

ETHNICITY AND RELIGION: THE HUI IN ZHENGZHOU

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Abstract

This project examines Chinese secularism and the *minzu* (ethnicity/nationality) framework. In tracing the genealogy of Chinese secularism through three figures, Kang Youwei, Chen Duxiu, and Mao Zedong, I argued that it is deeply intertwined with generations of indigenous efforts for national independence, in which religion was reified as a state component and consequently produced as a new regime of state surveillance. Chinese secularism aims to make modern, national subjects as well as regulate religious subjects. I also argued that the *minzu* framework is a modality of secularism that is meant to manage difference, which produces the only *minzu* majority, the Han as normalized Chinese subjects described in civilizational terms in contrast to all other *minzu* minorities. In this way, I position the Hui group in Zhengzhou in this context of Chinese secularism and *minzu* framework and conducted online interviews with seven Hui interlocutors to examine the effects of these state-directed projects. In the conversations with seven Hui individuals, I argued that the Hui's internal heterogeneity shows the limitation of and the homogenizing powers of the *minzu* framework, which makes the Huis' difference salient from the Han and produces the Hui's marginalization as an effect. In addition, in my interlocutors' discourses, religion, especially Islam, is characterized as backward, peripheral, and addictive, which have led many young, urban Huis to detach themselves from their supposed religious and ethnic identity and to eliminate their differences from the Han.

Introduction

The Hui, an ethnic group of Muslims in China, were characterized differently in dynastic Chinese history by the major Han group: as exotics in the Tang-Song; as conquerors in the Yuan; as “righteous rebels” or “disorderly savages” during their uprisings in the Qing (Lipman 1998). More recently, the Hui are often referred to as the “good Muslims” in China in contrast to the Uyghurs, the “bad Muslims” (Brophy 2019; Erie 2016; Wang 2013). Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Hui have integrated into the Han Chinese more than other Muslims, displayed less desire for independence, and are economically better off than other Muslim minorities, largely as a result of enjoying preferential governmental policies (Wang 2013). Despite their status and preferential treatment by the Party-state as the model minority, the Hui experience discrimination against their religious identity due to the global discourse that associates Muslim groups with connotations of terrorism (Erie 2016). In this paper, I will trace the particularities of Chinese nationalism and secularism in order to shed light on the situation of Hui in present-day China. I will ground my research in the Hui of Zhengzhou, Henan, and illustrate how Chinese nationalism and secularism have affected the Zhengzhou Hui’s understanding of religion and their positionality in society.

I will first situate the concept of secularism, the separation of religion from the state, in the context of China. The secularization process developed uniquely in China albeit influenced heavily by European colonial imperialism (Yang 2008). I will trace the institutionalization of Chinese traditional teachings as religions at the turn of the twentieth century, to anti-tradition movements in pursuit of rational, progressive modernity in the 1920s, and later the politicization of religion as superstition led by Chinese Communists that continued from the 1920s on. I will argue that because condescension was built into how secularism was understood and imagined, the secularization process continually rendered the common people unable to maintain their

autonomy in religious expressions. This top-down secularization process exerted violence against religious groups and marginalized non-Han peoples, in a way that is comparable to the European racialization of non-Christian groups (Asad 2003). The history of Chinese modernization, in which secularism plays a huge role, creates a Chinese essence epitomized by the Han and subsequently defines and minoritizes the ethnic and religious others. I will show that the Party-state's making of *minzu* (民族, nationality/ethnicity), a mode of Chinese secularism to manage difference, simultaneously marginalizes ethnic minorities in opposition to the Han majority and stabilizes the state as a multiethnic unity through nationalistic discourse. As a result, Muslims in China are racialized and discriminated against by the Han majority as an ethnic and religious other.

I conducted interviews with seven interlocutors to better understand how the Huis in Zhengzhou cope with such recent pressure while they have been a part of the local milieu for centuries. I chose Zhengzhou as the main research site because first, it was centered culturally, economically, and politically throughout history and Muslims have been attracted to settle; and second, it is the place where I grew up. Zhengzhou is located in between two long-standing capitals in imperial Chinese history, Luoyang and Kaifeng, and thus was relatively central politically, economically, and culturally throughout Chinese history, making Zhengzhou attractive as a place of dwelling for Muslim elites, travelers, and merchants. As a native of Zhengzhou, I am familiar with the Hui districts in the city. My experience in a middle school established for the Hui community (not exclusively) further motivates me to learn more about the Huis' situation in Zhengzhou. I originally planned to conduct ethnographic research in Zhengzhou in the fall of 2020, but the COVID-19 outbreak limited my ability to travel. Instead, I recruited seven interlocutors belonging to the Hui ethnic group online and completed interviews

via WeChat phone and video calls. In this paper, I will analyze the data collected from interviews and argue that among the present Hui community in Zhengzhou, there is a tendency to evade their Muslim religious identity and emphasize their ethnic identity as a result of the pressure from secularization and sinicization. I noticed that governmental and common people's discourse frames religion, particularly Islam, as backward, peripheral, and addictive; visible religious features such as public celebrations or individual attires are limited. More and more Hui people in Zhengzhou, especially younger generations, stopped practicing Islamic traditions not only in public but also in private spaces.

This project brings insights into the current social conditions of an inland Chinese Muslim community and discusses changes brought forth by China's secular modernity projects. The ethnography shows perceivable discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, and thus I invite my audience and informants to acknowledge the discriminatory and racializing ideas associated with Muslim communities. This analysis enriches anthropological studies of religion, ethnographies of Muslims, and helps frame Zhengzhou public policy so that Muslim minorities' needs may no longer be ignored.

The Particularities of the Chinese Secularism

Asad (2003: 2) argues that "Secularism...It is easy to think of it simply as requiring the separation of religious from secular institutions in government, but that is not all it is...What is distinctive about 'secularism' is that it presupposes new concepts of 'religion,' 'ethics,' and 'politics,' and new imperatives associated with them." In other words, secularism, an ongoing process, assumes a concept of religion in opposition to the secular and proposes religion as the reason for conflicts. In this section, I will delineate the making of the secular and religion in China through the analysis of several social changes led by prominent figures.

To understand secularism in China, we need to first look at the term “religion.” Sun (2013) suggests that the Mandarin word religion in China, *zongjiao* (宗教), was not used with its present-day meaning until the early twentieth century. The “*zong*” in *zongjiao* refers to “faction,” “ancestor,” or “clan,” and “*jiao*” refers to “teaching.” What is often discussed as the three main religions of China, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, were actually called *sanjiao*, three teachings. Sun (2013) argues that the references of them as distinct religions erase the fact that these three teachings were complementary to each other rather than contradictory. The term *zongjiao* as religion was introduced, popularized, and politicized in China along with the rising modernist view of religion as a national characteristic (Sun 2013).

