Blinkered Visions: Islamic Identity, Hui Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856–1873

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Introduction

On 19 May 1856, Qing officials in Kunming, the capital of the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan, systematically carried out a three-day massacre of the city’s Hui (Muslim Yunnanese).1 Han townspeople, the local militia, and imperial officials methodically slaughtered between four and seven thousand Yunnan Hui—men, women, and children—burned the city’s mosques to the ground, and posted orders to exterminate the Hui in every prefecture, department, and district in Yunnan (QPHF 1968, 6:20a, 8:4a; Gui 1953, 73). This massacre and the widespread attacks that followed signaled the beginning of the eighteen-year Hui-led Panthay Rebellion (1856–73).2

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1To avoid repetition, the terms “Hui” and “Muslim Yunnanese” are used interchangeably. “Muslim Yunnanese” (following Dru Gladney’s usage of “Muslim Chinese” [1991, 20–21]) is preferable to “Yunnanese Muslim” in that it highlights the fact that Yunnan Hui were Muslim subjects of the Chinese empire, not simply Muslims who happened to live in Yunnan. For a fuller defense of the term “Muslim Chinese,” see Gladney 1991.

2The term “Panthay” is unknown to almost all Muslim Yunnanese. Most likely the term came from the Burmese term pa-ti for Muslims, which was mistakenly applied by British officials who first came into contact with the Muslim Yunnanese in Burma in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet even as the term came into common parlance, it was almost immediately called into question. Following the rebellion and during the early part of the twentieth century, although the use of “Panthay” as a designation for Muslim Yunnanese faded in English-language treatments, it remained the most common appellation for the rebellion itself. While a misnomer in some regards, like the Boxer Rebellion, the label has achieved such widespread recognition that coining a new term would cause more ambiguity than clarity.

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The Panthay Rebellion marked the zenith of Hui dominion in Yunnan, but few accounts of the rebellion center their portrayal of those events on the Yunnan Hui and Yunnan society. Instead, most Chinese and Western observers have perceived the rebellion through the political and military lenses of the Chinese center (Wright 1957; Evans 1985; Wang 1974; Jing 1991). In a call to rethink acts of resistance ethno-graphically, Sherry Ortner suggests that “one can only appreciate ways in which resistance can be more than opposition, can be truly creative and transformative, if one appreciates the multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged...” (1995, 191). The multiethnic Panthay Rebellion offers fertile ground for testing Ortner’s ethnographic reframing of resistance and for prompting studies of resistance that reconsider more precisely the categories of ethnicity, religion, and identity in late imperial China.

The Panthay Rebellion, more than any other event in Yunnan’s history, has dominated both Chinese and Western representations of the Yunnan Hui in historical treatises (Tian 1981; Wang 1996; Lin 1991; Jing 1991; DX 1916; d’Ollone 1911; Israeli 1982). Yet despite the divergent theoretical frameworks employed in these past narratives, these representations all rest on two fundamentally false assumptions. The first is that the rebellion evolved solely out of a Hui hatred of the Han Chinese. The second is the premise that the rebellion was primarily Islamic in orientation, a premise which dismisses out of hand the significance of the contributions to the rebellion’s success of Yunnan’s myriad indigenous groups and allied Han Chinese. To counter such a priori assumptions, this article adopts a Hui-centered analysis by examining three crucial junctures in the Panthay Rebellion: the Kunming Massacre of 1856, Du Wenxiu’s creation of the Islamic Pingnan State, and the debates between Du and the renegade Yunnan Hui leader, Ma Rulong, who left his Hui compatriots in midrebellion and accepted a post with the Qing armies.

In addition to challenging these two assumptions, this discussion of the Yunnan Hui and their role in the Panthay Rebellion is purposefully positioned at the intersection of two contentious debates within the fields of Chinese and Islamic studies. The locus of the controversy in Chinese studies centers on concerns about the historical accuracy of utilizing the terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic groups” with reference to the peoples of various cultures in nineteenth-century China (Leong 1997). Recently, both Evelyn Rawski and Pamela Crossley have asserted, in their studies of Manchu culture and Qing rule, that to apply the term “ethnicity” “to earlier periods is anachronistic and distorts the historical reality” (Rawski 1998, 5; see also Crossley 1990, 7–8). Challenging this stance, Mark C. Elliot proposes that “thinking about the Manchus in ethnic terms is helpful because it enables us to... understand Manchu ethnic coherence in spite of apparent cultural incoherence” (2001, 17). Within Islamic studies in China, similarly, there has been an ongoing dispute, at times vociferous, over whether the Hui should be considered exclusively as an ethnic group or should be regarded only as a religious body in the era before the rise of the Chinese nation-state (Bai 1992; Deng and Wang 1992; Bai 1994; Lipman 1997; Gladney 1991). Of primary concern to this article is the manner in which the Hui expressed their faith, identity, and resistance during the Panthay Rebellion and how that expression challenges the assumptions fundamental to both debates.

Positioned in the southwest corner of China, Yunnan Province is bounded by the Tibetan plateau to the northwest, tropical Southeast Asia to the south, and the mountainous Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi to the north and east (see map). Ranging in elevation from more than fifteen thousand feet in the
northwest to several hundred feet in the south, numerous mountain ranges ripple across the province, often juxtaposing temperate valleys with towering alpine peaks.

For centuries, this area marked the farthest boundary of imperial control. Yunnan's diversified topography and unique geographical position at the confluence of Tibetan, Chinese and Southeast Asian cultures forged an ethnically disparate population singular in all of China. Today, Yunnan hosts 26 of a total of 56 state-recognized ethnic groups (minzu). During the nineteenth century, one provincial gazetteer enumerated more than 140 different groups—powerfully demonstrating not only the province's diversity but also the Qing state's cognizance of its multiethnic subjects. Despite such awareness, imperial documents—both from officials in Beijing and those posted to Yunnan—routinely divided the population of Yunnan into three categories: Han, Hui, and yi (XYT 19011 1966, 160:1a–40b, 161:1a–38b). The term yi (夷), as distinguished from the more contemporary ethnonym of the Yi (彝), was highly oppositional and referred, in its Yunnan context, to any indigenous group, other than the Hui, that was not Han. The strong oppositional nature of this term (i.e., not Han) and the difficulty in identifying to which particular group in each context was being referred has prompted me to translate the term as "non-Han," although I use the terms "indigenous peoples," or yi, interchangeably with "non-Han." The Han grouped peoples as dissimilar as Tibetans, Jingpo (Karen), and in some cases Miao (Hmong) into this one reductionist classification, despite the fact that, in many areas of nineteenth-century Yunnan, some individual indigenous groups in Yunnan vastly outnumbered the Han population. Although the Han did not consider the Hui as yi, they were included in the derogatory characterizations primarily reserved for the non-Han population. Most indicative of this derogation was the practice among some chroniclers of appending a dog radical (quanzi pang 犬) to the Hui character ( 純)—this being reserved almost exclusively for ethnonyms for the

