

Ethnic Evolvement in a South Fujian Hui Community

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Introduction

Baiqi is a place recognized in Fujian, a coastal province in south China, for its Hui ethnicity. However, the ethnic identity of its citizens was not really established until recent decades. As scholars have noted, though the Hui identity in south Fujian has been constructed under a preferential policy carried out by the state, it was impossible for it to have come into existence without its social and historical resources (Gladney 1991, 1998; Fan 2001a, 2001b: 309-33). In the past, Muslim identity was a matter of dispute within the Guo surname group. This name connotes Hui ethnicity today. The argument, more often than not, was driven by outside Muslim agencies, despite the fact that the Guo had retained some of the Islamic legacy of their Muslim ancestors. The Guo were eventually listed as Hui, one of 55 officially affirmed minority nationalities, in 1957, even though many Guo kinsmen had refused to be included as such when the government inquired into their ethnicity in 1953 (FPA 1953a).¹ In 1990 Baiqi was approved as an ethnic township (*minzuxiang*__), the only one for the Hui in Fujian.

I found it interesting to note in my field research that the Guo are now concerned with the authenticity of their Hui ethnicity with regard to their Muslim past, yet downplay comparable claims of other local Hui groups. As an exercise in historical anthropology, I propose to investigate the Guo Hui's Muslim history and how, in accordance with a changing socio-economic context, the locals have chosen to interpret this history. For a better understanding of the Guo's new attitude with regard to their Muslim past, I shall give attention, in the first place, to the relevant geographical conditions. Even though I do not take it for granted that natural surroundings should be treated as a decisive factor in

¹Documents in Chinese government archives are listed by *juanzong* (__-file), *mulu* (__-catalogue), and *an'juan* (__-archive) numbers. An ordered set of numbers, instead of a title, is given for each document. For example, FPA 138-1-1140 refers to a document located in the Fujian Provincial Archives (FPA). Its file, catalogue, and archive numbers, respectively, are 138, 1, and 1140.

social or cultural change, environmental influences, nevertheless, may be profoundly significant in determining the orientation of any such change.

The Physical Site and the Subsistence in the Past

The formation of ethnic diversities in China today is more often than not related to the natural environment. Ethnic diversities could be regarded as “leftovers” from the hegemonic process of sinicization in China’s past. From this standpoint, I mean to explore the significant of the natural environment in influencing certain ethnic processes taking place in a culturally more homogeneous landscape and how their surroundings helped people interpret their “sharing descent” (Keyes 1981) in order to reinforce an emerging sense of ethnicity.

Understanding the natural surroundings of Baiqi helps one understand why socio-cultural change in the Guo community took such a different course in the past.² Baiqi is more isolated compared with the other research site³ since it is located on a corner of the northern bank of Quanzhou Bay, from which one can see downtown Quanzhou.⁴ Since the Ming dynasty, the area has been officially named “Baiqi Pu.” According to Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), one *pu* is equal to ten *li* (one *li* is equal to 0.5 kilometer) and, for each *pu*, the government appointed a soldier to deliver official documents. Baiqi Pu was defined as a geographical locale extending about 4.5 kilometers from east to west and about 2.5 kilometers from south to north, centered at 24 degrees 55 minutes N and 118 degrees and 38 minutes E, where the Luoyang Jiang (Luoyang river) empties into Quanzhou Bay. The Baiqi *minzu* township now encompasses a total of 16.7 square kilometers including land, tide flats, open water, and salt pans.⁵

Despite the geographical obstacles and cultural distance Baiqi is closer to Jinjiang, the county seat of which has traditionally been located within the present-day

² For a comparison of different local Hui groups with regard to historical change see (Fan 2001b).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Quanzhou, an ancient city in south China, has always been considered as an important port city in international maritime history, see (Fan 2001a).

⁵ The shores of Quanzhou Bay have gentle slopes so that large areas are regularly flooded by the incoming tides. Entrepreneurs traditionally have set aside certain sections for the production of salt or shellfish by the natural evaporation of impounded seawater.

city of Quanzhou, it has administratively belonged to Hui'an, which is just north of Quanzhou. There are two means to reach Baiqi, by boat through Quanzhou Bay, or by land. Before the development of modern transportation (including bicycles), people had to walk. Therefore, waterways were crucial for connecting with the outside world. In the past, because of topography of the rocky hills, the land route to Baiqi was very rugged. Ye Chunji, county magistrate of Hui'an from 1570 to 1574, went so far as to describe the route to Baiqi as "a most dangerous" pass (Ye 1987: 221).

Topographically, much of the place is formed by denuded, weather-beaten terraces. After a road was opened to connect the different villages, people no longer had to use the various flights of steps. Nowadays, a visitor can barely tell where the path to the steps is without it being pointed out by a native.

Natural conditions determined the traditional patterns of subsistence in the Baiqi area. In the eyes of the county magistrate Ye Chunji, the area was not an ideal place for agriculture. Sixty or seventy percent of the population had to depend on local marine resources. There was some agricultural production in the fields constructed in one or another corner of the beaches by means of dykes to provide a supplementary source of income (*ibid.*). Many of those who relied on the sea for their subsistence, as Ye observed, also ran small businesses to transport goods for sale either on their behalf or in the name of others. This practice influenced the division of labor from the standpoint of gender. Since agriculture was not enough to make a living males turned to non-agricultural work. Traditionally, the Guo men either made their living from the sea or they had to become stonemasons. They were frequently away from home, looking for opportunities elsewhere. This affected the course of socio-cultural change among the Guo. People were too busy making a living to keep other commitments. In a long run, the lineage system, a social construction based in Confucianist and Neo-Confucianist ideology, was very much significant among the Guo, thus enabling them to retain more of their Islamic heritage than they might have otherwise.

