
Surviving as the Muslim minority in secularized China: Religious identity and career options for the Hui Muslim women

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[Introduction] No country has experienced changes as dramatic as China has throughout the last three decades. New economic dynamics have deeply affected the lifestyle of China's Muslims. The development of western consumerism, the rise in literacy, and increasing contact with Muslim countries have brought about new ethno-religious consciousness and socio-political claims.

The Hui are one of the ten Muslim national minorities in China. About 20% of them can be found in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, located in northwest China. Their ancestors were Arabs, Persians, or Turks who migrated from the Middle East and Central Asia to China during the Tang and Yuan Dynasties. A devout Islamic faith is at the heart of the Hui Muslim identity. Accordingly, even though Hui Muslims' mother tongue is Chinese and they share a physical appearance with the Han people, they are distinguished from the Han in terms of ethnic origin as well as religious identity.

The Hui population is concentrated on the Huangtu Plateau, which is located to the south and east of Ningxia and which stretches over a vast area with an average elevation of 1500-2000 meters. Most Hui on the Huangtu Plateau have traditionally engaged in agriculture. Chronic water shortage and drought have given the area one of the lowest annual incomes per capita in China; therefore, the Hui are marginalized both as a religious minority in secular communist China and as an economically disadvantaged people.

Under such circumstances, education in Ningxia has lagged behind that of the rest of the nation; most Hui Muslims remain uneducated and are obliged to live in desperate poverty.

One should add gender discrimination, which has long been forgotten or neglected in the context of the male-dominated Han and Hui societies. Thus, Hui women have been forced to live under strict patriarchal control. Hui girls' education has lagged far behind that of boys, since girls are not regarded as worth educating within the dominant patriarchal culture; therefore, many girls remained completely illiterate until the Chinese government took strong action to bring state schooling to the region. This was called 'the biggest obstacle' for the realization of universal secular education after the 1980s.

However, we must bear in mind that historically it was Ahongs (clerics) and Hui local leaders who founded private classes and schools to promote girls' education beginning in the early 20th century, and their classes and schools were the only options for the girls of the Ningxia. These classes and schools emphasized an ethical education based on Islam. The relative isolation from the state centre allowed them to retain their beliefs and religious autonomy until the beginning of the anti-rightist movement in 1957.

The anti-rightist campaign and the anti-religious Cultural Revolution which lasted from 1966 to 1976, had a tremendous impact on the educational conditions in the Ningxia region. All religious activities, including

schools and classes run by Ahongs, were banned, and religious leaders were persecuted. Yet, with the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the ban on religion was lifted, and Ahongs and Hui leaders were allowed to open schools again. At this stage, Ahongs and Hui leaders were engaged in not only opening the female *madrasas* (nüxue in China), built exclusively for Islamic education but also participating in the establishment of girl's public schools in order to enhance Hui Muslims' standard of living.

The differences between the *madrasa* and the public school have a considerable effect on students. *Madrasas* offer religious education in a gender-segregated environment, with a strong emphasis on ethical values and religious identity. Public schools, in contrast, uphold secularism, national identity, loyalty to the party, coeducation, and gender equality.

The girls' public schools that were established through cooperation between Ahongs and government are characterized by both secular and Islamic ethical education; however, Ahongs' attempt to promote education faced a new challenge, since the post-Cultural Revolution government took strong action to spread secular public schools in the region in order to promote national integration.

The secular public school is a double-edged sword for the Hui, whose identity is rooted in Islam; it contributes to the rise in educational level and the increase in job options of Hui Muslims, at the cost of Islamic identity. Thus, Hui Muslims are facing the dilemma of whether or not to pressure their children to adopt the secularism of the public school, which is a prerequisite to find a job in the government sector, or to encourage them to retain religious identity at the cost of socioeconomic benefits.

In order to shed light on Hui Muslims' educational dilemma, I will first explore the various attempts made by Ahongs and Hui leaders to promote Islamic ethical education and secular education for Hui girls from the early 20th century through the People's Republic of China. And I will explicate the reasons for which Ahongs and Hui leaders founded secular girls' schools in cooperation with government after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and the reasons for which these schools were eventually controlled by the government in the 1990s.

