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**A Change in the Ethnicity/Religiosity of the Hui People and Tourism
Development:
A Case Study of Hui Muslim Society in Yunnan Province, China**

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Introduction

This paper examines how the ethnicity and religiosity of the Hui people have changed through the influence of tourism development in Shadian, Yunnan Province, by focusing on the hospitality practices of the Hui people towards non-Muslim tourists.

The Chinese government has promoted infrastructure development both within and outside China under the Belt and Road Initiative. In the Initiative, Yunnan Province has been positioned as a hub connecting China with Southeast Asia and South Asia. Therefore, the development of the infrastructure has also been actively carried out in Yunnan province (e.g. Li et al. 2016). For example, an airport has been constructed in Mengzi, the seat of Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which is located about 30 kilometers from Shadian, the field site for this paper.

Moreover, the Initiative includes an enhancement of cooperation in the tourism sector and the expansion of tourism between China and neighboring countries (e.g. Yu 2016). The development of the transportation infrastructure has been expected to bring about a beneficial influence for the tourism industry, especially with regard to ecotourism and ethnic tourism, which together comprise one of the key industries in Yunnan Province, in which many ethnic minorities live. The Hui society is no exception.

However, non-Muslim tourists have been generally unwelcome guests for the Hui people. For example, when I first began carrying out fieldwork in Yunnan province, local Hui Muslims often asked me “are you Hui people?” Then, when they learned that I was not of the Hui people, they told me “this is a place for Hui people, get out here!” (Nara 2016).

Historically, Hui people tended to have an exclusive attitude toward non-Muslims, especially since the end of the Qing dynasty when the Han

people carried out a large-scale slaughter of the Hui people (Nara 2016). Moreover, the Islamic revival in the post-Mao era has caused rigid religious discourse to become more influential in Hui society. Consequently, that has seemingly strengthened their exclusiveness more than ever before.

However, Hui people recently began to actively accept non-Muslim tourists in Shadian. For example, one of the largest mosques in Shadian organized tour guides for tourists, including those who were non-Muslim. This paper examines such a change, focusing on the relationship between a change in the ethnicity and religiosity of the Hui people associated with an Islamic revival in the post-Mao era and tourism development resulting from the governmental initiative.

The previous literature about the religious revival in contemporary China was inclined to regard the revival of religions as a result of politics between the state and religious groups, such as resistance and negotiation (e.g. Madsen 1998). For example, Gillette argued, especially focusing on the consumption of the Hui people, Hui people challenge the evolutionism ideology of the Chinese Communist party, which subordinates the Hui people to the Han people through Arabization (Gillette 2000).

This kind of monograph sheds light on an important aspect of the religious revival in contemporary China that should not be dismissed. However, various factors, such as rapid economic development, social change in tandem with this development, and internationalization, have influenced religions in China since the 1980s. Ashiwa and Wank emphasized the importance of understanding religion in the context of a process of modernization that progresses through interactions among multiple actors, such as the state, religious associations, the clergy, and ordinary believers (Ashiwa and Wank 2009). According to their argument, a primarily dichotomic framework of the state and religion could not sufficiently explain the religious situation in contemporary China. For example, Yang has argued that the development of the domestic economy via the economic reforms has facilitated a religious revival in contemporary China (Yang 2000). According to their arguments, it is necessary to focus on various political processes amongst these diverse actors to constitute the domain of religion (cf. Asad 1993; 2003).

Grounded in the above, this paper focuses on the relationship between tourism development initiated by the Chinese government and the Islamic

revival since the economic reform. This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Yunnan province, China. This research was carried out between 2008 and 2018. Considering that religion is one of many sensitive problems in China, I have opted to use pseudonyms for people and places to protect my informants.

The following section will demonstrate how ethnic tourism in Hui society has developed under the governmental initiative that aims to redress the gap between the rich coastal areas and the poor inland areas where a lot of ethnic minorities live, and to develop the national identity of the Chinese nation. This section will argue that Hui Muslims' attitude of actively accepting non-Muslim tourists of other ethnic groups is seemingly related to the influence of ethnic tourism development initiated by the government. However, the third section of this article will reveal that this change in attitude cannot be reduced to a mere function of the influence of ethnic tourism development. This section will situate the Hui's attitude toward non-Muslims of other ethnic groups in the process of religious revival in the post-Mao era. Therefore, this section will describe a change in the ethnicity and religiosity of the Hui People in tandem with the Islamic revival. Subsequently, the fourth section will demonstrate how the development of ethnic tourism and process of Islamic revival have become entangled in Shadian. The last section will examine the extent to which it is possible that the entanglement of the development of ethnic tourism and the Islamic revival has enabled the Hui people to open up in Shadian.