Yang (2008) suggests that Chinese secularism was heavily influenced by European colonialism. The Chinese secularization process, Yang (2008) argues, rose in the context of a Western colonial encounter, and thus is saturated with the Western notion of secular modernity. With foreign imperialists’ threats against China, Chinese activists desperately longed to gain national sovereignty, and thus they attempted to absorb prevalent modernist discourses from the West that centered on progress, rationality, democracy, and science. As I will present later, Chinese activists appropriated this Western liberal secular view and placed religion, albeit a newly imported Western concept that could not be commensurate with the myriad of Chinese folk traditions, as a hindrance to progress. In this way, religion, co-constitutive of the secular and of the modern Chinese nation-state, was defined and policed.

Kang Youwei (1858-1927) represents one of the many who attempted to institutionalize Western secularist understandings of religion in early twentieth-century China. Kang was the principal leader of the Hundred Day’s Reform in 1898, demanding political and cultural reform in Qing China. Kang campaigned for the establishment of *Kongjiao* (Confucian’s teaching) as

the state religion and proposed a new practice of Confucianism following the framework of Christianity (Sun 2013). In the letter to his friend in 1891, Kang maintained that Christianity had prevailed in other continents of the world and destroyed local teachings (shaogongtanyu 2018). Kang argued that Christianity was not prevalent in China because Christian states have not conquered China yet (shaogongtanyu 2018). In Kang's view, Christianity was commensurate with Western colonial forces, and thus it is imperative to establish an indigenous Chinese religion to counter the force of Christianity, through which the Chinese people could in turn become the pioneer in modernization. Kang sought to represent *Kongjiao* in contemporary Christian practices and organization by proposing governmental sacrifices to Confucius and Heaven. Among his ideas for reviving *Kongjiao* included an establishment of Confucius associations across the country, an institutionalization of Confucian preaching, as well as a Confucian calendar that would replace the Gregorian calendar (Duara 2008).

Kang interpreted Western societies in a very particular way, namely that they had a social dimension called *religion* which the state managed to regulate. In other words, Kang understood religions as “a ‘natural kind’ of non-social being that exists on its own plane but contingently at some points comes into contact with society” (Fitzgerald 2000:159). Instead of mimicking the secularism that contemporaneous Western states practiced, meaning identifying Christianity as the state religion and regulating that religion, Kang sought in indigenous Chinese practices and attempted to construct a state religion, the necessary social dimension that he considered as the key to Western modernity. Through this particular interpretation and appropriation of Western modernity, religion and secularism constituted each other in early twentieth century China.

Kang's reform failed. Soon with the growth of radicalism and communism in China, the modernist discourse of liberal secularism was adopted in order to strengthen the state.

Transitioning from Kang's vision, a new wave of activists presupposed that a concrete idea of

religion existed in China and referred to traditional religions as an impediment to the resurgence of the Chinese nation, in stark contrast with Kang's vision of a state religion as a stabilizer of the state. Yang (2008) suggests that Chinese intellectuals adopted Western Orientalist discourse to categorize traditional Chinese religions. The May Fourth Movement led by Chinese youth in 1919 incited anti-superstitious sentiments. For example, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), a leading figure of the May Fourth Movement and one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, argued that the sabotage of traditional teaching, art, literature, politics, and ethics was necessary to endorse Mr. Democracy (德先生) and Mr. Science (赛先生), through which Chen believed Western states gained power (Chen 1919). Chen's view is a typical Marxist one: in "On the Smashing of Idols" (1918), Chen asserted that the idols of clay or wood were "useless things" that "cheat people" and the ignorance of the villagers surrendered them to superstitions (Yang 2008). In this discourse, religiosity was considered an impediment. Chen positioned himself and other reformers as the ones who could unveil the true reality to uneducated peoples. This materialist understanding of religion places those who believed in religion as incapable of self-emancipation from their own false consciousness and thus hierarchized religious peoples in opposition to non-religious ones. Interestingly, Yang (2008) points out that Chen also proposed an anarchist perspective, viewing the state as an idol that provoked international competition between states and hindered the path of world peace. However, this anarchist view was overlooked—only his advocacy to smash the traditional idols was popularized as the CCP gradually came into power.

This secular, anti-superstition attitude was represented and again politicized in Chinese Communist discourses to establish a Chinese Communist nationalism to combat the Chinese Nationalist Party (*guo min dang*, GMD). At the time when the Chinese Nationalist Party took

hold of main cities and started the persecutions of Chinese Communist Party members, Mao, in disagreement with other CCP members such as Chen Duxiu, decided to conduct field work on peasants in Hunan to prove that a peasant revolution would be possible (Terril 1980). This field work and later a field report named “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (1927) was carried out with Mao’s political goal to attach the peasants with his particular notion of nationalism in order to accomplish a communist revolution and defeat the GMD. The peasants, in this 1927 report, were framed as being oppressed by a dominant class, the “tyrants,” “gentry,” and “landlords,” who utilized religious authorities (*shen quan*) to stabilize their dominance. Thus, religious authorities, along with other forms of rule such as the state system (*guojia xitong*), were identified by Mao as the oppressive powers that constrained the real subjectivity of peasants (Mao 1927). In this way, religious authorities were defined in the terms of class struggles to direct the peasants to be loyal of a people that was homogenized through Mao’s vision of a proletarian unity.

Mao’s representation of religious authorities took a more active role in shaping Chinese subjects’ lives after the founding of the PRC. The newly founded Party-state fundamentally changed the CCP’s role: from a revolutionary party to a party of the state. As Asad (2003) argues, “Secularism...is an enactment by which a political medium (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion” (5). In other words, the young PRC needed to transform its people, whom the nation represents, to modern, secular Chinese citizens. Therefore, peasants, whom Mao referred to in 1927 as being oppressed by local elites through religious authorities, needed to go through thought reform, or “ideological remoulding” (Cheek 2019: 277), so that their traditional, highly ritualized ways of lives—for example, tributing to the Emperor, son of heaven—could be transformed. As ritualized economy being transformed to the

CCP's secular economy, or in other words religiosity framework being transformed to the nationalistic framework, anti-superstition efforts manifested in movements that aimed to limit or eradicate local religious practices. In the 1950s, the CCP sent Combat Superstition Teams to villages, symbolizing the first wave of eliminating superstition efforts by the PRC (Williams 2019). On June 1st, 1966, People's Daily published an article with the authorization of Mao Zedong named "*hengsao yiqie niugui sheshen*" (Sweeping Away All the Monsters and Demons). In this article, *niugui sheshen* (monsters and demons) referred to both a rhetorical meaning, that is, the imperialist, capitalist, and revisionist forces that might harm Chinese communism, and a literal meaning, namely old traditions that included any forms of supernatural being. The "sweeping away" of these traditions was explicitly characterized as a revolutionary political move, one that would bring good to the Party and the people. This article marked a start of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), in which the thousands-year-long spiritual ways of living were heedlessly equated as oppressive, backward, anti-communist superstitions and combated against. In Mao's call, religion, a relatively young, disembodied term created through the early twentieth-century secularizing efforts, was oversimplified as a class enemy and was violently uprooted from many aspects of individuals' lives.