Second, I will investigate how the spread of state schooling changed the life course of Hui girls, who live in an economically deprived situation, through field research that was conducted in Ningxia from 1994 to 2008⁽¹⁾. Although state schooling enhanced the literacy rate of Hui women and opened a new door for the broader world to the students, their success after graduating from a secular state school may be achieved at the cost of their religious identities. In this paper, special attention will be paid to 123 Hui women in Ningxia who chose to be teachers at the state school and they are seen as role models. Their success was achieved only by accepting the ideology of the secularism. However, no matter how they try to assimilate themselves to the mainstream Han culture, they are regarded as Hui. They are in a struggle with the conflicting desires to improve their socioeconomic situation and to preserve their religious identity with strong connections to the Hui community. I will investigate the ways in which their identity is divided between secularism and religion.

The analytic method used in this study is qualitative investigation at the micro-level. Particularly, case study were conducted through interviews, which were further supplemented with questionnaire surveys.

This study is notable in that it is based on continual fixed point observation on the Ningxia through a period in which China has attained phenomenal economic growth as globalization advanced throughout the world

between the 1990s and the early 21st century.

1. Educational history of Hui Muslims in Ningxia

The total population of Ningxia is 6,102,518. Among these, 2,182,260 or 35.8% - is Hui Muslim⁽²⁾. The Hui population is mainly concentrated in the Huangtu Plateau region in southern Ningxia, including counties such as Guyuan, Xiji, Haiyuan, Dongxin, and Jingyuan. Especially in Dongxin, more than 80% of the population consisted of Hui

Historically, the Hui Muslims were oppressed during the Qing Dynasty, and had been since the 18th century. Resistance built up, resulting in the Hui Uprising in the Dongzhi era (1862-1874) in Ningxia, and Gansu⁽³⁾. Hui Muslims once lived on productive land along the Yellow River, but after the Uprising they were bundled off to the barren Huangtu Plateau.

Although modern western-style education was introduced in China at the end of the Qing Dynasty, its development in the Ningxia Hui Muslim region had lagged behind that of other parts of China. Hui education mainly took the form of religious education at *madrasas* during the Qing era.

Hui Ahongs and Hui local leaders established secular schools out of a sense of crisis, recognizing that secular education in a nation state was essential to alleviate Muslims' underdevelopment⁽⁴⁾. Both Chinese and Arabic were taught at these schools.

Su Le (1868-1950) belonged to the gentry and was a successful entrepreneur at Weizhou in Dongxin County in Ningxia⁽⁵⁾. He studied Chinese classic literature in preparation for the Keju test (imperial examination in ancient China) and graduated the course of the Advanced Elementary School, a public school for boys in Pingyuan County, in 1906. After graduation, he opened a private school at his house for both religious and secular education in 1911. Relatives and youth who lived nearby studied at that school, which taught Chinese literacy and Islamic knowledge through an educational method that was different from the religious education found at *madrasas*.

Su Le and others who graduated from the Advanced Elementary School in Pingyuan County worked together with the government to establish the Weizhou Muslim Advanced Elementary School for secular education in 1918. Although this school was a public school run by the government, subjects such as Chinese, mathematics, natural science, and basic Arabic were taught.

Su Le was one of the founders of the the Weizhou Girls Normal School in 1933, during the Republican era. This school was founded as Weizhou Islamic Girls School in 1905 as an extension to a mosque in Weizhou. Ahongs were in charge of teaching Arabic at that time.

Although Weizhou Girls Normal School this was a public school; not only Chinese and mathematics but also the Qur'an and religious doctrine were taught. It changed its name to Weizhou Girls Junior Elementary School in 1939.

After the revolution of 1949, the government adopted various measures to boost public education in the Ningxia region. Such measures included the establishment of Hui Muslim ethnic elementary schools. Hui Muslim elementary schools were public schools, and Muslim children were privileged

enough to get scholarships from the government's drive to encourage schooling. There were 28 lower Hui primary schools (one was exclusively for girls) and 3 complete elementary schools in 1954. Consequently, the enrolment rate of Hui Muslim children gradually increased⁽⁶⁾.