This pattern of subsistence nevertheless had its heyday in the days of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Some senior informants maintained that in the early Qing period the Guo had over 200 boats in different sizes. Later, in the mid-Qing period, they even had an armed boat as a protection against pirates. Though such stories cannot be

confirmed, it is surely meaningful. The Guo were just beginning to write up their genealogy in conjunction with a deliberate effort to reassert the legitimacy of Islam in their ritual life. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the role of economic factors in the historical reconstruction of Guo identity.

The present distribution of the Guo population came about during the Qing dynasty. After the 1990 establishment of the Hui township, five villages were set up as administrative centers. These five villages were Lichun, Baiqi, Liandai, Xiandai, and Huohai. Thirteen natural villages in all were to be subsumed under the leadership of one or another of these five. The Hui township now has a population of just over thirteen thousand (13,024 in 1994). Ninety-one percent of the inhabitants are Hui surnamed Guo.

The Origin Discourse of Guo Descent Group

Together with other large-scale lineages, the Guo have a traditional explanation for their relatively large population. They give the credit to various *fengshui* (___)⁶ attributes of their focal ancestral halls. However, what we need to take note of here is that the Guo and other Muslim descent groups of foreign origin, like the Ding of Chendai township, Jinjiang, for example, have analogous legends with shared details. There is no need to list such similarities here. It is enough, for now, to conclude that these groups must have identified themselves with one another in the past. In the Ding community, I heard that fighting was common at sea or on the beaches because of competition for limited resources. The Ding, however, never fought with the Guo. Individuals of each group referred to one another as “brother.” A Ding informant thought this was because their respective ancestors practiced the same religion. Obviously, they have invested whatever facts might lie behind this explanation with a new meaning. Both acknowledge, nevertheless, a common identity in the past.

The extent to which these groups really shared a common identity in the past is not clear. We do know, however, that there were many cases of intermarriage. Most of those between the Guo and Ding, in particular, involved Ding women who married Guo men. Relatively few Guo women married into the Chendai Ding. Local historical records

⁶ The term *fengshui* in this context should be thus defined: “the location of a house or tomb, supposed to have an influence on the fortune of a family (see DEBUFL 1997: 358).”

tell us that some among the Ding helped with the renovation of the Qingjing mosque, one of the oldest in China, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) (Fan 2001b: chapter 3). Obviously, in the early years of the Ming dynasty, the Ding were Muslim. In contrast to the Ding, the Guo have traditionally been relatively close to the Qingjing mosque. This relation continued even into the first half of the twentieth century, when they had already given up the overt practice of Islam. Furthermore, the Guo were responsible, at one time, for a revitalization of Islam, which seemed somewhat successful.

Comparing the respective courses of the Guo and the Ding with regard to Muslim identity change, one can see significant difference in their approaches to assimilate with the Han. There were a number of deliberate factors behind the process in the course of the Ding (*ibid.*). This did not happen in the case of the Guo, on the other hand, in spite of the fact that their respective ancestors must have had similar ethnic backgrounds. Like other descent groups in south China, the Guo claim that their remote ancestor to have been a famous historical figure. There are two stories about where the Guo originally came from.

First, as is common elsewhere, the Guo claim that their ancestry came from a privileged background. This claim has been maintained for several centuries and traces of it still surface even today in everyday life. In their focal ancestral hall, for example, many eulogies have been incorporated into the decoration. Guo Ziyi (697-781), a notable official in the Tang dynasty, Han by descent, was considered to be a remote ancestor of the Guo. Many among the Guo still believe in this legend.

The second story has been constructed in accordance with considerations under the condition of modernity. Here I refer to some aspects of the reorganization of time and space in the sense of Giddens (1990). This story is to be combined with the grand narrative of both the Chinese nation and one of its component parts, the Hui nationality. Like other Hui communities in south Fujian, the Guo became a living example of those whose alien origin serves as a cornerstone to the narrative of a constructed Hui identity. They are of course regarded as descendants of foreign maritime Muslims and are thought to have constituted a Hui community in the early Ming dynasty. Two of attributes featured in the Guo Hui stories about themselves are their skill in navigation (*hanghai__*) and their business awareness (*jingshang yishi_____*). The ancestors

of the Guo are represented as Arabic or Persian traders who came to China by sea as the so-called Maritime Muslims (Lin 1993, Guo and Su 1993).

These two stories can be taken as presenting different aspects of identity for the Guo Hui today. By right of their claim that they can derive their descent from Guo Ziyi as progenitor, the Guo identify themselves culturally with the local Han Chinese, all of whom claim to come from places regarded as the source of both the Chinese nation and Chinese civilization as we know them today. This claim, nevertheless, did not preclude their Muslim history. According to a number of my informants, all of whom were over 70 in 1997, no one in the Guo community even knew of the term “Huizu” (Hui nationality) and the Guo never thought of themselves from their neighbors until the 1950s. For a long time, in fact, the Guo had believed that they were Han who happened to practice Islam. The original report of a government investigation carried out in early 1953 corroborates what my informants had to say (FPA 1953a). In addition, Islamic worship did not actually disappear from Baiqi until the 1940s. This fact suggests that the Guo did not differentiate between thinking of themselves as Guo Ziyi’s descendants or as former Muslims.