As this article appealed, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) actively attacked all forms of supernatural practice during the Destroy the Four Olds campaign. Religious spaces such as temples, monasteries, churches, and mosques were converted into barracks or prisons, sacred objects were broken or melted down, and religious leaders were persecuted and forced to renounce their faith at public meetings (Dikotter 2016). The Cultural Revolution is thus a national-wide campaign to secularize the young Party-state. Through this revolution, loosely defined religions, meaning the traditional, spiritual, supernatural ways of living, were defined as a damage to the state, and correspondingly, the people. This negative perception of religion led

the state to exercise the power to confine or eradicate it, which, in turn, shaped the secular nature of the state. This secularism is constituted through defining and confining indigenous and imported religions.

This secularizing Cultural Revolution inflicted heavy losses on Chinese religious communities. For example, Dillion (1994) argues that Islamic communities suffered from the CCP's nationalistic desire to replace existing ethnonyms so that an overarching ethnonym, *Zhongguo Ren* (Chinese citizen) could be applied to emphasize the uniformity of the nation. Dillion (1994) also suggests that the situation of Muslims changed radically after the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution. With the establishment of *gaige kaifang* (Chinese Economic Reform) during Deng Xiaoping's leadership, the CCP realized that China had to be able to develop trade and political alliances with the Muslim world and henceforth China's Muslims experienced a resurgence (Dillion 1994). Goldman (1986) argues that Deng's leadership had re-introduced religious activities to public spheres as a response to the Cultural Revolution that had driven religions to private spaces, which was relatively more difficult to censor. Correspondingly, the religious tolerance during Deng's time stemmed from the state's desire to exert tighter control over religion by making it visible to the public (Goldman 1986).

While Mao's and Deng's era ended, secularism does not. Secularism is an ongoing process as it discursively defines Chinese citizenship and accordingly transforms individuals. Currently, the PRC continues to be an atheist state and does not recognize any religion as the state religion. The state's perspective of religion is summarized in the Constitution Law of the PRC (2018), which claims that:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China have the freedom of religious belief...The State protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the State. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.

Though the state claims that citizens enjoy religious freedom, this freedom is qualified because whether a particular religion is “normal” is defined by the state. Here it also suggests that religion has the potential to “disrupt,” “interfere,” and “impair”: these verbs follow the aforementioned tradition of viewing religion as oppressive and shows the state’s continued cautionary attitude toward religion. As I will discuss in the next section, the state racialized several religious groups by creating fixed categories of peoples through *minzu* (nationality/ethnicity), which reduced individuals’ religious identities to ethnic ones.

Secularism in China, though sharing similar characteristics to Western secularism such as state-directed, has its particular genealogy. Secularism and religion discursively constituted each other as a reception to and appropriation of Western Christian version of modernity. Mao’s “sweeping away all the monsters and demons” legacy largely shaped current Chinese secularism in that China remains an atheist, and therefore, secular state. This process was influenced by Chinese nationalists’ endeavor to strengthen the state through the creation and institutionalization of religion as a need state structure and Chinese Marxists’ discourses that classed traditional religions as superstitions that should be combated. As also argued by Yang (2008), these secularization projects were all implemented by educated elites in China; local communities did not have the autonomy to address their identity or practice their own rituals. To summarize, Chinese secularism is intertwined with generations of indigenous endeavors for national independence, which produces religion as a new regime of state surveillance. In the next section, I will discuss a form of secularism that takes the shape of *minzu* (nationality/ethnicity) categorization, in which groups, such as the Hui, are ethnicized based on their religious identity.

Making *Minzu* and Han Domination in the Party-state

This ongoing Chinese secularism, co-constitutive of nation-making, retains the power of defining and policing religion. As the modern state claims to represent its people, the PRC requires the making of a normalized Chinese people that is representative of all citizens. In this section, I will first compare Asad's (2003) analysis of Europeans' conception of Europe to the making of a standardized Han Chinese citizen that is educated, atheist, and nationalistic. I will argue that the Party-state's moulding of *minzu* (nationality/ethnicity), as a means for the secular state to manage difference, minoritizes religious groups such as Hui Muslims while simultaneously providing a nationalistic discourse to accredit the state as a multiethnic unity. In such a *minzu* framework, one group needs to be recognized as a *minzu*, that is, recognized as different from the major Han group, or assimilates into the Han.

Asad (2003) argues that the conception of Europe is essentialized. To illustrate this idea, he quotes Wintle, who said that the European experience is heavily influenced by the Roman Empire, Christianity, the Enlightenment, and industrialization (Asad 2003). The secularization of European states that started from a historical, perhaps even coincidental, incident, is therefore incorporated into this articulation of European civilizational essence as a crucial accomplishment of the Christians, who were rational enough to emancipate themselves from their religion. Asad (2003) employs Raymond Williams's explanation of the word "civilization" to address the essence of European civilization: Asad argues that "it aspires to a universal (because 'human') status; it claims to be distinctive (it defines modernity as opposed to tradition); and it is, by quantifiable criteria, undoubtedly the most advanced" (166). In turn, this view of Europe expects real Europeans to acquire their identities from the traits of their civilization. In contrast to "real Europeans," Asad (2003) suggests that individuals who live in Europe yet are not seen as possessing this civilizational essence such as Russians, Jews during WWII, and Muslims, are

considered not “fully” European due to the essence of their own culture. The universality of the constructed European essence made it possible to argue that a Muslim has to “divest themselves of what many of them regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves” to “be assimilated or ‘translated’ into a global (‘European’) civilization” (Asad 2003: 169). Therefore, Asad (2003) argues that it is impossible for a Muslim to be represented as a Muslim and a European at the same time because Islamic religious identity, representative of Muslims’ essence, is incompatible with the standardized European image.

From a comparative perspective, Chinese secularization contributes to the manufacture of a standard Han Chinese image that marginalized the non-Han peoples as possessing traits that are incompatible with the Chinese national image unless they *hanhua* (sinicize). The ethnonym “Han” was extensively used throughout Chinese history. Chinese usually present themselves as “people of the Han,” in which “Han” refers to both the Han dynasty and the Han culture that originated in the region of the Han River (Chun 1996). Historically, differentiations between the Han and other groups were usually made when the Han were facing a collective enemy. For example, emperors of the Yuan and Qing dynasties were, and still are, referred to as barbarians from the North. While the construction of the Other has always existed, it was not until relatively recently that the boundary distinguishing Han and non-Han people was legalized.