Development of Ethnic Tourism in China

Since the economic reform, domestic tourism has been rapidly developing in China. For example, the number of Chinese domestic travelers reached 878 million in 2002. This means that China has formed the largest market of domestic tourism in the world (UNWTO 2016). Ethnic tourism in China has also developed in tandem with the development of domestic tourism. For example, under the governmental initiative, ethnic theme parks have opened one after another in various locations throughout China since the 1980s. In 1992, Yunnan Ethnic Village (*Yunnan Minzu Cun*), which exhibits the cultures of 26 ethnic groups living in Yunnan province, opened in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. Previous literature has argued

that such government-led ethnic tourism development in regions where many ethnic minorities live has aimed to redress the gap between the rich coastal areas and the poor inland areas, and furthermore, is intended to develop national identity.

The areas where Muslim minorities live are no exception. One of these areas is Shadian. Shadian is one of the towns in Gejiu city, Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Shadian has a population of about 13,500. The Hui population comprises about 90 percent of the total population of Shadian. Therefore, the Hui people are an ethnic majority group in Shadian. Moreover, Shadian has produced a number of Islamic scholars, such as Ma Jian, who was a professor at Beijing University and translated the Quran into Chinese. Therefore, Shadian has historically been one of the centers of Chinese Islam (Nara 2016). Furthermore, Shadian is famous for the Shadian incident during the Great Cultural Revolution. More than nine hundred local Hui people lay dead following this incident (Ma 1988).

Now, Shadian is famous for its large mosque. This mosque is called the Shadian Grand Mosque (*Shadian Da Qingzhensi*). The construction of this mosque began in 2007 and was completed in 2010. Moreover, tourism development was initiated by the government in tandem with the construction of the mosque (Gejiue-Shi Nianjian Bianji-Zu (ed.) 2009). This was one of the projects aimed towards tourism development: “Hui People Cultural Tourism Town in China (*Zhongguo, Shadian Huizu Wenhua Lüyou Xiaozhen*).” The government planned to invest 2.9 billion Chinese yuan into this project at that time. Moreover, 575 million Chinese yuan had already been invested in 2013. For example, the walking paths for tourists have been improved through this project in Shadian. As a result, Shadian obtained the designation of “Class 4A Tourism Destination in China (*Guojia 4A Ji Lüyou Jingqu*)” (Gejiue-Shi Nianjian Bianji-Zu (ed.) 2012). The Chinese government set up a tourist attraction rating system in China which has five categories: A (1A, the lowest level), AA (2A), AAA (3A), AAAA (4A), and AAAAA (5A, the highest level). Moreover, the number of tourists visiting Shadian exceeded 150 thousand in 2013 and the amount of tourism revenue exceeded 2 million Chinese yuan (Gejiue-Shi Nianjian Bianji-Zu (ed.) 2013). Furthermore, large sightseeing buses transporting tourists from the coastal areas have started to come to Shadian.

As a result of this situation, the Shadian Grand mosque set up an attendant at the mosque for tourists in 2014. The mosque recruited volunteer guides at the same time and by 2016, there were 34 local Muslim volunteer guides. This constituted a significant change in the Hui people's attitude toward non-Muslims in other ethnic groups, because they had previously been perceived as unwelcome visitors by the Hui people, as mentioned above. Moreover, Shadian especially tended to be disliked and avoided, not only by non-Muslims of other ethnic groups but also by the Hui people. During a conversation about Shadian, a Han female in her forties working in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, said to me, "They were peddling drugs, so Shadian was dangerous." Moreover, during a conversation about changes in Shadian, a Hui male in his fifties working in Kunming said to me, "When I had to go through Shadian in the early 1990's because of my business trip, I wanted to pass through as soon as possible." Thus, Hui people are inclined to have an exclusionist attitude toward non-Muslims of other ethnic groups. Moreover, Shadian also tended to be avoided by outsiders. Nevertheless, Shadian has actively engaged with both non-Muslim tourists and non-Muslims. How is it possible to understand such a change in Hui society?