Privileged Descent and Ancestral Ethnicity

For a better understanding of local Muslim history it is particularly important to know how the Guo and other Hui groups, the Ding, for example, understand the status of their family ancestors. Interestingly, most among the Ding think of their ancestors as non-Han, although, at the same time, they assert that they had already been culturally fused with the Han for a long time. Nevertheless, there were some who suggested that these ancestors were originally Han converts.⁷ All Guo informants from the early 1950s, on the other hand, argued that their ancestors had been such Han converts (FPA 1953a). What influenced both the Ding and Guo to have different consideration in terms of their ancestral ethnicity were the value of privilege descent and social surroundings.

For the Guo, Guo Ziyi was a venerable namesake established in the broad picture of Chinese history. It was easier for the Ding to believe ethnic origins were different

⁷ See (FPA 1953b). The Government also conducted an investigation in the Ding community in the 1953 survey.

because of family history passed down from generation to generation. It was said that they were descended from Sayyid' Ajall Shams al-Din (*Sai-dian-chi-zhan-si-ding*), who was highly regarded by all regimes subsequent to the Yuan for his achievements as a soldier and as a civilian administrator. But the Ding informants did not choose to think of themselves as a people distinct from the Han only because of this story. They maintained that they had already been assimilated with the Han for several hundred years. In fact, members of the Ding elites tried to reassert an ancestral loyalty to Sayyid' Ajall Shams al-Din in 1699 during the Kangxi era of the Qing dynasty (Zhuang 1996: 195-96), but the attempt failed. Nobody took this claim seriously until identity became a political issue in the late twentieth century. At any rate, given a connection to Sayyid' Ajall Shams al-Din, the Ding found it to be relatively more acceptable to acknowledge a non-Han origin. The Guo did not want to recognize that their ancestors had been ethnically alien, that there was no significant historical figure from whom to claim descent. More significantly, they were upset by the discovery that it was impossible to be Guo Ziyi's descendants and the Hui at the same time.

The social context could be another factor influencing how the Guo perceive the Hui. As my informants told me during my fieldwork in 1997, in the days when the Guo rejected to be officially recognized as Hui, they had been impressed by the fact that a large percentage of the population in neighboring villages of the Dongyuan township were Christian. The fact is, however, that their Christian practice has never been a reason for them to be regarded as non-Han. In addition, an item in the Guo genealogical collection had been influential in sharing the inherited image of the Guo family history. "*Shihuibian*" (___-Becoming Hui Disputation), written in 1807 by Guo Zhaofen, a descendant in the fourteenth generation,⁸ is an essay which raises different considerations with regard to the Muslim history of the Guo. Although the essay includes an appreciation of Islam, its primary purpose was to state that the Guo were actually the Han converts. One should not underrate the importance of this piece because it came to be a widely accepted identity representation.

⁸ As many as 10 copies of the Guo genealogy are known to have existed in Baiqi in addition to at least one printed by the family members in Taiwan in 1989. Anthropologists from Xiamen University have collected these and one among them, Guo Zhichao, has sorted them out for publication (See Guo 1991).

Despite the fact that they seem to have different foci, the second and third stories are differentially used in a discourse that actually amounts to the same meaning in most situations. The assumption of maritime Muslim descent was not foremost in the Guo way of thought. Even though this assumption might reflect an ascertainable historical fact, it actually was a product of modernity in relation to ethnic representation in the shaping of the modern nation-state. The narration of minority history has become a more crucial step in the construction of the nation-state in the particular case of contemporary China rather than that of other countries. The problem here is that all such minority histories have to be constructed under state supervision and they have to present themselves in a shape Prasenjit Duara calls “lineal” (1995: 27).

Although the traditional details entrusted by a hegemonic power to an objectively historical process with regard to a given group of people are just as likely to be true, the fictionalization intrinsic to the ways of conventional historiography makes the authenticity of any such historicity problematic. We see in a lineal historical narrative of the Hui, the Middle Ages and the Maritime Muslims becoming the constitution of a point of departure from which the successive stages in the formation of Hui nationality can be developed. It is not that I think that the picture we get from such historical narrative with regard to the formation of the Hui nationality is of no value. The problem, rather, is its generality which informs one or another consideration that emerges only under conditions of modernity such as to provide an ideologizing historical illustration.

Therefore, in historical study as such, one has to make a distinction between possibility and decision. Decision, in particular, is destined to emerge in the context of any subsequent grand narrative, frequently erasing some measure of whatever authenticity any historiography might presume to manifest and, more often than not, offering an alternate basis for any given history as ultimately codified. What we need, nevertheless, is to allow for various possibilities for interpreting a factual process both horizontally and vertically and to examine the problem posed by one or another definition. In the following pages I shall examine the different approaches to identity change among the Guo. I argue that the differences in question are a reflection of the extent of concern with Islamic practice, in conjunction with natural and historical conditions, on the part of my interview subjects.