Soon, however, private schools that were established and run by Ahongs and Hui local leaders were forced either to close or to transform into public schools in which Arabic was no longer taught. The Weizhou Girls Junior Elementary School continued to exist even after 1949; there were 70 students and 3 teachers of Chinese and Arabic in 1953, but the school closed in 1954 after merging with another public school.

In the latter half of the 1950s, Hui children were deprived of educational opportunities as a result of the government's campaigns of religious repression, such as the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957-58, the Anti-Religion Movement triggered by the Tibet Uprising in 1958, and the Cultural Revolution from 1966-76.

The Cultural Revolution caused devastating damage to the cultures and religions of Chinese ethnic minorities. During that period, unprecedented calamity also fell upon ethnic groups who adhered to Islam. Mosques were demolished and religious leaders were oppressed.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the number of Hui children at public elementary school has steadily increased again⁽⁷⁾. There were several factors that led to this occurrence. The first factor is economic development. The second is the Chinese government's proclamation of a compulsory education law in 1986, which required all students - including Hui Muslims - to complete nine years of combined elementary and junior high school education.

The third factor is the change in people's educational awareness. With economic growth, Hui farmers gradually began to recognize the fact that a junior or senior high school education was vitally important in order to earn an income sufficient to buy commodities such as colour TVs and motorcycles.

For these reasons, the total Hui student enrolment in Ningxia has been steadily increasing; however, girls' enrolment has remained very low⁽⁸⁾. According to a 1989 survey, the elementary school enrolment rate of school-age children (7-11 years) in Ningxia was 94.0%, but in 1991, the enrolment rate of Hui girls in the Xihaiqu district (consisting of Xiji, Haiyuan, and Guyuan) was only 63.6%⁽⁹⁾.

The primary reasons for the under-enrolment of Hui Muslims girls include poverty, male-dominant social values, and insufficient number of schools. The lack of female teachers and the schools' ignorance of Hui customs and culture may also be important causes. For example, according to the Islamic customs, unrelated men and women are not allowed to be in the same room or communicate freely. In addition, it is not uncommon for a woman to get married at age 15 or 16, giving many girls no choice but to drop out.

2. Ahongs' and Hui leaders' efforts to educate girls after the Cultural Revolution

2. 1. Schools founded by Ahongs and Hui leaders

Until the end of the 1980s, the number of enrolled Hui girls remained very low compared to their male counterparts, but it quickly increased afterwards⁽¹⁰⁾. Various attempts were made to improve girls' school enrolment in Ningxia. Among the most notable efforts were those made by Ahongs and Hui leaders. Together with the government, they established public schools to improve the educational standards of Hui Muslims. While striving to make both secular and religious education coexist in order to preserve religion and ethnicity.

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the ban on religion was lifted gradually, spurring an unprecedented educational reassertion in Muslim areas. Religious and political Hui leaders not only reopened the girls' *madrasas*, built exclusively for Islamic education, but also invested in the establishment of girls' public schools. In contrast to *madrasas*, these new girls' public schools developed both secular and religious curricula and promoted national identity, loyalty to the party, coeducation, and gender equality. The government was also eager to develop public schools in the region in order to promote national integration, and the Ahongs had to bear this in mind while promoting their own Islamic agenda. Secular schooling contributed to the integration of Muslim women, raising their visibility and acceptability in the public sphere and giving them access to job opportunities. Simultaneously, this situation created an unprecedented debate on Hui identity and its stance on modern education and women's economic autonomy.

I am reviewing three secular public schools founded in cooperation with Ahongs and local leaders.

The Weizhou Girls Junior Elementary School in Tongxin County, which had once been converted into a co-ed school in 1953, was re-established in 1985 as Weizhou Hui Muslim Girls Elementary School with the efforts of local religious leaders.