The Qing government and many of Yunnan’s Han Chinese residents tended to represent Yunnan’s ethnic makeup as a binary dualism (e.g., Han-yi or Han-Hui). Distinguishing the Hui in this way simultaneously highlighted their nonindigeneity and their distinctiveness from the Han. One of the primary reasons for the Hui not being included in the non-Han indigenous category was their prominent and historically well-documented role in the Mongol conquest of 1254 that fully integrated Yunnan into China after several centuries of independent rule under the Nanzhao (738–902) and Dali (937–1253) kingdoms. The “first tide” of Muslims to enter Yunnan arrived from Central Asia in the thirteenth century. These Muslims, who would later become the Hui, acted as soldiers and administrators for the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty who viewed them as more trustworthy than the indigenous Yunnanese or the Chinese (Armijo-Hussein 1997). From then until the outbreak of the Panthay Rebellion, the Yunnan Hui repeatedly attained the highest local and regional offices in the Ming and early Qing bureaucracies. Regardless of these attainments, the Yunnan Hui, over the centuries and up until the present, have retained a curious “betwixt and between” position that defies standard definitions of religio-cultural or ethnic differences. By the nineteenth century, however, the three categories—Han, yi, and Hui—became shorthand for denoting the entire population of Yunnan. During the rebellion, calls for peace often included the phrase “do not distinguish among Han, Hui, or yi; treat them all as equals” (Zhao 1953, 65).

In the nineteenth century, the term “Hui” differed considerably from those terms employed for religious groups such as the Buddhists (fojiao tu), Confucianists (rujia tu), or Daoists (daojiao tu). In these cases, the emphasis is on being a “disciple” (tu) or on the religion or teaching (jiao) itself. The Chinese characters designating these religions or teachings (fo, ru, and dao) most commonly refer to a category or class of people (e.g., Daoists or Confucianists) based on their beliefs or adherence to those teachings. These characters or terms were rarely used in late imperial Yunnan as a single-character-designation to describe a people in the same way that the terms “Han,” “yi,” and “Hui”—perceived as permanent and fixed—were employed above. The character hui (氺) specifically often appeared alone or in ways which distinguished the Hui as a group, such as “Huimin” (氺民), literally “Hui people,” or “Huizi” (氺子), an occurrence that, as Wellington K. K. Chan has pointed out, is analogous to the derogatory label for the far less assimilated Miao ethnic group, “Miaozi” (苗子) (1967, 103).

Differences among ethnic groups in late imperial Yunnan were far more likely to have been distinguished from one another through a constellation of practices, habits, and rituals than through any singular marker (such as the modern categories of race or religion). The Han conceptualized Yunnan Hui identity in terms of temperament, occupation, and customs. In the nineteenth century, Yunnan Hui frequently dominated occupations that required a cohesive working relationship within a group, such as in the caravan trade, mining, and the military. One gazetteer estimated that “more than two-thirds of Yunnan’s military degree holders and military officials are Hui” (DX 1916, 24:42b). Perhaps, because of the Hui’s success and prosperity in these ventures, the Han described the Hui in some rebellion-era accounts as “full of strength and able to endure hardship, full of vitality, fierce, and brave” (YJ 1953, 216; XYT [1901] 1966, 4:10b). More often than not, however, terms applied to the Hui expressed disapproval, such as in “fierce” (鉦), “combative” (鉦斗), and “assertive”
(qiang), which inevitably led to the characterization of Hui as having "a propensity to stir up trouble" (DZ [1855] 1968, 4:3b). Additionally, a prominent, and to the Han incomprehensible, identifying custom was the Hui's prohibition of pork, a custom which appears often as the differentiating marker between Han and Hui (DX 1916, 34:43b; Pillsbury 1976, 154–57).

Despite these perceived differences and the Hui's liminal status, neither the state nor the Hui themselves considered being Hui antithetical to being a Qing subject or "Chinese." In addition, the elements that defined one as Hui and those that defined one as Muslim were not necessarily coextensive. For many nineteenth-century Yunnan Hui, religious faith did not solely determine identity; their occupational specialties, communal solidarity, and putative common origins also played a role in forming identity.3 Han antagonism toward the Hui in the nineteenth century was based more on specific practices and assumed behavior or "customs" (such as cross-border trading practices, violence, and habitual practices) than on religious issues. The boundaries of religion, ethnicity, and other salient categories that today are often perceived as mutually exclusive were at that time considerably more fluid, which becomes evident in the case of the Panthay Rebellion.

Dangerous Dualism: Chinese Muslims or Muslim Chinese?

Since the first scholarly Western accounts of Islam in China appeared in the late nineteenth century, the standard rendering in English for Hui was simply "Chinese Muslims" or "Chinese-speaking Muslims." These terms reflected and reinforced the belief that the Hui were in effect Muslims who reside in China, yet Hui identity encompasses a variety of shared conceptions beyond that of religious identity. Exactly how this Hui identity is expressed with reference to Chinese cultural symbols and state policies in both modern and imperial China is central to this critique of past historical interpretations of the Panthay Rebellion and Hui identity.

A common assumption among many scholars is that to be Hui is incompatible with the "Chinese Order." Perhaps the most enthusiastic proponent of this view is Raphael Israeli, who argues that Islamic and Chinese cultures are irreconcilable. He asserts that the Hui are more likely to conform to the Chinese culture and abandon their Islamic identity "in isolated places where maintaining ones [sic] distinctiveness could become a matter of daily embarrassment and a constant nuisance rather than a source of pride and superiority" (1977, 321). Chinese scholar Wang Jianping, in a historical study of Yunnan Hui, adopts a similar line of reasoning. He suggests that being Hui "was distressing for the Hui [who] lived on the edge of two societies and were forced to have one foot in their Islamic culture and one foot in the 'host' Chinese culture" (1996, 241). From Israeli's and Wang's perspectives, then, the Yunnan Hui, isolated and outnumbered, should have long ago assimilated, yet the Yunnan Hui have continued as an independent and highly salient group to the present day.

American scholar Jonathan Lipman voices another common supposition in his study on the history of the Hui in northwest China. He coined the term "Sino-Muslim" to describe the Hui prior to the emergence of the People's Republic of China.

3See Gladney's similar findings on the Hui of late-twentieth-century China (1991, 21–26).
Lipman suggests that, prior to the founding of the PRC, the word "Hui" meant Muslim and that "[Hui] would not have used that name themselves" (1997, xxiii; see also Gillette 2000, 11–13). Few people contend that the static system of ethnic identification employed today in the PRC is an accurate reflection of the myriad permutations in which ethnic identity manifests itself. To suggest that the Hui identity was purely religious, however, reflects a modern interpretation of religion as something completely separate from ethnic and cultural identity (Bodde 1991, 148–49).

A shared thread in the arguments of all three scholars is the denial of any overarching Hui identity outside their religious beliefs. Implicit in their work and much of the literature on the Hui is the assumption that merely religious beliefs separate the Han and Hui. Nineteenth-century Yunnan, however, offers evidence to repudiate both of these positions. Not only is there no evidence that the Hui's distinctiveness ever caused the Yunnan Hui to relinquish their Hui-ness, but there are numerous indications that the Hui were amazingly resistant to assimilation (see Armijo-Hussein 1997, 158; Schwarz 1987). They seem to have avoided many of the cultural, moral, and intellectual biases of the Han toward the yi, and they selectively adopted many cultural practices of the Dai, Tibetans, and Bai (Ma 1999, 101–6).