The Han is recognized as a *minzu* in present-day China, presented on legal identification documents as a necessary component of a Chinese citizen’s identity. The Chinese borrowed the concept of *minzu* from the Japanese concept of *minzoku*, which is translated as *nation and nationality* in English (Bulag 2020). The Han is considered a part of the *zhonghua minzu* (the Chinese nation). Liang Qichao (1873-1929), contemporaneous with Kang Youwei, first proposed *zhonghua minzu* in 1902, referring to the union of five *minzu*, the Han, the Man, the Mongol, the Hui, and the Tibetan (Li 2006). Later, Yuan Shikai’s reuse of the five *minzu* was documented: in

1912 he referred to the “five great nationalities” to thank them for elevating him to the supreme position. In the 1920s, with a hope to bind them to a single Chinese nationality that centered on the Han, Sun Yat-sen blended the five nationalities to a unity, *zhonghua minzu* (Bulag 2020). In the 1930s, the CCP adopted a different concept for the non-Han peoples, namely *shaoshu minzu* (ethnic minorities), referring to them as being exploited and oppressed by the Chinese nationalist regime (Bulag 2020). The CCP then came to an alliance with the minorities to fight against their enemy—the Chinese Nationalists (Bulag 2020).

As we can see, the use of *minzu* in the twentieth century was intertwined with nationalistic efforts that sought to strengthen the nation. In these aforementioned figures’ discourse, the Han has always been centered. Though people like Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong endeavored to bring together peoples rather than dividing, their positionality as educated Han elites drove them to center the Han. These nationalistic efforts were closely associated with the secularization and modernization projects that I delineated in the previous section. In these projects, the activists accepted Europe as the epitome of civilization and similarly pursued the ideals of progress, rationality, and the freedom of the individual person (Yang 2008). It is taken for granted in present-day China that the reforms in the twentieth century set the foundation for the establishment of PRC and the prosperity that contemporary China enjoys. Thus, the ideologies that the Chinese precursors upheld, in a way that is similar to the essentialization of Europe (Asad 2003), became the essence of modern China. A standard Chinese has to be rational, educated, atheistic (free from the illusions of religion), and most importantly, loyal to the Party-state. The Han with these characteristics were elevated as the standardized Chinese citizen; in contrast, non-Han peoples or those who do not follow the norm are marginalized as inferior, and thus are required to sinicize—or, they are allowed to perform their cultural heritage as touristic objects, but the politicization of their differences is not tolerated.

The Chinese minoritization process, intertwined with secularization, has been violent and hegemonic. While many other places experienced a resurgence of native religions that may seek to overthrow the secular state after being suppressed first by colonial powers and then by the nationalist elites, religious rebellions that challenge Chinese Party authority are relatively absent in China (Yang 2008). Even in the well-known case of Falungong (Practice of the Wheel of the Law) that indeed contained implicit political messages, the religious group did not adopt an anti-state position until the state's harsh policing of it in 1999 (Shue 2004; Yang 2008). Yang (2008) suggests that this absence may be caused by the breadth and depth of twentieth-century secularist and nationalist projects in China. I argue that the institutionalization of secularist and nationalist ideologies was enabled by the legalizing of *minzu* in the PRC.

As I mentioned before, the concept of *minzu* was widely employed in the twentieth century by different political parties. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, a nationality identification project was launched in the 1950s (Mullaney 2011). In the first census in 1953, over 400 separate groups applied to be recognized as official nationalities, yet only 41 were initially recognized. The 1964, 1982, and 1990 census then recognized 15 more nationalities, bringing the total number to 56. There are still groups that desire to be officially accepted as a distinct *minzu*: the 1990 census reveals that 749,341 individuals are "unidentified" and are awaiting recognition (Gladney 1998). This identification process provides the CCP with the power to recognize the majority, Han, and in turn, selectively ethnicize peoples whose practices are different from the Han.

This Chinese project of making the majority in contrast with the minority has been analyzed by many. Harrel (1995) suggests that the acknowledgment of the Han majority in modern China was introduced by several major civilizing projects, in which the Han is constructed as the central, civilizing powers, while the others are recognized as peripheral ones.

In these projects, the civilizing center characterizes itself as one which helps the dominated to reach the center's superior cultural, religious, and moral qualities and therefore justifies the domination (Harrel 1995). Peripheral areas are portrayed as women, children, or ancient, as opposed to Han people who are masculine, mature, and modern. Diamond (1995) echoes Harrel (1995) and argues that ethnic minorities are identified by their difference from the Han: the key markers include house styles, costumes, hairstyles, foods, and festivals. In this discourse, differences are recognized as signs of primitiveness, in opposition to the "correct" way of development, and hence requires the minorities to *hanhua* (sinicize). However, while ethnic minorities may strive to "reach" the civilizational stage that Han people are in, they cannot erase the inferiority of minorities with this effort because their ethnicity, in opposition to the Han, is made into a fixed identity. The constitution of the Han as the normative ideal Chinese subject is comparable to the standard European subject, Christians; in both cases, a standard is formed and reinforced through the emphasis on civilizational development in opposition to other groups. In other words, groups other than Han in China are marginalized by the state. These minorities are considered incapable of being "real" Chinese because of their own cultural identity.

The categorization of Hui Muslims in China is a telling example of minoritization through the concept of *minzu*. Although archaeological evidence shows that Muslim peoples traded and settled in China since the very advent of Islam, there was no consistent term to refer to these peoples until the thirteenth century, when the state labeled their faith as the teachings of the Hui (Hui jiao) (Gladney 1998). The rise of this term and its institutionalization marks the increasing power of the imperial state and its authority to name in contemporary China (Gladney 1998). Similarly, the PRC exercised the power of naming through regulating *minzu*. Muslim groups received specific ethnonyms that categorize them into ten ethnic groups from the Chinese authorities: Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik, Tartar, Khalkhas, Dongxiang, Salar, and

Bao'an. The Hui forms 0.7943% of China's population, spreading throughout the central cities of China in small groups (Yang 2013) and varied in dialects and religious practices (Gladney 1998). Generally, Hui nationality (*Hui zu*) refers to Muslims who do not have their own language but speak the dialects of the peoples they live with (Gladney 1998). Before the legalizing of *minzu*, Islamic religious identity was relatively fluid: one could be accepted into Hui communities and mosques by converting to Islam (Gladney 1998). While after, the ethnonym of Hui became an ethnicity and, therefore, a genealogical identity. One can no longer join the Hui by converting to Islam: this identity can only be passed on by family heritage, similar to patronymic surnames. In this way, the Hui as a minority compared to the Han is fixed: though the Hui have been integrated into the Han throughout history, the presupposed Chinese essence, as I previously discussed, requires the Hui to *hanhua* (sinicize), yet constrains their ability to become identical to the norm exactly because of their assigned ethnicity.