Ma Xinlan, the granddaughter of Su Le, (one of the school's founders, as earlier mentioned) was its new principal⁽¹¹⁾. Taking advantage of their social prestige, liberal Ahongs and Hui leaders advocated the importance of girls' education at Islamic festivals and other gatherings⁽¹²⁾. Their zealous persuasion had a powerful impact on Hui, who had believed that public education would weaken the girls' Islamic faith. In order to sweep away parents' fears, the curriculum was designed to meet the demand of devout Muslims who wished to make their daughters learn easy Arabic greetings and phrases.

Ahongs and teachers compiled a document called '*Two Hundred Famous Phrases in Arabic*,' which was used by female Ahongs in teaching students welcoming words and songs in Arabic. The textbook included the Arabic alphabet, Arabic expressions of greeting, asking for the time, the four seasons, family, the history of Ningxia, an outline of the Hui ethnic group, its religious beliefs, and excerpts from the Qur'an. The appendix contained a tape recording of songs to welcome guests. Each lesson introduced particular contents of 'Today's words of wisdom', such as 'Seeking knowledge is

Muslim's mission' 'Time is money' 'Failure is the mother of success' 'Seeking knowledge even on to China' (Hadith) and 'One is never too old to learn'⁽¹³⁾. Parents welcomed these efforts, which emphasized respect on the Islamic culture, and began to send their children to the school willingly.

Meanwhile, the educator saw to it that what was learned at school was useful for daily life and could provide guidance for career choices. Vocational and technical training, such as sewing, embroidery, knitting, vegetable cultivation, and other practical courses, were included in the school's curriculum.

In the 1990s, several public schools in the most disadvantaged north-western regions received subsidies from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)⁽¹⁴⁾, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other benefactors, as the establishment of gender equality and penetration of secularism was a goal shared by the government and the said international organizations. The Weizhou Hui Girls Elementary School was a pilot project of UNESCO, and it affected eight other schools⁽¹⁵⁾, all of which participated in a girls' education project sponsored by the Ningxia Institute of Educational Science from 1992 to 1995. Under the project, the schools' curricula were redesigned to respect Islamic culture because UNESCO holds the identity of ethnic minorities in esteem. For example, Arabic was taught at these schools 2 times a week.

The second institution, the Shizi-shan-zhuang Elementary School in Xiji County, was established by Ma Jiafu in 1980, after the end of the Cultural Revolution. He had been arrested in 1958 at the age of 23 and was released in 1980. Ma Jiafu, an Ahong in the Xiji, used the money he received from the government as compensation for his imprisonment to get the school started. Shizi-shan-zhuang Elementary School is a public school, and the government shoulders the operating costs. The school also participated in the experimental project of the Ningxia Institute of Educational Science, which included Arabic lessons in the curriculum. The concept, which is very popular among students, increases enrolment.

The third school, the Hairu Girls Junior High School, handles secondary education. It was established in Tongxin County in 1986 by Hong Weizong, the Vice Chairman of the Tongxin County Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Hong Weizong was a religious leader 'a murshid (jiaozhu in Chinese)' of Hongmen Menhuan (Sufi Order), and was banned during the Cultural Revolution. He was well aware of the obstacles encountered by teenage Muslim girls who wanted to continue studying after elementary. In particular, co-ed boarding schools posed insurmountable problems to them. To help Hui girls overcome these difficulties, he founded the Hairu Girls Junior High School, an exclusive boarding school for girls. The start of the school's operation was most timely: The rising number of Hui girls graduating from elementary schools needed secondary education. The school also offered disadvantaged Hui girls the chance to continue studying by providing them grants and free textbooks and exempting them from miscellaneous fees.

The expansion of school buildings was supported by loans from the Islamic Development Bank. The Islamic Development Bank provided US\$35,800 between 1990 and 1997. This was said to be the

result of the good relationship between Hong Weizong and various Arabic countries⁽¹⁶⁾.