Inventing Ethnicity

Before the Kangxi era (1662-1722) of the Qing the Guo descent group actually experienced a process of declination in the overt Islamic practice. Two factors made this declination take place. First, possibly due to the geographical difficulty and the Ming court moved to Beijing that caused the Hui migration moved northbound (Lin 1995), *jingtang jiaoyu* (_____ -Chinese Islamic education) announced by Hu Dengzhou (1522-1597) in the north could reach Fujian while Qur'an became increasingly unintelligible to the local Muslims. Second, about that time along the Fujian and Zhejiang coast *wohuan* (___), the destruction caused by the Japanese pirates,⁹ reached its peak. As a consequence, according to the Guo genealogy (Guo 1991), "the ways of organized Islamic practice were lost (*zhangjiao shichuan*_____); some customs from other faiths were introduced and orthodox teachings even became unknown to us." The original version of this article examines this process (Fan 2003).

Up until the Kangxi era, however, Islamic worship was, once again, practiced among the Guo. It is noteworthy that during that period of time Islamic practice in Quanzhou was somewhat revitalized by, presumably, the effort of Chen Yougong, a Muslim from Yunnan taking duties as the commander-in-chief (*dudu*___) in the area. A genealogy note informs us that the Guo resumed Islamic worship in 1709, the year "Chen Yougong took up his official duties in Quanzhou. At the same time, he worked for the restoration of Islam in the area. Father Honglong thus came back to Islam" (Guo 1991). It seems certain that Guo Honglong was the key person to the revitalization of Islamic work in the Guo community. We need to briefly know what this was about.

There are several indications in the genealogical records that some sort of family controversy erupted prior to the Kongxi era Islamic revitalization occurred among the Guo. Because the unity of his lineage branch had been shattered, Guo Honglong, a twelfth-generation descendent, moved out from Baiqi to be near the Qingjing mosque in the city of Quanzhou (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that Guo Honglong

⁹ Beginning in the Yuan dynasty, with increasing number of Chinese merchant and armed smugglers getting involved, the 300-year-long *wohuan* reached its peak in the Jiajing period (1522-1566) of the Ming dynasty.

originally meant to turn Muslim. First, it was because his branch (*fang*) was weak that he left Baiqi. Second, he chose his new home because he thought of his ancestors as Muslim. An account also in the genealogy suggests that, although Guo Honglong's reason for relocating was not primarily religious, he sensed that, as a representative of Guo lineage, he had something in common with the Hui living in the neighborhood associated with the Qingjing mosque. In fact, he never really returned to Baiqi after having left. However, he was still recognized as a pioneer in the subsequent revival of Islam. Some among the Guo rediscovered their Muslim identity after having visited him and the Qingjing mosque. More importantly, at the time of Guo Honglong's arrival Islam in Quanzhou was regenerating itself with the help, above all, of Chen Yougong, a military official stationed there, a Muslim himself (see Fan 2003).

What the revitalization of Islam in the Kangxi era meant for the Guo community was that its members were able to preserve more of their Islamic heritage. Unlike other villages with a comparable historical background, Daishang and Dashan maintained public Islamic worship until the 1940s. More generally, all Guo communities have managed to carry on with customs derived from their ethnic past. Nevertheless, more often than no, these customs have been co-opted, as it were, to serve the ideology of ancestor worship. In other words, if it were not for the practice the ancestor worship they might not have survived to the present. It is surely the case for most among the Guo in the past that such inherited customs connoted neither non-Han ethnicity nor Islamic roots but, rather, simply loyalty to their ancestors. Only in Daishang and Dashan were things really different. practicing these customs subjectively did not mean that they were Islamic or ethnically different but that they were loyal to the ancestors. It was only in both Dashan and Daishang villages that things were different.

Available data shows that after the Kangxi Islamic revival several dozen Guo men from a particular sub-branch, the fourth, married women from Muslim communities, albeit perhaps nominal, such as Jin, Ding, Xia, and Ma in the broad Qing area.¹⁰ There

¹⁰ It is interesting that we find relatively few Ding men who chose to marry Guo women or women from other communities mentioned according to the Ding Genealogy (see Zhuang 1996: 433-94). Obviously, when it came to marriage, the Ding's nominal Muslim identity never played a significant role. This also

are, furthermore, many records in the Guo genealogy with regard to Guo men marrying women characterized as “*Qingzhen*” (___-pure and true), which would suggest some kind of association with Qingjing mosque in Quanzhou.¹¹

In conjunction with Islamic revival, moreover, many among the Guo chose to be buried in Muslim cemeteries around Quanzhou, such as in specified sites in the Lingshan cemetery, in addition those, already mentioned, who had opted for an Islamic style of entombment.¹²

As one would expect, formal Islamic worship was regularly carried out among the residents of Dashan and Daishang. It was said by many of my informants that the Guo in both had continued with their practice of Islam until the death of the last ahung, who was Guo himself, in the 1940s. Since then, Islam radically declined. Many legacies can still be found today, not only in these villages but also in all the Guo villages. Some have become idiosyncratic local customs accepted even by the Han. It is also said that many people in Dashan and Daishang held on to certain Islamic elements after the end of public worship. Some people, for instance, had never touched pork in their life. Several old Arabic copies of the Qur’an are treasured by villagers, used only for funerals. The Kangxi Islamic revival seems to have affected on the occupational distribution of the Guo in

demonstrates the completion of identity change among the Ding at that time. The Guo Muslims, for their part, had no choice but to intermarry with those so-called Muslim families.