In contrast to the opinions expressed above, two anthropologists, Dru C. Gladney and Elisabeth Allès, offer distinct and less reductionist frameworks for understanding Hui identity. Rather than falling into a binary classification of the Hui as either Muslim or Chinese, Gladney revels in “the wide ethnographic and religious variety found among the Hui who, despite this diversity, continue to regard themselves as one group” (1991, 26). In this way, Gladney redefines Hui identity so that Islam no longer serves as the single defining characteristic of Hui-ness in China but, rather, “only one marker of that identity” (323). He proposes that Hui identity should be considered “ethno-religious”—that is, the religious dimension of Hui identity could vary widely among Hui communities while still retaining the community’s overarching Hui-ness. Taking a somewhat different approach, Allès refutes Wang’s and Israel’s implicit assumption that the Hui are disposed to assimilation. She suggests that Hui identity is “not as much a mixture than it is a juxtaposition” of Chinese and Hui cultures (2000, 289). The treatments of Gladney and Allès indicate that the broad array of non-Muslim elements contained within the Hui identity are derived from the culmination of a centuries-long process of acculturation, not simply as a by-product of a state-assigned ethnic label.

Popular and state perceptions of the Yunnan Hui during the Qing dynasty were often inaccurate, uninformed, or simply overstated. As Gladney and Allès have indicated, Hui-ness depended on a number of parameters that often fell outside the Hui’s identity as Muslims. What these parameters were and how important an understanding of them was to the smooth functioning of the region’s governance and economy was often difficult for the state and for the Han Chinese to discern. A focused analysis of the Yunnan Hui during the Panthay Rebellion provides the opportunity to forge a balanced and nuanced understanding of Hui identity through this nineteenth-century event, a time when Hui goals, beliefs, and religious orientations are most evident in the historical record.

Breeding Contempt: The Kunming Massacre of 1856

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Yunnan experienced a dramatic transformation. As demographic growth put immense pressure on the already
overpopulated interior of China, Han Chinese, with central government incentives, began to migrate in ever increasing numbers to Yunnan. This migration resulted in an increase of the province’s total population from an estimated four million in 1775 to roughly ten million in 1850 (Lee 1982, 729). Immigration per se was not new to the region. Yunnan, ever since its integration into the Chinese empire under the Yuan, had been a popular destination of internal migration. This new wave, composed almost exclusively of Han immigrants, however, was distinctly unlike the ethnically diverse waves of immigrants that had preceded it. These new Han settlers differed from the local Han who had lived with the Hui and non-Han in Yunnan for generations. They tended to be far more assertive, for example, by illegally occupying non-Han land, forcefully appropriating productive mines, and submitting to and supporting the enforcement of the economic and political boundaries of the Qing government—support that resulted in Yunnan’s reorientation away from traditional transregional ties to Tibet and Southeast Asia (Daniels 1994; Armijo 2001; Giersch 2001).

The influx of these Han settlers provoked widespread violence between the newcomers and the established residents during this period, and the Hui attracted the bulk of Han animosity. Why this was the case is unclear. Perhaps it was because the Hui dominated the same occupations (mining, trading, agriculture) that the Han sought and were more numerous than their non-Han counterparts in the Han-dominated urban centers. Perhaps it was because the Hui, intimately familiar with the laws and their rights as Qing subjects, were able to defend themselves more effectively from the Han whom they encountered than the other ethnic groups could. Whatever the reason, by the early nineteenth century, disputes between the Han settlers and Hui had escalated into large-scale confrontations in which Qing officials progressively sided with the Han (Atwill 2002; Daniels 1994; Chan 1967).

The scale and scope of the anti-Hui violence perpetrated by Han Chinese in the fifteen-odd years leading up to the rebellion is staggering. In 1839 a local military official organized a Han militia that, with the implicit consent of ranking civil officials, killed seventeen hundred Hui in the border town of Mianning. Six years later, in the early morning hours of 2 October 1845, local Qing officials, aided covertly by bands from the Han secret societies, barred the city gates of the southwestern Yunnan city of Baoshan and carried out a three-day “cleansing” (xicheng) of the Hui populace (Lin 1935, 7:13b–14b). Qing officials and their bands slaughtered more than eight thousand Muslim Yunnanese, regardless of age or gender (Li 1953, 5–9; Jing 1991, 35; QPHF 1968, 14:16b). Given the sheer scale of the attack and the number of Hui casualties, it is incredible that the governor-general who investigated the slaughter—even not condoning the behavior of those provincial officials and Han Chinese implicated in the massacre—lay blame for it on the Hui. “The Hui,” he memorialized to the emperor, “display a strong sense of solidarity, and their character is fierce. . . . The Han are simply not strong enough to stop them” (Li [1865] 1974, 14:26b). Perhaps not surprisingly, these and other massacres excited rather than assuaged Han antagonisms. In early 1856, the Han gentry and the top Yunnan civil and military officials set into motion a plan to “attack the Hui in order to exterminate the Hui” (Rocher 1879, 36; see also QPHF 1968, 6:18b–19a, 8:3b–4a).

On 19 May 1856, Yunnan Provincial Judge Qing Sheng issued a proclamation within the provincial capital of Kunming authorizing “the slaying [of Hui] without being held accountable” (gesha wulan)—a directive many say was purposely mis-
written when posted to read “kill them one and all” (QPHF 1968, 4:2b, 8:3b; Jing 1986, 272; Zhang 1953, 266). As one Chinese official described it, “all Hui within the provincial capital, regardless if they were men or women, young or old, were mercilessly killed” (QPHF 1968, 12:10). The massacre lasted for three days and three nights. The roaming attackers looted and put to flame the city’s five mosques. Within seventy-two hours, the Han assailants slaughtered three to four thousand Hui—and several witnesses suggest that the figure was two or three times that (QPHF 1968, 5:21a, 6:21a–b, 14:16b; YHSILD 1985, 99–100; Wang 1953, 300).

Hoping to widen his campaign against the Hui and thus eradicate them completely from Yunnan, Yunnan Governor Shuxing’a issued a declaration to civil officials in the province “to massacre all Hui . . . within an eight-hundred-li radius” (Ma Guanzheng 1953, 294; DBX 1953, 84–85; Rocher 1879, 36). In addition, a powerful retired minister from the Chinese Board of War who resided in Kunming printed up and posted in every administrative seat in the province hundreds of notices that instructed local militias to assemble and kill the Hui (QPHF 1968, 6:20a, 8:4a). Accepting these declarations as an official carte blanche against the Hui, the Han began the attacks almost instantaneously. “As word spread,” an investigation later recounted, “similarly inspired acts occurred in each prefecture, department, and county [throughout the province] in places such as Chengjiang, Zhaotong, Lin’an, and Qujing. Sometimes the Han of a whole prefecture would act together, while in other instances several counties would link together without any formal plan or purpose other than to attack and pillage [the Hui]” (QPHF 1968, 12:9b). Not all Han were intent on exterminating the Hui, but the pressure to yield to those who were was immense. When one Kunming official stepped in to stop the attacks, he was branded as a Han traitor (Hanjian) and was threatened into submission. Elsewhere, efforts to protect the Hui and to stop the attacks were met by protests from local Han who complained that “to safeguard the Hui was not Heaven’s intent” (QPHF 1968, 12:9b). A deep-seated hatred of the Hui, together with the notion that removing the Hui would somehow enhance their own economic position, largely motivated the Han, and a wave of violence soon engulfed the entire province.