Being a secular public school, the Hairu Girls Junior High School offers no Arabic classes, but the founder has made sure that religious education is not completely eased out. The school teaches Islamic wisdom to both Hui and Han students. The school also edits an extracurricular textbook on the history of the Hui and their heroes, such as Zheng He, who travelled to the Arab countries in the Ming era, and Ma Benzhai, who fought in the Anti-Japanese War⁽¹⁷⁾. In teaching students the history, culture, and religion of the Hui, the textbook reinforces their identity, promotes mutual understanding, and creates a more harmonious environment between the Hui and the Han. Vocational and technical training in sewing, embroidery, knitting, vegetable cultivation, and other practical courses is part of the school's curriculum. Many graduates of Hairu went on to state-founded secular normal schools or vocational schools for teacher training and eventually became secular elementary school teachers. The roster of graduates shows that 92 students entered the school in 1986 and graduated in 1989; 22 became teachers at secular public schools⁽¹⁸⁾.

2. 2. Enhanced control of the state: Transforming into state secular schools

The girls' schools founded by Ahongs and murshids were successful at promoting education — basic literacy as well as Islamic teachings. However, these schools encountered a different challenge in the 1990s: the growing number of Hui girls enrolled at the secular public schools towards the end of the 1980s.

Faced with the rising popularity of public schools among Hui girls, the schools that had participated in the project sponsored by UNESCO and the Ningxia Institute of Educational Science decided to remove Arabic classes from their curricula. One possible reason for the drastic turnaround was government's pressure to increase the percentage of students proceeding to junior high school. In China, the government runs all schools, even those built by private individuals or NGOs. In other words, even when the private sector supplies large initial investments to build the facilities, the government pays for the teachers' salaries and overhead costs and ultimately, defines the curriculum. As a result, the schools built by religious leaders for promoting education without sacrificing religious identity were eventually transformed into government schools that served its policy: national integration and secularization.

Because of the growing number of elementary school students wanting to enroll in junior high schools, parents were welcomed the shift in the schools' curricula. They actually asked for a more ambitious learning agenda instead of basic education and emphasis on Islamic knowledge. Their motivations were pragmatic. For instance, the headmaster of an elementary school that used to teach Arabic told us, 'Studying Arabic takes time away from preparing for the junior high school entrance examinations.' In general, Hui pupils have no one in their families to help them with their studies, as most parents are illiterate or semiliterate; therefore, schools play an especially important role in children's education (survey in Ningxia, 2002). The Shizi-shan-zhuang Elementary School established

by Ma Jiafu Ahong does not teach Arabic anymore 'because there is no Arabic teacher' (survey in Ningxia,2000). However, the Weizhou Girls Elementary School still offers Arabic classes, but only as an extracurricular activity(survey in Ningxia,2007). In order to meet the changing demands of the authorities and parents, Arabic classes were abolished and the curriculum was revised to fit in with national curriculum standards. In sum, the schools established by the religious leaders were obliged to spend more time on general subjects at the expense of Islamic teachings.

Adapting to the development of China's market economy, Hui students also have to compete with their Han peers in school entrance examinations, an equivalent of the Keju test (the imperial examination in ancient China). The possibility of being easily swept up was so high at the wave of national integration that Hui girls were forced to conform to the secular national requirements. Moreover, girls' schools had to go co-ed in accordance with the government policy of state schooling and gender equality. One of them was Hairu Girls Junior High School, which went co-ed in 2002. According to government officials, 'Since there are both men and women in society, it is not good for women's development to educate girls separately from boys.' Yet, it seems that the primary purpose of making Hairu Girls Junior High School co-ed was to increase the admissions to senior high schools and colleges among its graduates (survey in Ningxia, 2005).

In addition, a large public high school with good facilities was built adjacent to the Hairu Girls Junior High School. Hong Yang, the current murshid of Hongmen Menhuan and the son of Hong Weizong - the founder of the Hairu Girls Junior High School who passed away in 1999 - was worried that the newly built public school would endanger the existence of the Hairu Girls Junior High School (survey in Ningxia, 2007). In 2008, the Hairu Girls Junior High School has been absorbed by this large public high school.