¹¹ Here are a couple of extracts (LDZ 1983: 15):

Chengji, of the fourteenth generation, was born in the fiftieth year of the Qianlong era ... took a wife from *qingzhen*, marrying Zhang Puguang's eldest daughter named Sajuan.

Chengmo, of the fourteenth generation, was born in the fifty-fifth year of the Qianlong era and died in the eleventh year of the Daoguang era. He took a wife from *qingzhen*, marrying Ma Jiangguan's second daughter, named Mojuan.

¹² In the genealogical records one can find many examples (*Ibid.*: 16):

Father Shimei of the eleventh generation [should be the thirteenth, actually] ... and his wife, surnamed Jin, were buried together in consecrated ground, Lingshan cemetery.

Father Ruchang of the thirteenth [should be fifteenth] generation died in the fourth year of the Jiaqing era and was buried to the east of his mother, surnamed Jin, in the Lingshan Cemetery outside of Tumenguan.

Qingqi, a fifteenth-generation forefather was buried in Lingshan, next to the tomb of Father Yizhai.

urban areas such as Xiamen and Quanzhou before 1949. Guo Jiaqi, one of my informants, told me that in addition to the occupations stonemason, fishmonger, and peddler, generally practiced by rural people in urban areas, the Guo in Quanzhou monopolized the butchering of beef. This was confirmed by Guo Zhichao, an anthropologist whose family was from Baiqi. Like his father, said Guo Zhichao, many Guo took jobs involved cattle upon coming to cities like Xiamen. Together with other family members, his father became a craftsman, making shoes and processing leather.

According to my informants, there were several hundred members of the Guo who insisted on not eating pork in the earlier years of the twentieth century, though some were willing to do so if necessary. Guo Jiaqi showed me a small square located at an intersection shared by several villages, not far from the new administration building of the township government. It is now an open-air market. Every morning people from neighboring villagers buy and sell fresh produce, though traditionally it has been a place for butchering cattle and selling beef. However, beef became unavailable during the 1950s. In the movement of agricultural collectivization, cattle were regarded as a “means of production” and were protected from butchering. Since then, there had no supply of beef. Even so, up to the 1980s, there were still some old Guo who maintained this tradition locally. This was called “*jinyou*”(禁油) which literally means forbidding the everyday consumption of oil, but really refers only to pork.¹³ Even though *jinyou* is now considered an Islamic relic, many of those who keep up *jinyou* in their everyday life are women who originally came as wives from the local Han community. Apparently, these women absorbed the custom of *jinyou* in conjunction with their gender role in the conduct of ritual life in Chinese society.¹⁴ In my fieldwork, I found out that a married woman is in charge of all domestic rituals, such as the preparation of sacrificial items, the birthdays of different deities, and the dates of the death of family members going back to two or three generations. All such things were largely unknown to males. Observances

¹³ The custom of *jinyou* is still observed today but only under these conditions 1) in the course of both ancestor worship and offering sacrifice to deceased relatives, 2) during the funeral period of family members and close, and 3) on behalf of someone dying. In addition, most people would feel forced to avoid pork when getting old.

¹⁴ For a general discussion on the issue of women and ritual in Chinese society see (Gates 1996: 179-88).

were distributed through the lunar year, marking not only every season but almost every solar term, as well as all death anniversaries. More importantly, the details varied from occasion to occasion. A married woman had to learn such things in the course of several years from her mother-in-law or from other women who had already married into the family. Only then could she be entrusted to do them without making mistakes. For these women, practicing *jinyou* had nothing to do with ethnicity. They did not become examples to adduce for the purpose of identity discourse until quite recently.

Obviously, the Guo Islamic heritage has played an important role in identity politics. Throughout history, nevertheless, it has always been mobilized by external agencies to this end, first, in a movement of return to what the ancestors were said to have believed, then, in the re-imagination of themselves as belonging to a different ethnicity.

It would be tempting to suggest that, compared to the other Hui communities in south Fujian, the Guo are ethnically more recognizable than anyone else, if one can assume that certain objective consistencies are significant in the differentiation of peoples one from another. But, a more comprehensive analysis of the Guo with regard to this assumption is supported by the observations of E. R. Leach, whose classic research in highland Burma challenges the conventional assumption that societies and cultures covary sufficiently that the two terms can be used interchangeably (Leach 1954, Bentley 1987). It is particularly true, however, that the possibility of ethnic marker is what allows an individual to mediate between a large-scale political movement predicated on a more cosmopolitan identity and variants anchored more to local particularities. Hence, we stumble across a very interesting phenomenon resulting from the different construction of identity politics today. In the past, observably Islamic features, or putative relics did not lead the Guo to construct their own ethnic identity, whereas nowadays such things have become key to a newly formulated Hui ethnicity. In spite of today's claims, together with its associated discourse of veracity, the Guo are prone to put emphasis on purity as guarantee of ethnic distinction although this purity is a matter of practice only in particular situations.

One might ask why this is the case and why Islam among the Guo nevertheless faded away in the wake of the struggle to survive subsequent to the Kangxi revival. We

might do well to remember how it was that the Guo and the Ding, respectively, had come diverge in the course of their history with regard to identity change. As I have pointed out, environmental differences played a role in this picture. The relatively remote and isolated natural setting held the Guo back relative to the Ding from the standpoint of conventional Confucian culture.¹⁵ This enabled Islam to last longer among the Guo and, of course, to leave more traces. In the case of the Ding, however, we see that social intervention finally dislodged Islam from conscious awareness though it had already begun to decline in the public sphere. Therefore, the respective differences in the Guo and Ding historical repertoires resulted in sharply divergent representations with regard to *qingzhen* as a criterion of their Hui ethnicity.