Despite the initial advantage of surprise, this strategy of extermination quickly went terribly awry. Even with the speed and magnitude of the Han attacks on the Hui, Qing troops and Han militia never gained the upper hand in the face of Hui and yi resistance (QPHF 1968, 2:33a, 3:4a–5a). News of the earliest massacres in Kunming, Chuxiong, and Heqing had spread quickly among the Muslim Yunnanese communities, and Hui reprisals were almost instantaneous. The intensity and swiftness of the Muslim Yunnanese reaction stunned the Han communities whose actions had provoked it. The shock and growing apprehension in Governor Shuxing’a’s memorial to the emperor is palpable when he complained that “there is no spot in Yunnan where you cannot find Hui . . . Although they are not numerous, they make up for it in their tenacity” (1:11a–b).

Within four months of the Kunming Massacre, Hui forces had captured Dali, the largest and most strategically placed urban center in western Yunnan, where they founded an independent kingdom, Pingnan Guo (State which pacifies the south).

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4A Han chronicler who lived in Kunming (1852–69) proposed that “people had mistakenly misinterpreted” the provincial treasurer’s intended order (Zhang 1953, 266). This tragic change in meaning is achieved relatively easily, since the two phrases differ only with the omission of a tree radical in the first character in the gesha wulun order from 格 to 各.
Fighting was far more desperate in the southern and eastern regions of Yunnan, as provincial officials attempted to maintain lines of supplies and communication between Kunming and central China. With a limited number of troops, however, it was difficult for the imperial forces to handle the breadth of violence that the extermination campaign had set in motion.

Chinese and Western scholars have traditionally considered long-simmering divisions between the Han and the Hui as the single most significant factor leading to the Panthay Rebellion. Characteristic is an early-twentieth-century account in the Dali Prefecture Gazetteer entitled “An Explanation of the Hui Provocation of the Rebellion” (DX 1916, 9:14a). In what became an almost rote overture in historical accounts, the roots of the Rebellion were presented as a series of Hui-instigated hostilities beginning in 1800 and culminating in 1856 with the Panthay Rebellion itself. Chinese and Western narratives written over the past century and up to the present have engaged in a type of teleological causality. They have presented Han-Hui clashes that were separated by decades and which were geographically dispersed throughout Yunnan as leading inexorably toward a preordained end—an end portrayed as unwanted by the Han but incited by recurrent Hui hostilities (DX 1916; Wei 1974; Wang 1974; Wang 1996; Jing 1991; Notar 2001).

Time and again, Qing officials justified Han attacks on the Hui by invoking in their reports the hoary stereotype of the Hui as being clannish, vengeful, and prone to violence. Even Governor-General Lin Zexu (serving in his first post since his defeat in the Opium War in 1842), whom the emperor had praised for his “even handed” treatment of the Hui, argued that “the Hui are so particularly fierce, we should make an example of them for other Hui” (1935, 2:12a–b; Waley-Cohen 1991, 86–87). Legally such biases were upheld. In the Qing law codes, harsher punishments were meted out to the Hui than to the Han for certain crimes (Lin 1935, 9b–10a; QPHF 1968, 6:12a; Hu 1998, 69–74; Lipman 1997, 97–101). Increasingly, the situation of the Hui in Yunnan became one of not only separate but also unequal treatment.

After the massacres of 1839 and 1845, groups of Muslim Yunnanese traversed almost the entire length of the empire to submit petitions before the imperial court in Beijing (Gui 1953, 75; Li 1953, 6). In the face of horrendous duplicity by local state officials, entirely at their own expense and without any guarantee that their appeals would be heeded, the Hui displayed a resilient confidence in the imperial system by taking their appeal all the way to the imperial throne. These and other Hui attempts to obtain an equitable resolution of Han-Hui hostilities exhibited a restraint that flatly contradicts the labels ascribed to them.

In addition to challenging prevalent Han stereotypes of the Hui as the aggressors, the Kunming Massacre of 1856 offers equally powerful testimony against those who suggest that the Hui are simply Han Chinese who practice Islam. As the ethnic selectivity of the massacres vividly demonstrates, the Hui, in the eyes of the Han, were not an ambiguously defined or imperceptible group, even in the diverse ethnic context of Yunnan. Nowhere in any account of the Kunming Massacre are there examples of Hui attempting to escape the violence by passing themselves off as Han Chinese. This absence suggests that the Hui identity was not simply a set of internalized religious beliefs that could easily be shed or hidden to avoid detection but, rather, that it was a broader set of identifiable markers visible to both Hui and Han. Yunnan Hui often lived in separate villages (some even labeled as such, e.g., Huihui village), or they clustered in a Hui district of the city. In some urban centers, the streets that ran through the Hui neighborhoods not only identified the area as
Hui dominated but also often carried derogatory connotations such as a street in Kunming called Zhuji Jie (Pig-gathering road)—an obvious slight to the Hui’s prohibition of pork (Zhang 1986, 125, 304). Yunnan Hui also dominated certain occupations, such as caravan trading, mining, and tanning—a domination that further spread their settlements and resulted in a broad web of commercial, social, and religious networks throughout the province.

The Hui differed from the Han in one other critical aspect: their strong commercial and political linkages with the Southeast Asian highlands—through their dominance of the caravan trade—extended the Hui sphere of interaction far beyond the borders of imperial China. Throughout much of upland Southeast Asia, the Yunnanese Chinese were known simply as Haw, with no distinction drawn between Han and Hui. Although the term “Haw” is somewhat ambiguous, firsthand accounts from late-nineteenth-century travelers in the region suggest that a large proportion of the Haw were Hui (Le May 1926, 188; see also Forbes 1987, 13, 26). Carrying salt and tea south to the Southeast Asian lowlands and returning with cotton on caravans that typically numbered between fifty and one hundred mules, the Haw played a crucial economic role in supplying goods and accessing markets unavailable within Yunnan (Forbes 1987, 17).

Traveling in the dry winter season, the Haw caravans annually passed through and traded with a diverse array of Tai, Karen, and other ethnic groups that populated the region separating lowland Southeast Asia and the Yunnan plateau. The bulk of the ethnic groups with which the Haw caravans traded lived in communities and loosely bound states (e.g., Lanna and Sipsong Panna) that remained semiautonomous from their distant tributary overlords to the south and north (Thongchai 1994, 97–99). Forced to negotiate a complex array of tolls and rights of transit that the non-Chinese ethnic groups imposed upon the caravans, the Haw became extremely familiar with political entities, networks, and allegiances of the region. This resulted in a Yunnan world of the Hui and those ethnic groups affected by or involved in the trade with the Haw that extended well beyond the formal borders of the imperial frontier—a world that had considerable economic, political, and ethnic integrity well into highland Southeast Asia.