Focusing on the explanation to tourists provided by local Muslim volunteer guides, the Hui people have seemed to claim the identity of a "Chinese nation (*Zhonghua Minzu*)" with a configuration that is both plural and united (Fei 1989); as such, the guides' explanation to the tourists emphasized the plurality and unity of the Chinese nation. For example, when explaining the governmental slogan, one of guides in his twenties said to tourists, "Patriotism and love of the religion (*Aiguo Aijiao*)"; "Patriotism is the most important for us Chinese nation. Based on it, we Hui people believe in Allah, love the religion." Moreover, when explaining a square in front of the mosque, he also said "There are no walls in our mosque, so anyone can come in. The square that we can see from here is called "Harmonious square (*Hexie Guangchang*)," and this is a space for national unity (*Minzu Tuanjie*)." Therefore, at a glance, Hui people seem to have accepted tourists in accordance with the ethnic tourism development led by the government.

However, this change in the Hui people's attitude toward outsiders could not be merely reduced to the influence of ethnic tourism development, because it has also been related with a religious revival in the post-Mao era.

A rapid revival of religion has occurred in China due to the abatement of religious policies since the economic reform. Islam in Hui Muslim society is no exception. Ethnic tourism development and the Islamic revival have been developing together.

Islamic Revival and a Change in Ethnicity/Religiosity of Hui People

A rapid revival of religion has occurred through the abatement of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) religious policies since the late 1970s. This is a noticeable reaction to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in which religion was suppressed. The policies of reform and opening called *Gaige Kaifang* introduced by Deng Xiaoping in December 1978 included a relaxation of the restrictions on religious activities. The CCP's approach toward religion was formalized in a 1982 CCP directive called *On the Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period (Document 19)* (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 10-11). Religious liberty was partially recovered, although it still functioned within conditions controlled by the government. This situation is also true of Shadian. For example, the number of mosques increased from three mosques before the economic reform to 10 mosques in the post-Mao era. The Shadian Grand mosque, as mentioned above, was rebuilt as part of this process (Nara 2015; 2016).

This transition in religious policy became a primary factor that brought about a revival in Islam. Therefore, Islamic activities, such as Islamic education, haji (pilgrimage to Mecca), and the repair of mosques have also been activated since the 1980's in Hui society (e.g. Nara 2018). For example, the number of haji has been rapidly increasing every year since 1989. Pilgrims to Mecca in Kunming increased from a mere two in 1989 (Kunming-Shi Renmin Zhengfu (ed.). 1990: 108) to 113 in 2009 (Nara 2015). With this Islamic revival, a more rigid Islamic discourse, such as Salafi religious discourse, has had an increasing impact on Hui Muslim society. Some factors in the increasing prominence of these discourses are the influence of Hui Muslims who studied in Islamic countries, the facilitation of access to Islamic knowledge through the spread of the Chinese translation of foreign Islamic thought (De Angelis 1997) and Islamic websites in Chinese, among others (Nara 2013; 2016). As a result, this has led to a pietization of a section of Hui Muslim society (cf. Turner 2008; 2010).

Consequently, Hui Muslims who became pious have objectified Muslim consciousness (e.g. Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). Such an experience is referred to as “recognize Allah (*Renshi Anla*)” in my fieldwork. For those Hui people who became more pious, the main criterion for being Muslim has become the strict practice of faith in Islam through objectification. In other words, ‘being Muslim’ has not been an inherent Hui attribute until recently. Therefore, Hui Muslims who recognize Allah do not regard Hanicized Hui Muslims as Muslims. For example, a Hui male in his twenties who practices Islam said to me, “They are Hui people but not Muslim. They only avoid eating pork. They don’t know anything about Islam.” This kind of statement is often made, especially among local Hui people who became pious. This means that pious Hui Muslims have come to separate the quality of being Muslim (one’s religion) from that of being Hui (one’s ethnicity), which constitutes a significant change, as the two had previously been regarded as inseparable classifications.