On the other hand, the institutionalization of *minzu* enables the state to prioritize its peoples' citizenship and place the differences in peoples' languages, traditions, religions in ethnic terms, which establishes China as a multiethnic unity. The Chinese Constitution presents the state as one that unifies 56 different nationalities. The Constitution Law (1982) claims that:

The People's Republic of China is a unitary multi-ethnic State created jointly by the people of all its ethnicities. Socialist relations of equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony have been established among the ethnicities and will continue to be strengthened. In the struggle to safeguard the unity of the ethnicities, it is necessary to combat big-ethnicity chauvinism, mainly Han chauvinism, and to combat local ethnic chauvinism. The State will do its utmost to promote the common prosperity of all the ethnicities.

Here, the reference to "Han chauvinism" represents the efforts of creating transcendental socialist subjects in Maoist era, during which attempts to resolve the tension between ethnic autonomy and Han domination were made but failed in its own way as I mentioned before in Bulag's argument (2020). What I want to emphasize is that PRC is referred to as "a unitary

multi-ethnic State”: all ethnic groups take the same share in contributing to the maintenance of the nation. Similarly, the number “56” and the nationalist discourse that these ethnic groups belong to a single nation, China, is emphasized in the Chinese educational system and is prevalent in popular culture. For example, the lyrics of a popular song Love My China writes: “fifty-six stars, fifty-six flowers, fifty-six brothers and sisters together form one family, fifty-six national languages together form one sentence: I love my China, I love my China” (Love My China 1991, Lyrics by Qiao). This song takes for granted that there are 56 national (ethnic) groups in China, and these groups together form a single nation. This heavily nationalistic discourse is necessary for constructing China as a nation, an imagined community bounded by the “deep, horizontal comradeship” among its people (Anderson 2006).

Though the Constitution (2018) specifically rejects Han chauvinism, the making of the Han majority as a *minzu* is crucial to the stabilization of the Chinese nation. In the 1930s, the CCP’s support for national minorities and their nationalist motivations were established to emancipate themselves from the oppression of their collective enemy, the Nationalist. However, with the victory over the Chinese Nationalist party in 1949, this common enemy was defeated, and thus the triadic relation among Communist, ethnic minorities, and the Nationalists was no longer balanced (Bulag 2020). Bulag (2020) argues that the recognition of ethnic minorities after the founding of PRC was not a “concession to minority” but rather “the adoption of a different logic pertaining to state-building.” Thus, the autonomy—as stated in the Constitution (2018), “[t]he organs of self-government of ethnic autonomous areas are the people’s congresses and people’s governments of autonomous regions, autonomous prefectures, and autonomous counties”—granted to the minorities was not the one demanded by them; instead, the “territorial autonomy” granted to ethnic minorities through ethnic autonomous regions was a “local-level multi-nationality administrative area” where a significant number of Han Chinese present (Bulag

2020). Similarly, Veer (2014) argued that the minority ethnicities such as Muslim groups are constructed as a threat to the constructed Chinese majority; therefore, the sheer greatness of the Han in population diminishes the threat of minority.

In this section, I presented the construction of the Han as the normative Chinese citizen in contrast to ethnic others following the secularist and modernist discourse. The Han is characterized as a superior group in civilizational terms, whereas other groups are ethnicized based on their differences in practices, religions, and languages from the Han. This categorization of Han and non-Han was legalized and thus made fixed through the making of *minzu* in China. I argue that the making of *minzu* minoritizes groups such as Muslims, while simultaneously establishes the Party-state as a multiethnic unity through nationalistic discourses.

The Hui in Zhengzhou: Observations and Perspectives

Located in the central part of the PRC, Zhengzhou is the capital and the largest city of the Henan Province. Henan Province is located at the mid- and down-stream of the Yellow River. There are 41 different ethnic minorities in Henan, among which the Hui has the most population, taking 0.99% of the total population (Pu Shi Institute for Social Science 2013). In Zhengzhou, the Hui is the second largest ethnic group, accounting for 10.51% of the population (Pu Shi Institute for Social Science 2013).

The Hui's presence in Zhengzhou can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) when Muslims (generally called 回回 "Huihui" at that time) passed Zhengzhou while heading towards the capital of Tang, Changan (长安, now called 西安 Xi'an). Some settled in Zhengzhou and formed the earliest Huihui settlement there. This settlement stabilized in Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 CE). Because of Genghis Khan's Mongol conquests, many Persian and Arab Muslim

soldiers were forced to move towards the east. These soldiers garrisoned the banks of Yellow River, where several large Huihui settlements developed to accommodate Muslim soldiers, merchants, and scholars. Throughout history, these Huihui communities mingled into local Han communities through trade, intermarriage, and other interactions. In the 1950s, right after the founding of the PRC, there were eight mosques in Guancheng Hui District in Zhengzhou. Because of activities against traditional religions, local mosques experienced damage and abandonment during the Cultural Revolution; it was not until after 1978 when seven out of eight old mosques were reopened and re-established by the state as a place of worship for the local Hui population (Pu Shi Institute for Social Science 2013).

In Southeast Zhengzhou, there is a district for Hui communities, called the Guancheng Hui District (管城回族区). The total population of this district is about 562,000, of which there are 23,000 Hui. As a native Han of Zhengzhou, I grew up in Guancheng Hui District and attended Zhengzhou Huimin Middle School (Huimin: 回民, “Hui people”; this school is built, not exclusively, for Hui students. What I remember that distinguishes this school from other schools in Zhengzhou is that the school’s dining hall has the Halal label. This school consists of both middle and high school, grade 7 to 12). The contradiction between this seemingly large number of Hui population brought together by this specific district and my actual experience of encountering very few Hui individuals throughout my childhood inspired me to place this research in Zhengzhou.

I decided to conduct ethnographic research in Zhengzhou. There, I had planned to visit local Mosques, talk to religious leaders (Akhoond), and recruit research interlocutors in local Hui communities. However, COVID-19 pandemic limited my ability to travel. I was only able to conduct online interviews in Mandarin through WeChat with interlocutors whom I recruited. I

recruited seven Hui individuals, all of them are in their 20s or 30s and have lived in urban environment throughout their lives. Six of them self-identify as female and one identifies as male. Thus, younger and older generations, as well as those with low income or living in rural areas, are left out in this research. As an outsider to Hui communities and Muslim communities myself, I, depending on each conversations' context, attempt to grapple with the Hui identity's complexity and seek to take each interlocutor's word seriously on their own terms. With each interlocutor, I held an interview lasting from 30 minutes to an hour. During the interviews, we discussed questions related to their Hui identity and their personal experience as a Hui. Interview questions for each interview were slightly different to follow the flow of each conversation; for instance, when one showed particular interest in the concept of religion, we would talk more about religion. Interview question examples include: Do you and your family identify as Muslim? What kind(s) of Hui traditions do you and your family practice? How is your practice different from your older relatives? Have you experienced advantages or disadvantages because of your Hui identity? What do you think of religion? In this section, I will examine the interlocutors' responses to my questions in the interviews and analyze the overall pattern presented in their discourse.