If the upland residents of Southeast Asia perceived the Hui and Han Yunnanese as one undifferentiated group, as many scholars have proposed, the strong possibility is raised that, with the Haw label, a non-Islamic dimension of the Hui identity emerged as a result. Conversely, the ambiguity of the Haw label in concert with the Hui’s interactions in the ethnically diverse and sensitive ethnoscape of highland Southeast Asia likely intensified the Hui’s perception of themselves in similar ethnic terms. The ethnic salience of the Hui identity beyond their identity as Muslims is especially significant, considering what Thongchai Winichakul, following the observations of Edmund Leach and other ethnographers of upland Southeast Asia, calls “negative identification,” or the tendency for groups to define themselves by differences rather than a static set of shared characteristics (Thongchai 1994, 5; Leach 1954, 285–86; see also Moerman 1965, 1222; Barth 1969, 9). In other words, apparently in the Hui’s role as caravaneers, middlemen, and cultural mediators throughout the Yunnan world, Islam by the nineteenth century had become only one part of a larger Hui identity.

5The street today still retains a vestige of this disparaging designation in that the present name of the street is an exact homophone of the past derogatory label, but the characters have been altered to mean Pearl Street.
The substantial contact and trade made by the Hui in Burma, Laos, and Thailand also accentuate the fact that boundaries of the Yunnan world and Qing China were not coextensive. Although the economic tensions resulting from the influx of new Han settlers certainly created tensions that led to the outbreak of violence in Yunnan, the differences between the Beijing-centric Qing regime and the multicultural world of Yunnan could have also caused a certain amount of friction. This friction was especially apparent between the groups particularly active in these non-Chinese regions and the newly arrived Han settlers, settlers who had ties to, networks with, and an orientation toward central China. When this conflicting worldview confrontrity was added to the economic and demographic pressures of mid-nineteenth-century Yunnan, it led to increasingly virulent outbreaks against those considered most deviant, the Hui—violence which culminated in 1856 with the Kunming Massacre.

The bloody three-day Kunming Massacre of 1856 and the violence that preceded it were, regrettably, not isolated events in late imperial China. Such ethnic violence occurred in China’s other frontier areas during the late imperial period, yet the massacre starkly exposes a depth of hostility different from the periodic outbursts typical of communal feuding, secret societies, and even piracy witnessed in other parts of China. Instead, what we find in mid-nineteenth-century Yunnan is a growing campaign of intolerance supported by official acceptance of anti-Hui conduct. As Han-Hui tensions became the axis around which local violence revolved, state policy slowly conformed to this bipolar perspective: accepting the Han-Hui division as a legitimate construct around which to organize their “pacification” efforts. The Hui and non-Han residents of Yunnan appear not to perpetuate this bipolar myopia. On the contrary, the newly founded Pingnan State instead reflected a deeply engrained Yunnan emphasis on multiethnicity.

Multiple Visions: Islamic, Chinese, and Non-Han Influences in the Pingnan State

On 23 October 1856, in a ceremony marking the founding of the Pingnan State, Hui leader Du Wenxiu was formally invested with the offices of generalissimo and sultan of all the faithful (DX 1916, 9:20a–b; Li 1985–86, 468–69). Throughout his eighteen-year rule of the Pingnan State, Du proposed a style of government that reflected the ethno-religious nature of its Yunnan Hui leadership even as he dealt with the exigencies of establishing a rebel state. The Dali regime reflected the strong interethnic ties of the Hui with the Han and of the yi with predominantly Han-Islamic imagery and a heavily indigenized presence in its institutions and rule. There is little doubt that the religious force of the Hui’s Islamic beliefs heavily influenced the Pingnan State (Wang 1974; Wei 1974; Lin 1991; Wang 1996). To see the regime as monolithically Islamic, however, ignores the assiduous manner in which the Hui sought to balance their rule with non-Islamic features.

No one exhibits this multifaceted Hui identity more clearly than Du Wenxiu himself. Born in the western Yunnan town of Baoshan in 1823, Du was educated in

6Such ethnic violence occurred in China’s other frontier areas throughout the late imperial period: disputes between the Miao and Han in neighboring Guizhou, between Hakka and Han throughout southeastern China; ethnic tensions in Xinjiang and Gansu as a result of frontier expansion; and even pirates along the southern coastal waters (see Jenks 1994; Leong 1997; Ownby 1993; Lipman 1990; Millward 1998; Antony 1989).
the Chinese classics and studied for the Chinese civil service exams, a practice not uncommon among elite Hui families. He passed the first of the exam levels and obtained his xiucai degree at the age of sixteen (DBX 1953, 90; YHSLD 1985, 121). His stature later increased among Yunnan Hui when he and two other Hui traveled to Beijing to petition the imperial court for compensation for the loss of property and life in the aforementioned 1845 Baoshan Massacre. Failing to secure a satisfactory settlement from the Qing regime, Du reportedly traveled extensively throughout western Yunnan’s trading networks on his family’s behalf, gaining firsthand experience in Yunnan’s commercial, political, and multiethnic landscape (Bai 1997, 4; de Carné 1870, 658). Du epitomized the Yunnan Hui’s propensity to produce individuals who could effortlessly negotiate the Chinese, Hui, and non-Han spheres within Yunnan. This was an expertise that the Pingnan regime strategically replicated in its rapid ascendency. The regime from its inception consciously sought to avoid the binary “trap” of reducing the insurrection to a simplistic Han-Hui conflict. It did not simply seek retribution against the Han who had instigated the attacks but, rather, promoted a political vision reflecting each of the region’s three ethnic spheres (e.g., Han, Hui, and yi). The new state’s anti-Manchu Qing rhetoric and common desire to end the reorientation of Yunnan triggered by the recent Han migration unified the multiethnic population into a potent, broad-based constituency.

Central to these unification efforts was the transformation of Dali into the symbolic center of the newly established Pingnan State, a center imbued with a sense of imperial authority and legitimacy. Du selected terminology from both the Islamic and Chinese traditions in creating the Pingnan State’s symbolic structure. Using symbols from a variety of traditions allowed Du to weave together a seamless mosaic of ideological justifications for the founding of the Pingnan State, a state that would fuse various political, religious, and ethnic symbols into a single coherent denunciation of the Qing court (Du 1953c, 127).

The Pingnan ideology should not be misinterpreted as syncretic. Under the new government, the various cultures present in Yunnan deftly retained and continued to articulate their shifting local and regional forms of experience. The regime reorganized Islamic, indigenous, and Chinese forms into a new cultural system heavily colored by the transnational Yunnan context. Understanding this complex mix is fundamental to making any sense of the Panthay Rebellion. In this historical circumstance, Islamic influences coexisted and sometimes dominated certain spheres of the nascent regime’s efforts to establish an independent kingdom, but never to the exclusion of the other panethnic and anti-Qing dimensions. The regime’s very public and rapid interweaving of these traditions into visible signs of the Pingnan State reveals the leadership’s commitment to an inclusive mode of rule.

Although clearly multiethnic, the Pingnan State had an undeniably strong Islamic hue. Within weeks of Du Wenxiu’s investiture as ruler, Du ordered that the main Dali mosque, which had been heavily damaged in the fighting, be renovated. He later followed this with a campaign of mosque construction and restoration that did not end until there were “five or six mosques” in Dali alone (YHSLD 1985, 213). Du established a hierarchy of religious offices charged with overseeing religious instruction and affairs, which paralleled this growing physical manifestation of Islam. This governmental division became one of the three administrative branches of the government along with the civil and military divisions (Bai 1997, 9; Tian 1963, 146). The Pingnan leadership also sought to revitalize Islamic learning and culture in the first years of Du’s rule by establishing Islamic schools (madrasas), printing the first
Qur'an in China, and encouraging the use of Arabic among educated Hui (Du 1953b, 117; He 1937, 15; Bai 1997, 13).