To seek alternatives, Hong Yang established the Dongxin County Second Kindergarten (Dongxin Muslim Kindergarten) where Arabic, which is not permitted at the compulsory education level, is taught. In addition, Hong Yang is exploring new ventures by establishing *madrasa*, or *nüxue* in Chinese such as the Beidasi Girls School, a Haiyuan Girls School for the training of female Ahongs. These *madrasas* are private schools in which religious education is conducted. Hong Yang pays the teachers' salaries and running costs by himself, so the school is free from the governmental control.

To sum up, after the Cultural Revolution, Ahongs and local Hui leaders were actively involved in founding schools and promoting Hui girls' education without sacrificing religious identity. However, bowing to the pressure from the government and the Hui community, they gradually converted their schools into secular public schools to raise their educational standards. Eventually, Islamic teaching was dropped from the curriculum and the exclusive girls' schools became coeducational.

On the other hand, since *madrasas* were run by religious leaders, they were free from governmental control. This is the reason that there are a lot of *madrasas* in Ningxia.

2. 3. The expansion of secular schools for Hui girls; Reasons for choosing secular public schools

In the past, most parents considered girls' education a waste of time because, once married, a daughter became part of her husband's family. They also believed that public school education was anti-Islam, as it weakened Islamic values.

However, the Reform and Open Policy promoted the growth of a commodity economy. When confronted by the new socio-economic demands, parents re-evaluated the economic advantage of secular public school education changed their attitude towards it. Today, the first choice of most Hui girls and their parents is a public school, even if they know that the values taught at the secular public school are incongruous with Islamic values. The chief reason is economics. Education increases the girls' job options, improves their social mobility, and creates better marriage opportunities.

Teaching has been one of the most popular careers for young educated Hui women. Girls who are successful in their education at public schools are often eager to become teachers. A public school teacher earns a monthly salary and is even allowed to register as an urban resident. More importantly, the teaching profession is not regarded as being against Islamic values. In addition, the Hui believe that a female teacher makes a much better wife because she is a specialist in children's education. Therefore, becoming a teacher enhances the possibilities for young Hui women of finding husbands with respectable social status, such as doctors and government employees.

A change in the Hui's perception of secular education opened the floodgates for public education among Hui girls. However, it was government initiative that produced the most important and influential measures: the Compulsory Education Act of 1986 and the Education Act of 1995, which inspired students to attend secular government schools⁽¹⁹⁾. The Compulsory Education Act requires all children to complete nine years of schooling; Article 8 mandates the separation of education and religion. As a result, the government banned the private schools established by Ahongs, who had wished to teach Hui girls both secular and religious subjects in a gender-segregated space. In 2006, the Compulsory Education Act was amended to eliminate all charges for textbooks and miscellaneous fees, dramatically reducing the dropout rate. Even the poorest Hui girls could now finish elementary and junior high school.

Before revision of the Compulsory Education Act, not a few Hui girls who dropped out of public school studied at femal *madrasas*⁽²⁰⁾, but there are only few girls to go to female *madrasas*, which concentrate on religious studies. Female *madrasas* exist in Yinchuan, Shizuishan, Dongxin and Haiyuan Counties. Girls who chose to go to *madrasas* without going to junior or senior high school explained the reason for their choice as follows: (a) family's religious occupation, (b) failure in the entrance examinations of high schools, and (c) economic difficulties (survey, in Ningxia 2005).

It is interesting that the number of girls who choose to go to *madrasas* after the completion of nine years of compulsory education has been increasing. New college graduates have faced job market difficulties after the middle of the 2000s, which has discouraged Hui Muslim families from sending

their daughters to higher-level institutions such as senior high schools and colleges⁽²¹⁾.

On the other hand, if girls go to *madrasas* and master Arabic, they may have the chance to work as interpreters in cities like Guangzhou and Yiwu, where many Arab businessmen come to visit⁽²²⁾. This background should be noted in understanding the development of female *madrasas* in Ningxia.