Most of my interlocutors admitted to experiencing discomforts, if not outright discriminations, because of their Hui identity. Several of them gave me examples of the stereotypical impressions of the Hui: the Hui is often characterized as “*xiong*” (凶), translated in English as brutal, fierce, or mean; it is said that the Hui tends to fight; if they wear traditional Islamic costumes, for example, Hijab or Burqa, they would be called “terrorists.” Several suggested that they are often called outsiders because many Han people thought that Islamic traditions are imported from Arab or Persia, yet they believed that they belong to Zhengzhou as

they and their previous generations are all born and raised in Zhengzhou. One told me that she does not like her Han peers acting curious about her dietary restrictions: she encountered many offensive questions such as “what would happen if you eat pork?” Another demonstrates her experience wearing Hijab: people would stare at her on the street or ask disrespectful questions. She added that these negative experiences had led her to stop wearing the Hijab.

I asked my interlocutors how their Hui identity manifests, and all of them responded with the Hui’s differences from the Han, which is identical to how the state distinguishes non-Han peoples from the Han as I mentioned before. Most of them maintained that their Hui identity only manifests in several restrictions: they can neither eat pork or dog nor use substances such as alcohol or cigarette. Some of them only eat in restaurants with the *qingzhen* (“pure and true”; Halal) label. When I discussed this aspect in detail with an interlocutor, she said that she wanted to be a Han sometimes because of the inconvenience she experienced. For example, it is hard to find a restaurant with the Halal label; this lack of access may shape the importance of Halal to their lives. She explained that this dietary restriction does not mean much to her and this restriction is more of a family tradition. Therefore, she would want to be born in a Han family to avoid these restrictions. One suggested that the Hui identity in her family also shows in their appearance: they all have relatively larger eyes, high-bridged noses, and double-fold eyelids, which are different from the Han. She claims that this difference is becoming less visible since more and more Hui intermarried with the Han. Only one responded that there is no difference between him and other Han people. He claimed that he is not religious and therefore he neither follows any of the Islamic practices nor has participated in any religious activities or celebrations. To summarize, the Hui identity appears mostly in my interlocutors’ dietary traditions, which, some argued, do not have much meaning to them.

As for their religious experience, only one of them self-identified as religious while others neither wanted to be called religious nor self-identified as Muslim—one clarified that only religious Hui are Muslim. This religious individual thought of Islam as a positive restriction that supports people by preventing them from falling into temptations that may harm their mental and physical health. For example, as a Muslim, she is not allowed to use substances. This interlocutor suggests that she decided to voluntarily follow Islamic practices after she went to college. As a child born in a traditional Muslim family, she was forced to obey Islamic traditions and attend religious practices by her parents. She told me that about twenty years ago, her father used to be the Akhoond (阿訇, “*ahong*”) of a local Mosque, where there was a great Muslim community, and thus following religious traditions was easy. As a child, she did not like these religious experiences: she thought of herself as different from other kids. However, when she attended college and majored in the Arabic language, she was introduced to the concepts and meanings of Islam, which she found intriguing and beneficial to her. Since then, she decided to stop resisting the practices but rather follow them voluntarily.

While I asked those that self-identify as non-religious about their attitudes towards religious Muslims, their answers were surprisingly identical. They thought of the religious Muslims as more “authentic” or “pure” (纯正) whereas they are less authentic because of *hanhua* (sinicization). They all suggested that religious Hui would come from peripheral areas while there would be fewer religious people in urban cities. When a Hui married a Han, this Hui would have been no longer “pure”. Accordingly, Muslims in mainland China would be not as pure as those from Muslim countries because the Hui communities in China were formed based on intermarriage between outside Muslims and local Han. Based on their own experience, my interlocutors all thought that there would be fewer and fewer religious Hui as time progressed. It

seemed that religious Muslims, in their words, were connected to authenticity and periphery, while non-religious Huis were described in opposition to these terms.

Following this question, I invited them to discuss their perspectives on Islam. Their responses this time were also similar. All of them asserted that Islam was a belief that provided people with spiritual support in difficult times. Islam should be private because religious people should not coerce others to believe in it. Many suggested that Islam originated from the Middle East and was brought to mainland China by the Arabs and Persians. One maintained that for all the Hui, Islamic traditions were inherited: the older generations would have taught younger ones the practices and their meanings. There was a perceived pattern that religious Hui individuals always had a traditional Muslim family. Despite these perceptions, some also presented negative aspects of Islam to me. One suggested that some concepts in Islam should be eliminated. For example, some Hui families forbade their children to marry Han. This interlocutor argued that as religion ought to have led people in the correct direction and brought in positive developments, this limitation in marriage was unreasonable: if Islam became the barrier that prevented people in love to get married, it then deviated from the original intention of religion. Others showed their attitude towards Hijabs, saying that Hijabs limit women's freedom. One suggested that it was identical to the constraints that pressured women to not show up in public places in feudal societies: in Islamic tradition, Muslim women's body parts should not be revealed to people other than their family members. She considered this as a sign of the society's regression, and thus she rejected this restriction. Another compared Zhengzhou's religious environment to that of Northwestern China and asserted that the former was relatively progressive. This interlocutor used religious freedom as a criterion and demonstrated that, in Zhengzhou, one could choose whether to believe in a religion or not, in contrast to more peripheral areas where religious

practices were more emphasized. As a result, their perceptions of Islam as a religion were largely non-positive: Islam was considered traditional, undeveloped, and tangential.

Overall, my interlocutors presented a non-positive or negative view on Islam and religion in general. Religion and religious peoples were often described as uncommon, abnormal, backward, and peripheral in their comments. At the beginning of an interview, one told me that she probably cannot provide me with much information on Islam, because she was “just an ordinary worker (只是一个普通的工作者).” Although she did not present straightforward negative views on religion directly, the word “ordinary” (普通) that she used implies that religion is an uncommon thing in her community. Another one maintained that he is relatively “open-minded” (开明) as he did not discriminate against religious people. He added that he did not want to follow any religious doctrine either. Again, he exhibited neutral feelings about religion. However, the fact that he asserted that he was relatively open-minded acknowledged that among his family and friends, there should be people who discriminated against religious groups. Many of my interlocutors maintained that usually no one would discuss religion at work or school. Religion seemed to be an irrelevant matter in people’s ordinary life.