The use of Arabic, always a key marker of Islam for the Hui in China, took on an especially significant position in the Pingnan State. The Pingnan bureaucracy employed Arabic as the preferred language for communication among the Hui elite and within the state administrative structure. The degree to which Arabic displaced Chinese is difficult to measure, although it is highly unlikely that Chinese and the use of Chinese characters was forbidden (He 1937, 15; YHSLD 1985, 112). Arabic, at the very least, did become the preferred language for external and diplomatic relations. The first British envoys seeking contact with the Pingnan regime discovered this fact when, after crossing into Pingnan territory from Burma, they found themselves presented with documents entirely in Arabic and were compelled to wait several days until a Chinese translation could be obtained (He 1937, 15; Anderson 1876, 94; Chan 1967, 115).

The use of the Arabic language was only one dimension of the Pingnan State's efforts to position itself within the larger context of the Islamic world. An example of how the Pingnan State coupled the usage of Arabic with their goal of creating an Islamic aura is powerfully visible in a state proclamation sent to the Muslim population in Lhasa via Hui caravan traders in the early 1860s (Garnier 1873, 565; see also Jest 1995). Written in Arabic, the Tibet Proclamation cast the rebellion as a righteous response to treachery by idolaters. Employing almost exclusively Qur'anic and Islamic metaphors, the proclamation adroitly established the Pingnan insurgency within an Islamic frame:

The cause of the dispute was that the Idolaters and their chiefs assembled together to kill the Muslims and began to insult their religion... Having abandoned every hope of life, we fought with the Idolaters and God gave us the victory... [The ruler's] name is Sadik, otherwise called Suleiman. He has now established Islamic Law. He administers justice according to the dictates of the Qur'an and their traditions. Since we have made him our Imam we have been by the decree of God, very victorious... The Ministers and chiefs under our Imam are as single-hearted as Abu Bakr and as bold as Ali. No one can face them in battle. They are imperious to the Infidel but meek to the Muslim. The metropolis of Infidelity has become a city of Islam!

(Garnier 1873, 565)

Although the Tibet Proclamation captures the Islamic tone, a tone that was without a doubt an important part of the new state, the Pingnan regime never allowed their Muslim beliefs to overwhelm the Chinese and indigenous character of their state. Indeed, attempts to characterize the Pingnan State as either Islamic or Chinese miss the point entirely. The state was Hui, and, as in the Hui identity itself, Chinese and Muslim were not seen as mutually exclusive. No other symbol so markedly illustrates this inclusiveness as Du Wenxiu's own seal (see fig. 1). On one side was his Chinese title of generalissimo (zongtong bingma dayuanshuai) and on the other his Islamic titles of sultan and commander of all the faithful (Qā'id jāmī al-muslimān).

This inclusiveness permeated the Pingnan political culture, which consistently employed distinctly Chinese imperial symbols side by side with Islamic traditions. Du's efforts to transform Dali into the capital of Pingnan State also included a deliberate co-opting of the symbols of the Qing while at the same time challenging Qing authority with imagery from the previous Ming dynasty and the contemporaneous Taipings (DX 1916, 9:20b; Zhao 1953, 52). He took meticulous care in
the selection of the symbols, choosing those that would resonate with all groups within
the multiethnic populace of Yunnan, as well as selecting symbols whose seditious
meaning could not possibly be lost on the new subjects of the Pingnan State. Li
Yuzhen, who interviewed long-term Dali residents in the late nineteenth century,
indicated that Du "set into action a series of building programs based on the Qing
imperial institutions in Beijing, including [the construction of] an imperial Forbidden
City—[with the walls] a kilometer in circumference. At both the upper and lower
passes, he had 'Great Walls' built with only one entrance, which ran from high in the
[Cangshan] mountains and deep into the [Erhai] lake, making the valley
impenetrable" (Li 1902, 196). Although he adopted those symbols from the Chinese
imperial court, Du highlighted the foreign nature of Manchu rule by using titles and
styles of dress (including his own imperial robes) from the Ming dynasty—the last
"Chinese" dynasty to rule China (DX 1916, 9:20; He 1937, 15).

The Pingnan leaders, from the rebellion’s inception, viewed the support of the
indigenous peoples as critical to their own long-term success. Efforts to attract and
reflect yi participation formed an essential component of the state’s strategy, and local
yi involvement was vital to the Hui’s military success. A Catholic priest stationed in
Yunnan reported that “the indigenous people joined the Muslims because the
marauding by the Chinese had, in their minds, rendered all of the [Chinese] odious”
(SMEP 539:943). The Qing officials dismissed such early reports of animosity by the
yi toward the state, and many, such as Governor Shuxing’a, in a memorial to the
emperor, deluded themselves that the Hui were simply “seducing the yi peoples”
(QPHF 1968, 2:23b). In the months following the Kunming Massacre, the swiftness
with which the non-Han united behind the Hui quickly disabused Qing officials of
that idea.

In southern Yunnan, a local official reported, Hui “had linked up with non-Han,
occupying, burning, and seizing property” (QPHF 1968, 4:5b). In western Yunnan,
Hui and yi forces numbered “more than three thousand,” and in the eastern part of
the province, the Muslims united with Yi and Nong (Zhuang) who all had old grudges
against the Chinese (4:24b; Cordier 1927, 191–92). This unity quite likely reflected
the close ties formed over centuries of commercial interaction, but it also grew from
being common victims of Han discrimination. The rapid crystallization of the Hui-
yi alliance highlights the fact that only the Han conceived of the conflict as anti-Hui
in scope (QPHF 1968, 2:11a–12b, 23a; 19:18a–19a).

The Pingnan government, far from marginalizing the non-Han, actively and
successfully incorporated them into its administration. A catalog of ranking officers
and officials circa 1867 lists over twenty individuals of indigenous origin, including a ministry devoted entirely to non-Han affairs (DWTZM 1953, 183–92; Wei 1974, 213–15; Yegar 1966, 75). Key among these was the powerful Li Wenxue (also called Li Zhengxue), a Yi leader from the Ailao mountain region south of Dali who emerged as an early supporter of the Pingnan regime. He was awarded the office of Commander of Non-Han Affairs (Dasi fan) (DWTZM, 1953, 189; Li 1902, 220). According to Chinese scholar Jing Dexin, members of the Bai, Yi, Dai, Hani, Lisu and Manchu ethnic groups served as either civil or military officials, reflecting Du’s stated intention to “spread the offices among the three cultures [Han, Hui, and yi], [since] each has their own origins and behave[s] in their own way” (Du 1953b, 118; Jing 1991, 173–75).

