of anti-imperialist Islamic discourses from the Middle East, reinforced their national Chinese identity with religious justification. Strongly influenced by their time at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, these imams and religious students moved away from the late imperial *Han kitab* political theory that the source of power and legitimacy of a political entity comes from a personal sovereign who embodies the Mandate of Heaven – and that God is the source of the Mandate of Heaven due to the Unity of Being. The prominent Imam Wang Jingzhai 王靜齋 (1879-1949), who went to Al-Azhar in his forties (Wang 1937), published articles in the widely-read Chinese Muslim magazine *Yuehua* 月華 spreading the (purported) hadith: "*Hub al-watan min al-iman* (حب الوطن من الإيمان)"[46] – "the love of one's homeland [springs forth] from the faith." Based on what he had learned at Al-Azhar, he interpreted *al-watan* as 'the place where you live.' Given that his audiences were largely Chinese Muslims, the homeland for them would be China. Many pious *Hui* accepted that they should defend and build their homeland, the Chinese nation (Wang 1930; Matsumoto 2006).

Although many of these Nationalist imams and religious students were brought up under the *Qadim* (قديم Old) *jiaopai* 教派 or "teaching school" of Islam,[47] which drew upon the *Han kitab* and other indigenous traditions from

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[46] This hadith is not found in the most reliable sources but appears in *Kashf al-Khafa' wa-Muzil al-Ilbas* (1102), *al-Silsilah al-Hadith ad-Da'ifah* (36), and is reported by Al-Saghani in his *al-Mawdhu'at* (81).

[47] *Jiaopai* is the indigenous way of addressing Islamic groups in China, instead of using, for example, "sect" or "school of jurisprudence," because virtually all Chinese Islamic teaching schools are *Sunni* and *Hanafi* (except for *Salafiya*). The major *jiaopais* in China, apart from the *Qadim*, include the modernist *Yihewanli*, *Xidaotang*, which focuses on the study of the *Han kitab* and Sufi orders such as *Jahriya*, *Khufiya*, *Qadiriya*, and *Kubrawiya*.

the imperial era, they added to, or perhaps went beyond, the above ontological understanding of political legitimacy based on the Unity of Being by searching for direct scriptural justification for nationalism. This was reflected, on the one hand, by the popularity of the above-mentioned hadith. On the other hand, they showed a deep deference towards the Islamic materials from the Middle East as a large number of modern Arabic Quranic commentaries, works by authors like Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Muhib al-Din al-Khatib (1886-1969) (Matsumoto 2006), were translated into Chinese and published in dozens of Chinese Muslim magazines. Nonetheless, the transfer of knowledge was highly selective. Only those materials that were in line with Chinese nationalism and of benefit in the face of imperialist aggression and indigenous modernism were adopted by students at Al-Azhar (Mao 2016). This is an interesting case where, when responding to the problem of national integrity, references were made by drawing on the communication or discourses produced within a supposedly functionally differentiated religious sphere to foster a supposedly secular Chinese national identity. This process of religious justification of national identity is in turn accompanied by a nationalization of the religio-cultural group identity configuration.

4.6   *Hui* Nation Beyond the Chinese Polity: Pan-Islamism

The structural elements of Islam can be used to inspire the creation of a political unity beyond the existing nation state. However, this political unity does not necessarily follow a religious logic but rather a secular (national) one. As its geopolitical ambition expanded after the successive victories in the 1895 First Sino-Japanese War and the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, Japan plotted psychological warfare to mobilize the people of *Huijiao* ("Hui religion", jap. *Kaikyō*)[48] from the Far East to the Middle East (Office of Strategic Services 1943; Wang 2015, 193-229). These efforts continued until the end of World War II. By the 1920s in China, propaganda efforts such as the founding of the magazine *Huiguang* 回光 (*Light of Islam*) within the Society of Light (International Moslem Association) in Shanghai by a Japanese man named Teijirō Sakuma 佐久間貞次郎 (1886-1979) were common. In an article entitled "Political Situation of China and Muslims" (*Huijiaotu* 回教徒[49]) (1925), Sakuma called on Muslims in China to strive for independence. His reasoning was that *Hui* was a *zu* ("race" or "nationality") with state recognition. Thus, the *Hui* should be able to claim political rights and resort to political actions when necessary. According to Sakuma, *Huizu* ("Hui nationality") was built on a religious basis, where the religion – Islam – was seen as political by nature. This political feature of

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[48] The Chinese name *Huijiao* 回教 was also used in Japanese for Islam before and during the early 20th century.
[49] That is, followers of the teaching of the *Hui,* which is Islam.