Another factor in play is the Guo claim to Guo Ziyi as a remote ancestor, as albeit Han, a claim the Guo are not ready to relinquish even today.¹⁶ It is not surprise that, as can be seen in Guo Zhaofen's writing and in other genealogical records, the adoption of Guo Ziyi is in no way thought of as contradictory to their new-found belief that they are really ethnically Hui. Even though Guo Zhaofen firmly advocated a return to the religion of Islam, which he thought of a legacy from the ancestor of the Guo community, culturally he sought identification with *ru* (_Confucian) traditions. This means he must not have recognized much of a difference between the Guo and other communities except with regard to the practice of Islam, which he assumed to have been adopted by the Guo under the Yuan. It seems that the perennial attempt to reconcile the contradictory claim of descent from Guo Ziyi and the undeniable history of Islamic belief have always been acceptable, even to other Muslims. No criticism is evident in the written genealogy or in the government interviews of the early 1950s or mine in the late 1990s. Neither Chen

¹⁵ After achieving a high level of accomplishment in the imperial civil examinations a gentry-elite class emerged among the Ding. It was this class that finally dislodged Islamic practice in the latter part of the Ming dynasty (see Fan 2001b: Chapter Three).

¹⁶ Nowadays, all Guo know that celebration of Guo Ziyi as ancestor is the result of forged documentation. Interestingly, however, elders in the Group for the Compilation of the Guo Genealogy, a voluntary folk committee established in 1995, agreed not to change this claim out of respect for established tradition and for the ancestors themselves. I was told in the spring of 1997 that, it was a matter of respect to pass on their history as they received it from their ancestors, even if acknowledged fabrications figured there is. In view of this, one might have expected the Guo to avoid any claim of descent from foreign Muslims.

Youngong nor the two Muslim officials who came later seem to have objected. Indeed, as Guo Zhaofen said, there were many Han Chinese who converted to Islam. This corroborates Jitsuzo Kuwabara's argument that Muslim missionaries had both directly and indirectly converted a number of Han Chinese nationwide, particularly since the mid-Ming (1974). It would be reasonable to assume that explanations like those offered by Guo Zhaofen occasioned no surprise.

The Guo and External Agencies Before and After 1949

The Guo's Islamic heritage made them more recognizable than other foreign Muslim descendants when it came to catching the attention of political or semi-political agencies. In addition to the customs the Guo have always practiced and the brief period of Islamic revival in the Kangxi era, their historical connection with Muslim neighborhoods has also made them ethnically visible. According to Guo Jiaqi, people from Baiqi commonly worked as casual laborers in the district around the Qingjing mosque prior to 1949. This was the reason Chen Youngong was able to make contact so soon after his arrival in Quanzhou. Two military officials subsequent to Chen Youngong were Muslims also. Both made a contribution to enhancing vitality of Islam in Quanzhou. The first, Ma Jianji, a provincial commander (*tidu* __), was said to have renovated mosques in Quanzhou and Baiqi in 1818. The other, Jiang Changgui, was said to have invited an ahung to Quanzhou in 1871 to take charge of religious affairs, including, in particular, the development of Islamic education (Wu 1993).

In the twentieth century like the Ding of Chendai, the Guo were inevitably drawn into a movement launched by *Zhongguo Huijiao Kangri Jiuguohui* (ZHKJ—Chinese Islamic Association of Anti-Japanese) between the 1930s and the 1940s. The association sought to unify Muslim Chinese, whether observant or nominal. Sent by this association in 1940, Ahung Zhang Yuguang visited Baiqi. He selected three young people together with others from Hui communities elsewhere, to undergo Islamic education at the Chengda Normal School, which at that time was located in Guilin, Guangxi. According to the ZHKJ, Islam was the only thing to hold the Hui together. In addition, one of the reasons Zhang Yuguang chose to go to the Quanzhou area was its distinctive position in

the history of Islam in China and its rich Islamic legacy. However, what he found when he arrived in Quanzhou shocked him. He wrote:

Because there are barely a few Hui families and most of them share the same surnames, marriage is a difficult problem for them. For this reason, most women in each family are from non-Muslim homes and have contrasting non-Muslim customs. Except for not eating pork, there are no other taboos (Zhang 1937, cited from Wu 1993).