Du Wenxiu, throughout his reign, displayed a genuine appreciation of the role that the non-Han played in Yunnan society in both its past and its present. At one point, prior to an important military offensive, he made reference to the emotive historical imagery of the Nanzhao Kingdom, a potent sovereign kingdom that, along with Tibet, had rivaled Tang China’s position of supremacy in the region: “Even if we cannot realize far-reaching permanent victory, we can still achieve a smaller, more remote success like that of the Nanzhao Kingdom, which lasted eight hundred years” (1953a, 106). By invoking the historical imagery of the Nanzhao, Du adroitly highlighted Yunnan’s history of indigenous rule and the region’s illustrious period of independence from Chinese control, while emphasizing the importance of the non-Han groups in Pingnan’s prosperity (Ma Chaolin 1953, 287).

The eighteen-year-long rule of the Pingnan State over large portions of southwest China cannot be reduced to a single cultural or ethnic tradition. The regime’s longevity derived from its ability to appeal to its multiethnic populace, a fact that Du clearly sought to endorse in his public proclamation that “the three cultures [of Yunnan] together form a single body” (1953a, 106). Du’s comment also reveals that the Yunnan Hui did distinguish among their religious beliefs as Muslims, their ethnic identity as Hui, and their cultural grounding as Chinese; and, indeed, apparently this ability to embrace their tripartite makeup was precisely what fueled their success with their multiethnic constituency.

Ethno-religious Identity in Nineteenth-Century Yunnan

By the summer of 1862, the Pingnan regime controlled the area from the Tibetan borderlands in the north to the Southeast Asian highlands in the south and eastward as far as the strategically important city of Chuxiong, midway along the main route between Dali and Kunming. Du’s Pingnan regime, however, had made few lasting inroads into the Qing-controlled areas around Kunming in central and eastern Yunnan. The difficulty of advancing into this area was perhaps compounded in the spring of 1862 when Hui General Ma Rulong, leader of the most powerful rebel military force outside western Yunnan, abruptly surrendered to and began fighting for the Qing.

Born and raised in a small Hui village near the southern Yunnan prefectural capital of Lin’an, Ma Rulong played an influential role in the violence leading up to the rebellion when he organized a group of Lin’an Hui to avenge the death of his brother at the hands of Han in 1854 ("Talang Nan’an zhengkuang ji" 1953, 257–
58). Because of this early involvement and the fact that he was a military licentiate (wu xiucai), Ma was one of several regional Hui military leaders who garnered early support against the imperial government (Rocher 1879, 34). Although major military success eluded Ma’s army in the first years of the rebellion, in the summer of 1860 he successfully captured the key administrative center of Chuxiong and in the process aided the Pingnan regime by cutting off the supply lines of a Qing offensive on Dali (QPHF 1968, 9:2b–7b). After his victory, Ma promptly handed control of the city over to Du Wenxiu’s generals but repeatedly rejected overtures to accept a post within the Pingnan army. His sudden defection to the imperial forces two years later, although seemingly unanticipated at the time, may have stemmed from a variety of motivations, ranging from individual aspirations and jealousy to an underlying regional rivalry between western and southern Yunnan (Atwill 1997, 23–25). Ma’s refusal of a commission in the Pingnan Army in 1860 and his abrupt change in 1862 serve to underscore the danger of assuming that Islam was the sole unifying factor among the Hui during the Panthay Rebellion.

The Ma Rulong–Du Wenxiu schism belies the imperial court’s tendencies to consider being Hui synonymous with being Muslim and to view the Hui as a static or monolithic body. That the Hui did not respond to Han aggression in a uniform or unified manner is consistent with the multivocal ethnic dynamics of Yunnan in general and the Yunnan Hui in particular. The open rift between Ma and Du, as revealed in their correspondence, dramatically illustrates how the Hui viewed the ethno-religious nature of their identity in southwestern China at this time. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori have suggested, with regard to other areas of the Muslim world, that being Muslim is often less significant than the manner in which that role is arranged in configuration with other customs, identities, and shared "imaginings" (1990, 21). The manner in which Ma, Du, and other Hui expressed themselves reveals an awareness of self that is couched in both a narrow religious sense and a far broader ethno-religious significance.

Rebellion-era documents that Han chroniclers wrote make use of a range of terms for identifying the Hui. Although such descriptive terminology varied little among the Han, there was a sharp division between Han and Hui in the ethnic labels utilized to indicate the Muslim Yunnanese, particularly within the Yunnan context. Government documents throughout the nineteenth century consistently employed four terms interchangeably when referring to the Yunnan Hui—“Huimin,” “Huiren,” “Huizhong,” and “Huizi.” Each of these terms contains the hui ideogram combined with a second ideogram indicating people or group of people. The four resulting compound characters have subtle differences, although Qing officials and Han elite used each of the four terms in an undifferentiated manner to refer to the Hui.

In documents that Yunnan Hui wrote for other Yunnan Hui in the nineteenth century, two other terms consistently appear—“Mumin” and “Huijiao”—meaning “Muslim” and “Hui culture,” respectively. The meaning of these terms is not synonymous with the four terms mentioned above, and it is precisely the differences between the two sets of terms that shed light on the ethno-religious aspects of Hui identity. Although being Hui meant also being Muslim, the shifting relationship of that Muslim-ness, together with other identities (e.g., local, regional, occupational), allowed for formation and reformation of what it meant to be Hui.

Among Hui today in the PRC there is the general belief that being a Muslim is different from being a Hui and that one should not use the term “Huijiao” to mean “Islam.” This point of view is predicated on the difference between one’s religious identity (Muslim) and one’s ethnic identity (Hui). Although ethnicity has only fully
emerged as a discursive category of the state in the twentieth century, the clear distinction between one's ethnic and religious identity does appear to have existed in mid-nineteenth-century Yunnan during the Panthay Rebellion. In other words, the Muslim Yunnanese distinguished between themselves as Hui separate and distinct from their religious identity as Muslims. Moreover, neither the Hui loyal to the Pingnan regime nor those allied with the Qing government appear to have found any inconsistencies between their actions and their identities as Muslims, Hui, or Chinese. This section will illustrate precisely this differentiation by examining the usage of "Huimin," "Huijiao," and "Mumin" in correspondence exchanged by Du Wenxiu and Ma Rulong between the years of 1862 and 1868.

After Ma Rulong's enigmatic decision to capitulate to Qing forces in 1862, he and Du Wenxiu vied for the position of true leader of the Yunnan Hui, and each sought to shift the precarious balance of power to himself. A recurring point of contention in the correspondence between Ma and Du (which persisted intermittently over the remaining ten years of the rebellion) was the tension that they each felt between being a Hui leader and being a Muslim leader. On the one hand, a Mumin would be considered part of "one Muslim family," and, on the other hand, a Huimin, Huijiao, or Hui would be regarded as one among three peoples (Han, Hui, yi) that constituted the "Yunnan world." Part of the difficulty in assigning meaning to these terms some one-and-a-half centuries later is how to determine if such terminology suggests a nested or bifurcated relationship between the two identities. A close reading of the documents written during this period of unprecedented Hui ascendancy offers rare insight into this relationship.