This change seemingly renders Hui Muslims more exclusive. However, this separation of religiosity and ethnicity among Hui Muslims enables them to regard non-Hui people as potential Muslims. For example, recently, some Hui people have often interrupted the conversation following questions by Hui people in mosques, with queries such as “are you Hui people?” as mentioned in the first section, and made statements such as, “Hui people is just an ethnic minority in China. Islam is for all mankind. So, you should ask him ‘are you Muslim?’.” Furthermore, this kind of Hui Muslim, who became pious, shows a marked tendency to welcome non-Muslim outsiders coming to mosques (Nara 2016). Such a change in the ethnicity and religiosity of the Hui people is closely related with the development of ethnic tourism in Shadian.

Entanglement of Islamic Revival and Tourism Development

This section will examine the development of ethnic tourism in the context of the religious revival occurring since the economic reform and may shed light on other aspects of the development of ethnic tourism. As mentioned above, local Hui Muslim volunteer guides’ explanations are seemingly based on the governmental discourse about the concept of a Chinese nation. However, at the same time, they attempt to spread Islamic

beliefs to other non-Muslim tourists through an explanation on the existence of Allah, the prophet Muhammad, the position of women in Islam, and how to perform the daily prayers in Islam,. Most of the clergymen in the Shadian Grand mosque regard the opportunities for communication that result from ethnic tourism as chances to propagate Islam. For example, when I asked about the mosque's attitude toward non-Muslim tourists, one of the clergymen in the mosque in his twenties who manages the attendants said, "At first, there were conflicts between local Muslims and tourists because they didn't know Islam, for example, some of female tourists dressed skimpily. But now most of us have come to regard it as a chance for spreading Islamic belief to them." Therefore, the mosque set up an attendant for tourists and recruited local Muslim volunteer guides.

Moreover, most of the volunteer guides also aim to propagate Islamic beliefs by acting as guides. For example, in an interview about his motivation to act as a guide, one of the guides in his twenties told me,

"The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had to go to propagate Islam, and our ancestors of Hui people also had to go to do so by themselves when they just arrived in China. But now they will come here if we do nothing special. That is a very happy thing."

This kind of motivation to act as a guide is shared among them. Therefore, they proactively give an explanation about Islam, their mosque, and the Hui people when parties of tourists arrive at the mosque in large sightseeing buses. Such a party of tourists consists of dozens of people. The travel agency contacts the mosque in advance when such a party comes to the mosque.

However, there are various types of non-Muslim visitors to the Shadian Grand Mosque. In addition to groups of tourists, many individual tourists or small groups of tourists visit as well. Most come to the mosque simply to take a picture of the mosque. There are many tourists with this motivation, especially in the evenings because the mosque is lit up at night. Moreover, some tourists come to the mosque to take a picture for a commemorative wedding album. In an interview about the development of tourism in Shadian, a local Hui female in her thirties sarcastically explains

such a situation by saying, “The Shadian Grand Mosque is a charge free tourist spot.”

However, most of the local Hui are not necessarily negative toward such a situation. While acting as a guide, one of the volunteer guides in his teens told me, “Recently more than one couple who is getting married soon comes to the mosque to take a photo every day. Some of them are not Muslims. Even so, it is a good opportunity for them to touch upon Islam.” Furthermore, local ordinary Muslims also tend to expect that the development of ethnic tourism will lead to the propagation of Islam to non-Muslim in other ethnic groups. For example, during a conversation about the attendants at the Shadian Grand Mosque, a local Hui male in his forties said to me, “We should make a strong effort to train up the attendant at the mosque in order that they become able to propagate Islam better to an increasing number of tourists.”

Conversely, non-Muslim tourists do not necessarily develop a national identity as a unified Chinese nation through ethnic tourism in Shadian, because their motivation for tourism in Shadian is based on “otherizing” Hui people. This is demonstrated by the phenomenon in which non-Muslim tourists have rapidly increased following the 2014 Kunming attack. The Kunming attack was a terrorist attack that occurred in the Kunming Railway Station on 1 March 2014 and caused more than 170 casualties. Moreover, the attackers are said to have been Xinjiang’s Uyghur separatist terrorists who allegedly planned the attack and trained for it in Shadian.¹ According to local Hui Muslims in Shadian, this terror attack did not decrease the number of non-Muslim tourists, and instead caused an increase in their number. In an interview about the influence of the terror attack, a Hui male volunteer guide in his twenties said to me, “Non-Muslim tourists have been rather increasing since the terror attack. They have not been decreasing at all.” According to him, more than two thousand tourists visited Shadian during the first spring festival following the terror attack in Kunming. This was the largest number of tourists per day.