This was the general situation of the Hui in the downtown neighborhoods of Quanzhou at that time. Zhang was pessimistic about the future of Islam here, which motivated him to visit Chendai as well as Baiqi and cultivate ahung or Islamic educators for the local Hui. Unlike the Ding community, within which traditional Chinese education was highly encouraged even after the abolition of the system of imperial civil examinations (Ding and Ding 1986), Baiqi was backward in this regard. The place did not have a school of any kind until the turn of the twentieth century. Only boys had a chance to attend, starting around the age of 10. Most would quit within two or three years. Guo Jiaqi suggested to me that this situation might have been due to the traditional division of labor in Baiqi. Men without special skills were condemned to take casual or seasonal jobs. As long as children could do basic arithmetic and write simple letters their parents thought it was enough for dealing with prospective employers. So parents would discourage boys from lingering unnecessarily in school. Not all families were able to offer their boys even such a limited education.¹⁷ Unlike the Ding, the Guo barely had qualified youngsters available when Zhang Yuguang came to find candidates.¹⁸

¹⁷ Baiqi established its first modern school in 1917. This represented a significant change for the better by opening up schooling opportunities for the children of poor families. As others were started later on, such so-called modern-style schools came to be operated directly by the Guo themselves. At the turn of the twentieth century, two or three wealthy families had been able to send some of their children to Shanghai and Shandong (Qilu University) for higher education. Driven by nationalist passions, none held out till graduation but, rather, returned to their home villages to establish schools, in turn, and educated their fellow Guo.

¹⁸ Three young men who went to study at the Chengda Normal School were Guo Xiukun, Guo Xiuzuo, and Guo Weiqi. The school closed before the Japanese occupation of Guilin. The three escaped with refugees from the North. Guo Weiqi disappeared in the chaos. The other two were able to return home later but played no role with regard to Islam during the rest of their lives.

When Zhang Yuguang died in 1942, his plan came to naught. Those who returned from the Chengda Normal School lost their enthusiasm for continuing with a mission Zhang had been unable to finish. Nevertheless, Zhang's endeavors left something of legacy, an accretion of symbolic capital for the local Hui, so that, once a new regime began putting policies of towards ethnic minorities into place after the communists came to power in 1949, they were able to step forward and take advantage of the opportunity.

Referring back to the epigraph from Anthony Smith at the beginning of this article, cultures and ethnic identities must be understood in a comprehensive context. When government investigators arrived in Baiqi in early 1953 to look into Guo ethnicity they found that their proposed identification was actually rejected by the locals. The people claimed that they have long been assimilated with the Han (*Hanhua* ___). Accordingly, although Ahung Ma in Quanzhou had written letters to convince them to accede to the government categorization, the Baiqi Guo insisted they were originally Han who had converted. The reason for this conversion was said to be that the Yuan court had forbidden the Han from becoming officials (FPA1953a). Some villagers doubted this offhand explanation. They merely insisted that they have been gradually becoming Han for generations, in spite of a remnant of Muslim customs still practiced in everyday life.

This account from the 1950s was confirmed 40 years later in 1997. Some of my informants explained why they had rejected the assumptions of government's inquiry in 1953. One of the reasons was that they had never heard the term *Huizu* (___), which implied that they were not who they traditionally believed themselves to be. In addition, they were convinced they were descendants of Guo Ziyi. "Was there ever such a term as *Huizu*? We did not know. We only thought that we, and of course our ancestors, were Muslims (*Huijiao tu*___), just like the people who happen to be Christians in Dongyuan, the neighboring township." A couple of elders pointed out that the explanations of the early 1950s depended on the genealogical records available at that time.

We can conclude that the Guo Hui sought to buttress their ethnic identity with an assertion of purity because they believed the legend that they had originally descended from Guo Ziyi. Guo Ziyi's privileged status and his accomplishment in the restoration of the authority of the Tang imperial court won him a place of honor in Chinese folklore as

well as in all relevant historical account, ranging from serious historical narrative and scholarly writing to the products of popular culture. It was hard for the Guo informants to subscribe to an outsider's ethnic categorization if it meant to the sacrifice of a privileged origin they had been convinced of for so many generations. In place of the veracity the Ding Hui characteristically emphasize, new-found purity has come to preoccupy the Guo in their concern for self-identification today.

Indeed, what the Guo said in the 1950s represented a general acknowledgement with regard to the role of Hui in the society of that time. As shown elsewhere, the movement to consolidate the Hui in the early twentieth century was proclaimed in the ideological framework of Chinese nationalism (Fan 2001a). Foreign origin in the discourse of Hui identity at that time was, as Thomas Eriksen noted, "undercommunicated"(1993: 31). Although this was soon criticized and corrected by certain scholars as a matter of intellectual honesty or ethnic emotion, the Hui in general were categorized along religious fault lines. The Guo might have had reason to be especially sensitive to such considerations, given that almost every religion to be found in China had established a beachhead somewhere in the immediate vicinity. This would inevitably lead locals to a comparative appreciation of religious differences.

Religious diversity was a factor in local identity formation. Fortunately, concern with regard to religious boundaries never inspired a sense of true ethnic passion in the hearts and minds of ordinary villagers in the area in and around Baiqi. When Christianity embarked on active missionary work in this area in the nineteenth century, Islam was already at low ebb, even though some people in relatively isolate Dashan and Daishang were still observant. To most among the Guo in other villages, Islam was merely something to keep around like an old picture. The 1953 official report noted that the Guo informants called Islam "*dajiao*"(__-big religion), although they no longer practiced it anymore(FPA 1953a). At that time, Christianity had already been present in a couple of Guo villages for over four decades. There was even a church in Lichun in 1939. As to other religions, most locals practiced "folk religion." This has commonly been mistaken for Buddhism by villagers. The Guo in the Baiqi area and those in Hui'an have treated certain secular rituals and funeral procedures carried out in the past as "religion,"

likewise. Since these were performed only on behalf of those who had attained scholarly honor or official rank, the locals call them *rujia ji* (____-Confucian sacrifice).