3. Faith and career in a secular society: Wavering between two identities

Though some Hui women are aware of certain points of conflict between Islamic values and secular public education—specifically, the ban on religious education—they have nevertheless chosen to teach in public schools. In the past, the shortage of female teachers had been one of the major obstacles to female education in the Hui region. As a result, since the mid-1980s, teacher training for Hui females has been promoted in Ningxia by the government.

This section is based on my survey of 123 female Muslim students trained to be secular public school teachers at the Guyuan Ethnic Normal School⁽²³⁾. This school provided upper secondary level education aimed at training teachers for primary schools in Ningxia in the years 1995, 1996, and 1997. Most of the students were born between 1978 and 1980. It was in 1978 that the Reform and Open Policy started. The life course of those students has been synchronized with the progress of China's market economy. By 2008, almost all of them have become state schoolteachers in the southern region of Ningxia.

The Guyuan Normal School for Nationalities adopts a standard national curriculum that includes politics, Chinese, mathematics, calligraphy, music, speech training for teachers, psychology, painting, physics, chemistry, and basic linguistics. It should be noted that 'politics' includes philosophic education based on Marxism-Leninism and Maoism.

Female Hui teachers impart on their students what they have learned at the normal school. What they teach follows the standard national curriculum, wherein anything related to the Han culture is the exemplar. Other regional or ethnic cultures are not taken into consideration. Portraits of Mao Zedong, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin are hung on the walls of rural elementary schools. Motivated by communist ideology, public education is aimed at cultivating loyalty to the communist regime. It could be said that the Hui are now almost fully integrated into the Han culture.

Some female Hui teachers are members of the Chinese Communist Party. They say, 'I will constantly strive for girls' education because I was educated and developed under the good policy of the Party.' They claim that 'villagers have an old-fashioned mindset' and 'believe that girls will be exposed to bad influences if they go to school'. Thus, these female teachers believe that it is their mission to eliminate these narrow-minded notions and 'sow the seed of love in poor villages' (survey in Ningxia, 2004).

Detached from their Islamic traditions, more and more female Hui teachers have been achieving professional success. The absence of religious practices in their daily lives has blurred the distinction between them and female Han teachers.

The only religious custom Hui teachers have preserved is the Islamic dietary prohibition on eating pork. Female Hui teachers know about Islam but exhibit no interest in it, not even out of curiosity. They do not read the Qur'an or go to mosques, although they attend Islamic events and festivals. They do not pray at home or fast during the month of Ramadan. They show no interest in female madrasas and the students enrolled there. They talk about their fathers' visits to Mecca but seem to think that religion is for old people only and has nothing to do with them.

In sum, female Hui teachers seem to have lost touch with Islamic traditions, and many of them no longer care about practicing religion in a social context. For example, when summer training workshops were held in Yinchuan for female teachers working in the mountainous areas in South Ningxia in August 2002 and again in August 2004⁽²⁴⁾ it was observed that an increasing number of teachers were fashion-conscious and wore accessories like necklaces and piers. Of the 120 participants in the 2004 training, 64 were married Hui women, only 13 of whom (20 %) wore cups the symbol of Hui women's marital status. Instead of cups, some donned half-sleeved blouses and skirts with permed hair and thick makeup. Traditionally, Hui women do not express their opinions before a large group of people, but these teachers did so without hesitation in front of government officials. It seems that the Hui have gradually assimilated the Han code of conduct and values. They build their careers on their secular education by concentrating on professional pursuits.

However, giving up one's faith and blending into the host society is not in everybody's agenda; that is, some female Hui teachers value their Muslim identity. Dejected about being isolated from their religion, a few teachers decide to shift to other jobs. For example, a Hui woman (Ms. M), who used to work as a Chinese teacher at a junior high school after graduating from Ningxia University, began to feel that she was gradually getting separated from her religious beliefs. Consequently, she quit the post to work as an interpreter at an Arab-China trading company in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, where her family had moved. Ms. M, wearing a veil, told us, 'Working as an interpreter is tough, but I am satisfied with the job. All of my colleagues and friends are pious Muslims. It keeps me closer to my religious beliefs.' (survey in Zhejiang, 2007)

After retirement, many Hui cadres become pious enough to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, as did Mr. M, an official who founded the Xingyuan Female Islamic School (*madrassa*). It is possible, therefore, that female Hui teachers at secular schools will revert to being pious Muslims after retiring.