Islam further allowed the self-determination of *Huizu* independent of the Chinese nation. This independent nationhood of *Huizu* was consistent with the Pan-Islamism that Japan had been advocating, as a means to create "a buffer 'Muslim autonomous state' in North-west China or in Central Asia" (Bodde 1946b, 330). Pan-Islamic understanding of the *Hui* was also formulated within China in response to the growing slander and prejudice against Chinese Muslims (Nedostup 2009, 17; Bodde 1946a, 282). A young Muslim, Xue Wenbo 薛文波 (1909-1984), drew his readers' attention to understanding *Huizu* as the Pan-Islamic nation by emphasizing the oppression Muslims faced within and outside China. This allowed him to construct a unified consciousness of the Pan-Islamic nation. It is not hard for one to observe the Leninist rhetoric in his writing as he wrote that

> the countries of the Muslim nations (*Huijiao minzu guojia* 回教民族國家) were the first objects of oppression and exploitation by Euro-American powers. Therefore, those ruled and oppressed in the world are *Huizu*, the proletarians [of the world] are *Huizu*, and now the *Huizu* are already awakened, and most of them want to unite under the banner of Islam (*Huijiao*). (Ciecuria 2016, 129; Xue 1933b)

Xue's later writings took a more systematic turn, unlike his '*Han* believers' theory opponents, he pointed out that *minzu* are not simply based on shared blood but culture, customs, psyche, and religion (Xue 1933a).

4.7 *Huihui minzu*: 'Cultural' Identity Between Religious Individual and Independent Nation

The increasingly theoretical/systematic language employed by Xue developed from a broader evolution in modern Chinese scholarly language with an analytical power that resembles its Western counterpart. This development of the language enabled a more sophisticated configuration of the *Hui* rather than either reducing it to the religious individuals or inflating it to a nation per se. There was still another way to construct the *Hui* as an identity marked by Islamic characteristics, but within the Chinese national boundary, which was made possible by the adoption of Western (Japanese) terminologies/neologisms and modern historiography. The terminology of *wenhua* 文化, or culture, was important. Imam Wang Jingzhai coined the term "*Huijiao wenhua* 回教文化," or (Chinese) Islamic culture, in an essay published in 1939 (Wang 1985).

> His basic premises about this "Hui culture" were as follows: there is a distinctive "(Chinese) Islamic culture" or "Hui culture," which was implicitly different from Islam itself (even though it was 'inseparable' from it). This culture was in turn "inseparable" from the "Hui people" who created it. Finally, and most significantly, this culture was "Chinese," since it had sprung forth from China. As the home of the Muslims, China, therefore, did not simply "house" them, but was also the birthplace of their culture (*wenhua*). (Ben-Dor Benite 2004, 98)

This concept of culture allowed a theoretical separation of the material manifestations or the practical dimension of Islam from any references to the attributive elements of tradition, i.e., references to the 'special' (see earlier sections of this article on 'attributive differentiation'). In addition, Wang acknowledged that *Huijiao wenhua* was not just any culture but one that was developed in China. '*Huijiao* culture' here becomes an intermediary meso-level abstraction for communal connections between the universally encompassing religious cosmology and "buffered self" in Taylor's assertion (2007, 300). The role of 'Hui culture' is particularly important for *Hui* group identities to connect with the secular nation state, which is similar to the construction of 'Islamic civilization' suggested by Katerina Dalacoura (2019, in this special issue). The difference is that 'Islamic civilization' in her case was created to link the reforming Ottoman Empire or the Turkish Republic with the 'universal community' of Islam by preserving its Islamic heritage; whereas the indigenousness of 'Hui culture' in China relates and legitimizes the inclusion of Chinese Muslims in the modern Chinese nation state. However, both 'Hui culture' and 'Islamic civilization' are rendered as products of human endeavor in a temporal demystified history and thus as secular constructs. The point about indigenousness is picked up by the historian Jin Jitang 金吉堂 (1908-1978), who, in his *Zhongguo huijiao shi yanjiu* 中國回教史研究 (*Studies in the History of Chinese Islam*; Jin 1935; 1971), argues that *Huijiao minzu* 回教民族 ("Hui-religion nationality") or *Huimin/zu* ("Hui people/nationality") is a Sinophone Muslim ethnicity. To deal with the difference between *Huizu* and Muslims in Xinjiang, Jin acknowledges that *Huizu* has a more heterogenic makeup of people from different Muslim regions. What is unique about these people is that the *minzu* history began on Chinese soil when these people started to mix and reproduce. Due to this diverse makeup of individuals and the unique starting point on Chinese soil, the *Huizu*, Jin argues, are Chinese and have their own language (i.e., Chinese) and "custom" (*fengsu* 風俗/*xiguan* 習慣), which is synonymous with Wang's 'culture.' Thus, Jin provides a rather nationalized narrative about *Huizu*. In another publication, Jin states that this cultural uniqueness is the result of the special social-political dimension of Islam which binds people together with social teachings and *shari'a* law (Jin 1937; 1974).