It is worth noting that my interlocutors frequently described religion in ontological metaphors: the abstract idea of religion was presented as physical objects such as “drugs.” Several mentioned that they did not want to get “obsessed with” or “addicted to” a religion; they might prefer a particular religion because of its cultural or aesthetic values, but they did not want to be strictly religious. One separated religion from real life and argued that individuals should not rely too much on religion as spiritual support because, after all, real life should be what matters. This metaphor of religion as drugs also appeared when an interlocutor and I engaged in a conversation on how the surrounding environment influenced people. He compared religious

people to groups who were addicted to drugs. In China, there has long been governmental prevention of drug use; drug-abusing represents the lack of agency of drug users, who are often referred to as immoral because they are indifferent and ungrateful to the efforts made by the anti-drug police. He started by saying that “this might be an inappropriate comparison”, and then he placed the religious community in juxtaposition to drug abuser and asserted that similar to how a “normal” person would stay away from those who abused drugs, one might stay away from religious people because they were different. He then added that he would not tolerate those who propagandize their religions or attempt to ask him to join. Though he suggested that this comparison might be inappropriate, the language he used in the demonstration, such as “normal,” which is often used with a positive connotation, shows us that religious people were considered as different from normal ones—they might even be considered as abnormal.

This rhetorical language is not new, and as argued by Musolff (2012), these metaphors, as a fundamental concept- and argument-building process, may contribute to discrimination. My interlocutor’s metaphor is identical to the discourse used in CCP’s justification for their action to Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The CCP claimed that the camps for Uyghurs aimed to re-educate them to eliminate the “tumor” and “virus” introduced by religious extreme and terroristic ideas (Ramzy and Buckley 2019). One of my interlocutors touched upon the topic of Uyghurs and, recycling the governmental discourse, claimed that these re-education centers are positive, in that the CCP protects them from foreign infiltration. This tendency of construing religion as “drug,” “virus,” and “tumor” demonstrates the negative impression of religion. As this discourse prevails, it is easy for one, who may not know about any religion, to form an adverse view on the idea of religion and further this bias to discriminate against religious groups.

Concerning the CCP’s policing of Islam, I asked my interlocutors whether they have noticed any governmental support or repression of Islamic religious practices. Over half of them

responded that they have not perceived any support or repression. One non-religious interlocutor informed me that the government indeed kept maintenance of religion because religion could sometimes control people and thus introduce harmful consequences to people. She suggested that at schools, there used to be slogans prohibiting people to coerce minors to attend religious activities. She argued that governmental intervention on religious practices was a positive action and supported her argument based on the unfavorable connotation of religion that I discussed above. In contrast to this interlocutor's idea, the one who identified as religious claimed that the government neither supported religious activities nor did it endeavor in understanding the meaning of certain religions. Instead, it only allowed private religious practice, while the government usually bans larger and more public Islamic events. She further asserted that the government did not hold positive attitudes towards Islam as it usually connected this religion with terrorism. While this religious interlocutor's words may contradict with others', I place her words in a more authoritative position in regard to government's treatment of religious activities. Those who self-identify as non-religious and do not often participate in religious practices might have not experienced or heard about the limitation of Islamic events. Therefore, these responses show that the Zhengzhou government demarcates religion in private spaces and may not allow public religious practices. This religious interlocutor's response may present to us some interpretations of the Constitution, which writes "the state protects normal religious activities" (2018). For the state, "normal" religious activities may likely mean private and invisible ones; on the contrary, public, influential religious celebrations are not allowed.

However, there is governmental support for the Hui as an ethnic minority. All of my interlocutors demonstrated that they received support in standard examinations. For all ethnic minority students, there are five supplemental points added to their high school and college entrance examinations. High school and college entrance examinations are important

standardized tests in China: the final scores students receive will directly impact which high school or college they enter. The higher score a student gets, the better-ranked school one can attend. For Hui students specifically, Zhengzhou Huimin Middle School drops ten points for their entrance requirement. Since an individual's grade may directly relate to their family's financial situation and social status, this policy privileges low-income ethnic minorities' education opportunities. However, simply adding five grade points to significant examinations cannot bring equity among groups because inequalities, as I addressed in previous sections, are far more complicated. Besides, some mentioned that from around the 1970s to 1990s, there used to be a wage subsidy of less than a hundred *yuan* to compensate Hui for their particular dietary restrictions: beef and lamb were usually more expensive than pork. This subsidy stopped being issued several decades ago. Overall, their reaction showed that these governmental preferential policies have brought little or even no help to them.

The government only supported the Hui based on their ethnic identity whereas it repressed public Hui religious activities. The governmental policies towards religion and the common people's perspective on religion limited the Hui in expressing their traditional religious identity in public. Dietary restrictions remained the most prevalent tradition of the Hui, which, as my interlocutors reported, became increasingly hard to maintain because of the perceivable changes in Zhengzhou. One suggested that there used to be several Hui commercial streets: for example, all the restaurants there had the Halal label. However, these streets now either reduced greatly in size or vanished. No one was held accountable for breaking the unspoken rule of forbidding Han restaurants in these streets. In addition, most of my interlocutors said that there were fewer and fewer religious Hui around: usually, their grandparents' generation believed more in Islam and they had their own Hui religious community, but when they moved out from that place, such a religious environment would no longer exist, and thus they stopped practicing

Islamic traditions. All of them demonstrated that growing up, there was no Hui community, religiously, or secularly. Despite that there is a considerable Hui population in Zhengzhou, especially in the Guancheng district, they encountered almost no other Hui individuals growing up. This observation illustrates the increasing invisibility of Hui people in Zhengzhou over the past several decades.

Therefore, the differences between the Hui and the Han are intentionally or unintentionally eliminated. Instead of mutual cultural exchange, it seems that the Hui experiences a cultural invasion from the Han. As I noted previously, cultural assimilation to the Han is named *hanhua* (sinicization), an action to which the Hui are required by the Chinese notion of civilization. When asked about their perspective on *hanhua*, all the non-religious ones responded positively. One suggested that *hanhua* is a mode of ethnic fusion (民族融合), which was a necessary step for the state to develop into a “new era”. *Hanhua* was considered as protection for ethnic minorities since differences might lead to conflict. Another asserted the presence of differences would hinder the developmental progress of society, so such an elimination of differences through *hanhua* was necessary. In many of my interlocutors’ view, differences were unfavorable, which I think might come from their experiences of being othered as Hui.

Some of them traced the reasons for *hanhua*. One claimed that this “ethnic fusion” and the elimination of Islamic practices were influenced by the educational system: since following certain traditions can be time-consuming, many Hui parents decided to drop their children’s required religious practices to lengthen the time they could spend on standard national education. Another employed the *hanhua* process to explain why the wage subsidy for Hui was canceled. She suggested that when the PRC was newly established, there was a need to take care of every

ethnic group to reach ethnic unity. However, since now the nation had been stabilized, it was no longer necessary to place particular emphasis on the Hui. The PRC now turned to focus more on unstable areas like Xinjiang and Tibet. What she referred to as “stabilized” in mainland China, I think, was the eradication of differences between the Han and ethnic minorities. In most cases, the Han was the dominant group while minorities lose their unique traditions and practices that, as Diamond (1995) argued, differentiate them from the Han.