Far from being a simple case of conflict between Muslim and secular identities, debates on modern education have uncovered deeper issues: state control versus the autonomy of private institutions, local/ethnic affiliation vs. national acceptance, and eventually, marginalization vs. better social and national integration. In the last part of our paper, we will discuss the extent to which the *madrassas'* development is related to of the struggle to overcome marginality.

Conclusion

The Huangtu Plateau in southern Ningxia is one of the poorest areas in China. The Hui Muslim people who live there have been historically suppressed. In 1978, the Reform and Opening Policy was introduced, and the market economy has progressed rapidly ever since. Accompanying this social change, Hui Muslim children's enrollment rate increased

In this paper, I have examined the ideals and realities of Hui women's schooling in contemporary China. I described attempts made by the Ahongs and Hui leaders to promote Islamic and secular education for Hui girls since the early twentieth century and at the beginning of the People's Republic of China. I also pointed out the partnership between Ahongs and local Hui leaders in building public girls' schools in cooperation with the government after the Cultural Revolution ended. During this period, the CCP attempted to send Muslim girls to public schools, where religion-related matters were excluded from the curriculum. Helped along by the increase in the Party's administrative and monetary power, the vast majority of Hui girls now attend secular public schools.

It is crucial to understand how the spread of state schooling institutions changed the Hui girls who had lived in deprived conditions. State schooling enhanced their literacy and created new opportunities for them. Some became teachers at secular schools, able to support themselves and their families financially. Accordingly, their social status rose and they earned the respect of their community. In fact, they have become annoyed by the mental conflicts between their 'Muslimness' and secular identity.

It is true that secular public education has created new possibilities for Hui Muslim young women from poor peasant families; however, Hui Muslim female teachers are struggling to face the conflict between the state and the Muslim community, between secularism and religion, between competition and a non-competitive peaceful life, and between career and family. This is the harsh reality of Muslims living in China, a secular Marxist state.

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Surviving as the Muslim minority in secularized China: Religious identity and career options for the Hui Muslim women

SHIMBO Atsuko

The Huangtu Plateau in southern Ningxia is one of the poorest areas in China. The Hui Muslim people who live there have been historically suppressed. In 1978, the Reform and Opening Policy was introduced, and the market economy has progressed rapidly ever since. Accompanying this social change, Hui Muslim children's enrollment rate increased.

In this paper, I have examined the ideals and realities of Hui women's schooling in contemporary China. We described attempts made by the Ahongs and Hui leaders to promote Islamic and secular education for Hui girls since the early twentieth century and at the beginning of the People's Republic of China. I also pointed out the partnership between Ahongs and local Hui leaders in building public girls' schools in cooperation with the government after the Cultural Revolution ended. During this period, the CCP attempted to send Muslim girls to public schools, where religion-related matters were excluded from the curriculum. Helped along by the increase in the Party's administrative and monetary power, the vast majority of Hui girls now attend secular public schools.

On the other hand, since female *madrasas* were run by religious leaders, they were free from governmental control. This is the reason that there are *madrasas* in Ningxia.

It is crucial to understand how the spread of state schooling institutions changed the Hui girls who had lived in deprived conditions. State schooling enhanced their literacy and created new opportunities for them.

Teaching has been one of the most popular careers for young educated Hui women. Some became teachers at secular schools, able to support themselves and their families financially. Accordingly, their social status rose and they are allowed to register as an urban resident. In fact, they have become annoyed by the mental conflicts between their 'Muslimness' and secular identity.

It is true that secular public education has created new possibilities for Hui Muslim young women from poor peasant families; however, Hui Muslim female teachers are struggling to face the conflict between the state and the Muslim community, between secularism and religion, between competition and a non-competitive peaceful life, and between career and family. This is the harsh reality of Muslims living in China.