The religious diversity in this area was really a consequence of a movement launched by Lin Zhaoen in the sixteenth century to integrate Confucianism (*ru_*), Daoism (*dao_*), and Buddhism (*shi_*) (Dean 1998). Actually, this movement was a rearguard resistance against the overpowering influence of Neo-Confucianism. Even though Lin's religion of three-in-one (*sanyijiao* ___) was an attempt to find a compromise away three different belief systems, the diffusion of his ideas is thought to have somewhat sharpened the sense of religious boundaries in the mind of the ordinary people in the area. Lin's homebase was in Xinghua prefecture, next to Hui'an County in the north.

Although the majority among the Guo insisted on their Han origin, on the one hand, and, on the other, on the distinctiveness of their religious practice, though now abandoned, the government assigned them to the Hui nationality in 1957. The government decision did not depend so much on the amount of tangible and intangible evidence of ethnicity but to a great extent, rather, on the need of the new regime with regard to state-making, including the need to enhance its credibility in the eyes of its citizens. It is interesting, however, that in a meeting held by the government shortly after the official listing of the Guo as Hui, just under fifty percent of the Guo attendees persisted in emphasizing their conjoined claim of descent from Guo Ziyi and Islamic belief (*xin huijiao* ___), albeit lapsed. This reference to religious practice, paradoxically cited in 1953 to contest their recognition as Hui is now called up in support of their claim to special ethnic status today. In addition to the traditional co-option of Guo Ziyi, details having to do with Islamic constitute the largest part of the symbolic currency on deposit in the collective memory. This is a function of the one-time centrality of Islam and the length of its hold in Guo history. We need to ask, finally, why Islam went fallow if the Guo were really so concerned about it? The answer seems to corroborate a more general argument pertaining to the fate of Islam in this area, on the margin of the Islamic colonization of the Chinese world.

Conclusion: Disappearance of Islam

I suggested earlier that natural conditions limited Baiqi's ability to shine with cultural achievements. The Guo were unable either to accomplish what the Ding had done in the past, in line with Confucian norms and traditional Chinese expectations, or, to maintain the vitality of their Islamic faith. The genealogy notes that the Guo had several complete copies of the Qur'an in Arabic, practiced regular communal worship, and recognized Allah as the one and only God when they moved to Baiqi. But, Islam began to decline soon afterward. This seemed to run in the face of the fact that the Hui, in general, were people whose religious beliefs entails a distinct, separate identity and were on the verge of recognition nationwide at that time. In addition to the highly developed Confucian culture diffused throughout southern Fujian, certain objective factors, such as the successive Ming and Qing bans on maritime trade and the change of Muslim living patterns from transient to settled after the northward move of the political center, were also critical in the increasing isolation of Muslims in areas like that in and around Baiqi. Matters got, in fact, after the rise of Chinese Islamic education in Muslim communities throughout China in the seventeenth century.

There are indications that, paradoxically, the crystallization of a distinct the Hui identity came about at the cost of an increasing loss of Muslim identity as a *sine qua non*. Yang and Yang rightly point out that, by and large, the Hui ran into a crisis of Islamic during the Ming-Qing period. This was mainly due to the more or less momentary historical context and to the perennial and powerful force of sinicization that never lets up (1999: 208-09; also see Ho 1998). By the second half of the Ming dynasty most expatriate Muslim communities had lost their native languages and the Qur'an became more and more unintelligible. One can therefore assert that the formation of a new identity as Hui was, as it were the other side of the coin of an accelerating process of sinicization of what had once been alien populations of Muslims. It was not difficult to envisage the kind of thing described in the Ding Hui genealogy. Many people, at that time, met for Islamic worship but had to parrot the foreign sounds (*fang yiyin* ____), both in the recitation of the Qur'an and in prayer, without really understanding the meaning (*buzhi qiyi* ____).¹⁹ In order to counter this situation, Hu Dengzhou (1522-1597) began to promote Chinese Islamic education, called *jingtang jiaoyu*, in Shaanxi

¹⁹ See (Zhuang 1996: 27).

Province. Soon it became popular elsewhere among the Hui nationwide. It is worth noting that *jingtang* education was tantamount to the sinicization of Islam, on the one hand, while the re-Islamicized beneficiaries were gradually siphoned off into a category we now call Hui, on the other. *Jingtang* education constituted a critical key in the emergence of the Hui identity in the Chinese history. What the Guo and, of course, other Hui communities in south Fujian needed at that time was what their counterparts needed in the rest of China. Unfortunately, this never happened, neither in south Fujian nor, for that matter, anywhere else in the province.

Lacking what was needed to sustain its vitality in relatively remote areas like Baiqi, Islam was doomed to a slow decline. While Islam in Quanzhou had intermittent episodes of revival after the Kangxi era, these were somewhat limited in scale and depended on external agencies. As Zhang Yuguang pointed out, the shortage of necessary conditions inevitably led to a situation that “boomed when people [Chen Yougong, for example] were here (*ren zai shi xing* ___) and died when they left (*ren qu tong shi* ___)”(Zhang 1937). This was proved anew soon after Zhang died before having had a chance to complete his work in 1942. In Baiqi, Islam held on, just barely, for a couple of years after Zhang’s death. After the death of Guo Xingfa, the last ahung, in the mid 1940s, Islam disappeared from the mainstream of the community life, except for a few fleeting trances.

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