Moreover, another Hui male volunteer guide in his twenties explained the cause of the increase in non-Muslim tourists to me when he said, “Non-Muslim tourists come to Shadian in order to see what kind of

¹ Xinhua Net (http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2014-09/12/c_126981249.htm), referred on October 15, 2018.

place the terrorists gathered in out of mere curiosity.” He also said that a lot of non-Muslims learned that Shadian has one of the biggest mosques in China and a robust Islamic landscape through the terror attack. In other words, non-Muslim tourists see Shadian as “a den of terrorists.” According to him, other ethnic minorities living around Shadian, who had not previously been interested in Shadian and the Hui people, have also come to the mosque.

Thus, the development of ethnic tourism has progressed in Shadian in tandem with the Islamic revival since the economic reform. Therefore, the improvement in the inter-ethnic relationship cannot be reduced to a mere function of the influence of ethnic tourism, though it has seemingly improved through the development of ethnic tourism. In actuality, a change in the religiosity and ethnicity of the Hui people, in accordance with the Islamic revival in the post-Mao era, has been an important factor in their acceptance of non-Muslim tourists. Ethnic tourism gives the Hui people an opportunity to propagate Islam, because they have come to regard non-Muslims of other ethnic groups as potential Muslims through the separation of their religiosity and ethnicity. Conversely, some also maintain the perception that Shadian is “a den of terrorists’ and not a tourism spot representing “the plurality and unity of Chinese nation,” especially following the terror attack in Kunming. In other words, the improvement in inter-ethnic relationships has not necessarily occurred through the sharing of their interests or national identity, but has instead come about through the entanglement of changes in the religiosity and ethnicity of the Hui people and the development of ethnic tourism that has generated a context in which contact can occur (Pratt 1991) between the Hui people and non-Muslims of other ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The Belt and Road Initiative has activated the cross-regional movement of people from home and abroad by establishing a wide economic zone and the development of supporting infrastructure. This is expected to lead to the development of the tourism industry. Moreover, ethnic tourism has developed under the governmental initiative that aimed to develop regions inhabited by ethnic minorities and the national identity. However,

local Hui Muslims have come to actively accept non-Muslim tourists because of the recent separation of “Hui” as an ethnic category and “Muslim” as a religious category, in accordance with the Islamic revival in the post-Mao era. In this context, the Hui people regard tourism as an opportunity for the propagation of Islam.

This means that tourism has provided the Hui people with the possibility of evading the governmental control of religion. Islamic activities are legally limited to officially authorized mosques in China. In contrast, informal religious activities are strictly controlled by the government (e.g. Nara 2018). These informal religious activities include Islamic missionary work. Therefore, the tourism development led by the government generates an ambiguous space which entangles religion and tourism. Furthermore, tourism development provides the local Hui people with an opportunity to propagate Islam to non-Muslims. In other words, the tourism development resulting from the Belt and Road Initiative might expand religion in the face of the government’s intention to restrain religious activities.

As mentioned above, the entanglement of religion and tourism has taken place even following the terror attack in Kunming, even though the Uyghur people living in Shadian were forcibly deported back to Xinjiang, the budget for tourism development was frozen, and a police box was established in front of the Shadian Grand Mosque. However, now, such an ambiguous space has shrunk in size and potential as a result of the governmental regulations against religious activities in Shadian under the Xi Jinping administration. One of the volunteer guides at the mosque told me, “The government hinders us from communicating with tourists now.” A clergyman in charge of the attendants at the mosque left the mosque. Therefore, the attendant infrastructure is not functioning effectively now. In the evening, as many tourists visit the mosque to see it lit up, Shadian is colored by rows of glowing red plastic national flags attached to street lamps. One of the guides said to me, “The elderly said it’s like the atmosphere of the Great Cultural Revolution.” According to local Hui Muslims, there are more than 500 cameras monitoring Shadian. In fact, the cameras flashed several times when I was walking down the street in Shadian. I would like to examine how they address the current situation in which governmental control is strengthening in this way in future research.

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