In contrast to these non-religious ones, the religious one suggested that *hanhua* might be unfavorable. She first analyzed why this process might be advantageous to non-religious Hui. *Hanhua* provided non-religious Hui with more convenience: for example, they would no longer need to find restaurants with the Halal label nor would they be required to avoid drinking and smoking. *Hanhua* also benefited the Hui because the elimination of difference would prevent them from being discriminated against. She thought that showing less Muslim features in appearance, for example, not wearing Hijab, would make people experience fewer discriminations. Nevertheless, she maintained that *hanhua* is disadvantageous for religious Hui because the process made the religious environment no longer “pure.” *Hanhua* introduced temptations from the outside world, and therefore, the Hui would be lured by these temptations and lose their tradition.

Consequently, becoming identical to Han in the process of *hanhua* could be both beneficial and disadvantageous to the Hui in Zhengzhou. While it indeed prevented the Hui from being othered by making them identical to the Han majority, the Hui inevitably lost their own religious traditions. I asked my interlocutors if their next generation would follow, or at least get to know about, traditional Hui practices. One who has a child told me that her son was totally the same as Han: he was not required to follow any restrictions or practices. This interlocutor added that she and her husband registered their son as Hui because of the governmental preferential

policy. Based on these interviews, I imagine that there would be fewer and fewer religious Hui in Zhengzhou; there might even be fewer people knowing about Hui practices and traditions. In several decades, the Hui ethnicity in Zhengzhou might cease to represent the celebrated Islamic cultural heritage, though the Hui was identified as a distinguished ethnic group based on their Muslim identity. Instead, Hui identity might only appear in identification documents; it might become a symbol of governmental preferential policies such as added grade points, as the main reason people would keep registering as Hui.

Despite the heterogeneity, these interviews showed that my interlocutors had a neutral or even negative view of religion. Religion, particularly Islam, was perceived as backward, peripheral, and harmful. In this negative view, Islam doctrine hindered society's progress: for example, some Hui families forbade their children to marry the Han. Religion was peripheral both geographically and ideologically: many claimed that religious traditions were only maintained in rural areas; in urban work or school settings, people seldom engaged in discussions on religion. Religion was also represented as harmful to people's mental health: metaphors that connect religion with "drugs," "virus," and "tumor" prevailed. Islam was thus demarcated as simply a belief and limited solely in private places, as a result of Chinese secular politics and the dominance of the Han. Such demarcation and limitation perpetuated negative stereotypical impressions of religion. Therefore, the Hui, whose identity was constructed largely based on their religious practices, deliberately or not, had reduced their "Muslimness" manifested in their clothing, dietary, and other traditions.

Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed the particular genealogy of the Chinese secularism, carried out through the institutionalization of a particular understanding of religion as hindering the

resurgence of the Chinese nation. This process marginalized religious groups by constructing a standardized Chinese citizen image as educated, nationalistic, and rational based on the Han group. I then examined the concept of *minzu* in China and argued that the making of *minzu* legalized the minoritization of non-Han groups in contrast to the Han while simultaneously stabilized the Chinese nation as a multiethnic unity. During this process, the Hui is made fixed as an ethnic group in contrast to the Han and thus asked to confront their otherness.

I concentrated on the situation of Hui in Zhengzhou, Henan, where I conducted interviews with seven young, urban interlocutors. I argue that despite the internal heterogeneity of the Hui, my interlocutors tend to separate their supposed religious identity from their ethnic identity. Instead of an ethnonym for Muslim peoples and their traditions in China, “Hui” gradually became a symbol of a rather trivial governmental preferential policy to ethnic minorities. This increasing invisibility of Islam as a religion corresponded with neutral or negative perspectives of religion. Religion, especially Islam, was often referred to as backward, peripheral, and even harmful, all of which were contradictory to the positive qualities of modernity. *Hanhua* (sinicization), a process constitutionalized by the domination of Han, also aggravated the gradual decrease in the number of religious Hui since differences were not tolerated. With the constantly changing notion of how to be a practicing Muslim in the secular state, I predict that there will be fewer and fewer Hui Muslims in Zhengzhou in the next several generations.

The recognition that Hui traditions have been neglected should inform potential government policy changes and individual actions to better the situation of the Hui and remedy the state violence exerted on them through *minzu* framework. I suggest that the government could issue statutory holidays for Hui individuals on large religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr, “Festival of Breaking the Fast,” when Hui could enjoy a day or two off work or school to

celebrate this holiday with their community. As for schools, especially those for the Hui community such as Zhengzhou Huimin Middle School, elective courses on Islam could be held so that students can choose to learn about Islamic traditions. Also, non-governmental organizations could promote articles, artworks, songs using new media to destigmatize Islam and Muslims. However, while these suggestions could “recover” some of the loss from a depoliticized, multicultural perspective, they cannot stop the ongoing state secularism that seeks to define and redefine true Chinese citizenship, through which ethnic and religious differences are constituted and managed. As this thesis comes to a conclusion, I also stumble upon a piece of fairly recent news (Han 2020): the Chinese government, province by province, is gradually canceling preferential policies for minority ethnicities. With the imminent danger of religious and ethnic groups co-constituted with the secular Chinese state, ethnic minorities’ ways of lives could only be represented in culturalist, if not modernist or secularist, terms: in these discourses, ethnic minorities are always traditional, backward, in need of catching up to the modern, secular, urban, educated Han. The suggestions above, even with its depoliticized nature, may only be utopian dreams as the PRC continues to force assimilation and exert tighter control of the fixed differences between the Han and the non-Han made through the *minzu* framework.

While this analysis indeed presents insights on the Hui’s status quo in Zhengzhou, there are several limitations. I recruited interlocutors online with the help of my peers, and thus there is little age, gender, or class difference among the participants of this research. Younger and older Hui generations’, Hui males’, and rural, lower income Huis’ views are not represented. Other factors also hinder the data collection process: I was not able to conduct face-to-face interviews or visit actual sites in Zhengzhou. Therefore, my analysis cannot be considered as a comprehensive study of the Hui in Zhengzhou. However, the limitations present in my research might open up avenues for future research that will contribute to the anthropology of secularism

and religion and the ethnographies of religious and ethnic minorities. I advocate for more research on Muslims' status quo in different parts of China. For example, the Hui's situation in Ningxia could be investigated since Ningxia is the only Hui autonomous region. Different Muslim communities' perspectives on each other, for instance, Uyghurs' perspectives on Hui in Zhengzhou, is also worth noting as it may deepen the study of the aforementioned perceptions of central and peripheral, authentic and inauthentic.

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