Jin's was the first scholarly Chinese Muslim attempt to argue for a separate Sinophone Muslim ethnicity. His argument became popular among the *Hui* elites in the later years of the Republic. Communist theorists used his argument to justify their early treatment of the *Hui* as an ethnic minority or 'minority nationality' in Soviet terminology. After the Long March (1934-1935), the Communist forces settled in northwestern China, where Muslims had a significant presence. In their attempts to gain support from these frontier people while constrained by Stalinist theories, Chinese Communist Party specialists decided to identify Chinese Muslims as a historically oppressed *minzu* rather than a religious group. This granted the *Hui*(*hui min*)*zu* 回(回民)族 *minzu* status and

later promised them benefits, which was in stark contrast to Chiang Kai-shek's banning of the term *Huizu* in the 1940s (Ciecuria 2016, 139). This laid the general framework for the contemporary People's Republic of China understanding of the *Huizu* as a people with historical links to Islam who emerged within China, thus, making them a secularizable ethnicity with rights within the Great Chinese Nation ("Huizu jianshi" bianxie zu 1978; "Huizu jianshi" xiuding ben bainxie zu 2009).

5. Concluding Remarks: *Huihui* Group Identity Formation and Differentiation Theory

In the above historical account on the development of the identification of Chinese Muslims as *Huihui,* I have employed Stausberg's framework to identify the co-existence of different types of differentiation. This framework allows us to recognize different elements of the *Hui* identity discourses as 'religious,' or as related to a 'religion,' in a specific way. However, it does not allow for further scrutinizing the relationship between the development of religio-cultural *group identity* and societal differentiation. An additional theoretical perspective is needed to deal with certain questions, especially those related to the specific use of a particular form or combination of differentiated elements beyond a single tradition. For instance, why did the *Hui* of the Ding lineage switch to the use of the attributive element of filial piety (*xiao*) instead of, say, submission (*islam*). I suggest interpreting this as a response to the 'reference problems' of other social systems. This goes beyond Stausberg's remit of the "evolution of religion" (2010, 361). In this case, I consider Luhmann's theory of differentiation to be helpful in understanding the dynamics between differentiation, reference problem, and group identity creation. Luhmann distinguishes between (1) *segmentary differentiation,* which creates similar or equal societal subsystems, distinguished on the basis of either descent or residential communities; (2) *differentiation* in terms of *center* and *periphery;* (3) *stratification,* which produces *dissimilarity in rank;* and, finally, (4) *functional differentiation* (Luhmann 1977, 32-6; 2013, 12-3).

In the *Huihui* case: the *Huihui* as *Semu* class in the Yuan Dynasty refers to a form of stratification; the Ding lineage is a segmentary subsystem in the regional society; the *Han kitab* understanding of *Huihui* is based on a center-periphery differentiation, where the true 'returner' is heading towards the (theological/cosmological and political) center; finally, the creation of the *Huihui minzu* follows the segmentary differentiation, although it is structurally coupled with functionally differentiated systems. As these varying forms of differentiation produce societal (sub)systems by their own logic, the reference problems and corresponding solutions are related to that. My main argument with regard to the divergent late imperial and post-imperial responses to the

emerging reference problems in the direction of religion or secularity respectively can be viewed in this light. Thus, the guiding idea of orthodoxy as an expression of the center becomes prominent in the *Han kitab* formulation; conversely, the employment of the 'secular' formation of *Hui* identity is needed to render it an equal segment of the modern Chinese nation.

For an evolution of differentiation to take place, we will usually find a "latent preparation and the emergence of new orders within the old" (Luhmann 2013, 12). This aligns with my observation of the reification of the Pure and True Teaching and the historicization of *Huihui* in the late imperial period as constitutive to the post-imperial development. We should not forget that differentiations co-exist and regulate the deployment of each other. This may allow us to have a more precise understanding of the "ambivalence" (Dressler 2015) observed in minority discourses in various post-imperial nation states. For the case of *Huihui* in early post-imperial China, it seems adequate to speak of the domination of the segmentary differentiation path (nation/ethnic formation), influenced by a discourse on functional differentiation, at least from the perspective of the *Hui* people. As a result, the constant engagement in theorizing the *Hui* ethnicity – e.g., by formulating concepts like 'culture' originating from functional systems – should be read as an effort to differentiate a nationwide *Hui* unit on an equal footing with other *minzu*.

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