The Chinese word "Mumin" almost certainly comes directly from the Arab word nu'mīnīn, or "Muslim," and carries with it the strong religious connotation of "believer" (Allès 2000, 29). The term "Hui" originally comes from the Chinese ethnonym for the Uigur people of Central Asia, "Huihu" or "Huihe," but sometime after the twelfth century, the term evolved in meaning and pronunciation into "Huihui," meaning "Muslim" (Gladney 1991, 20). By the nineteenth century, the use of "Hui," at least in the multiethnic context of Yunnan, had taken on a broad ethno-religious meaning, while "Mumin" retained its narrower religious connotation. In the contentious period of the Panthay Rebellion, Du Wenxiu and Ma Rulong's letters specifically suggest that "Mumin" was employed for speaking internally between Muslims about Muslims, while the terms "Hui," "Huimin," and "Huijiao" were more commonly invoked in speaking of the Hui as an ethnic group.

Only months after offering his services to the Qing, Ma Rulong sent a letter to Du Wenxiu attempting to persuade him to end his resistance to the Qing forces. Ma, having just defected to the Han-dominated Qing forces, began his letter by justifying his actions:

Looking back at all of the past dynasties, the Qing has treated its people (min) benevolently. . . . The violence [against the Hui] in Yunnan was clearly not at the court's instigation. Just think, if the Hui (Huimin) of each province can have peace, why would [the court] want to wipe out only those of Yunnan? It was all because the [local] officials were not honorable, [instead] stirring up problems and reporting it as Han-Hui violence. Local officials have now clarified that the uprising was a result of Han massacring Hui (Han mie Hui), so the court has decreed that a strategy of peaceful resolution be followed and all officials are now peacefully complying. (Ma Rulong 1953b, 99)

Yet while he portrayed the earlier conflicts and rebellion in ethnic terms as Han versus Hui, Ma, having just defected to the Han-dominated Qing forces, could hardly stress
his ethnic allegiance as a Hui in his communications with Du. Instead, in the next paragraph, Ma attempted, through repeated use of the term “Muslim,” to accentuate the common religious beliefs that he and Du shared as Muslims: “Given that all Muslims are one family and that now two-thirds of Yunnan has negotiated peace, the one [Muslim] family is the most important point... Peace is really for the good of Muslims as a whole; we have absolutely no desire to harm the intentions of the western Yunnan [Muslims]” (Ma Rulong 1953b, 99). What is striking about the letter, aside from Ma’s considerable bravado, is his conspicuous effort to tack back and forth between discussing the Hui in religious terms on the one hand and ethnic terms on the other, always differentiating and never conflating the two identities. In the quotation above, Ma assiduously uses the term “Hui” to describe the Muslim Yunnanese as the victims of the early violence, but in the second part of the letter he shifts to employing exclusively “Mumin” (Muslim). The division between an ethnic Hui and a religious Muslim identity is then deftly broached in Ma’s explanation to Du as to why the Hui had thus far succeeded in their rebellion: “The reason we, the Hui, are winning all of our battles is that we as Mumin soldiers7 are not fighting for [personal] reputation and money, but for Islam (jiaomen); therefore, God (zhengzhu) is protecting us” (99).

Ma Rulong’s letter suggests a differentiation between the terms “Hui” (Huimin) and “Muslim” (Mumin), with the former used to refer to a group of distinct people and the latter to refer to a community of believers. It is likely that Ma uses “Mumin” as an emotional appeal to their common religious beliefs in order to engage Du in the need for common action as Muslims. He then employs “Huimin” to describe objectively the treatment of the Hui as an ethnic group at the hands of the Qing government and their Han compatriots.

Du Wenxiu’s response, written less than a week after Ma’s letter, categorically refutes each of Ma’s appeals, while amplifying the rigid distinction between “Huimin” and “Mumin.” In a direct rejoinder to Ma’s supplication to act as “one Muslim family,” Du affirms: “[Obviously] all Muslims (Mumin) under Heaven are one family, so why do we need to differentiate between different groups [within Islam]? Now [the Pingnan regime] is setting up the posts of governor, general, officers, commanders, and so on, and although they are outwardly only titles, inwardly they are supporting all Muslims (jiaomen), so friends and families near and far all happily follow” (1953a, 106). Du then went on to indicate that, although he accepted that he and Ma were part of one family as fellow Muslims, Ma Rulong’s defection to the Qing was the cause of the Hui in Yunnan being divided. Thus, the correspondence between Ma and Du clearly indicates an awareness of and a distinction between Mumin and Huimin, which sheds light on an important aspect of late imperial Yunnan Hui identity. It does not, however, fully explain the seeming ambiguity of the terminology used then and still used today.

A specific example of this ambiguity is the term “Hui jiao.” Most Western commentators have suggested that “Huijiao,” which contains the character for hui and the character for religion (教) should be understood as “Hui religion,” or more literally “teachings of the Hui” (Gladney 1991, 19; Lipman 1997, xxiii; Gillette 2000, 11; Allès 2000, 29). Understanding jiao strictly as “religion” is a rather precarious reading of its meaning in the later imperial period, since the term is also used in the expression “Hanjiao” to refer to the agglomeration of beliefs ascribed to Han Chinese. Yet as

7The usage of the word “Mumin” here clearly modifies the word “soldiers” in a manner reminiscent of the famous line “Onward, Christian soldiers.” Note how this strengthens the Muslim dimension of Hui identity but clearly indicates their discrete nature from one another.
eminent seventeenth-century Yunnan Hui scholar Ma Zhu rather disparagingly noted as a warning to Hui, “those who do not have religion will become Hanjiao” ([1680] 1989, 1041). Similarly, in neighboring Guizhou, we find references to “Miaojiao,” which do not indicate any specific corpus of religious teachings, but the traits or beliefs of the Miao people (Luo [1938] 1988, 3:10a, 4:8a, 10:21b; Qingshi liezhuan 1928, 44:49a).

On the surface, the term “Huijiao” appears once again to conflate the ethnic Hui identity with the religious Muslim identity, yet this usage appears only very infrequently among the Hui themselves. Critical to this point is Dru Gladney’s indication that, during his fieldwork throughout Muslim Chinese communities in the 1980s, he “rarely heard Hui refer to themselves as Hui jiao tu (Hui religion disciples) and only occasionally as Hui jiao” (1991, 20; see also Gladney 1991, 9–8; Allès 2000, 28). This observation from his fieldwork in contemporary China parallels what can be observed in Hui documents written during the rebellion in which the term “Huijiao” also only rarely appeared. Why? In part, the answer is that the term’s usage among Yunnan Hui was highly specific and referred to something entirely different from Islam—the broader set of ethnic markers, traditions, and occupational tendencies that defined what it meant to be Hui—not simply their Islamic beliefs.

Several years after this initial exchange of letters, Ma Rulong wrote a letter to a senior Pingnan official in which he further elucidated his distinction between being Hui and being Muslim. Written during the peak of the Pingnan offensive in 1868, Ma’s letter, in addition to restating the arguments of his earlier letter, rather disingenuously calls on the common religious beliefs among the Yunnan Hui past and present to convince the Pingnan regime to give up its resistance:

> Our ancestors were all subjects of the Qing—how could our generation try to change it? Would that not lead us to adopting a position of no loyalty or filial duty? More to the point, the Hui (Huizhong) of every province are already obeying [the Qing], so that, even if the whole of Yunnan were to rebel, we are simply putting ourselves on the outside [of the Qing]. How could that hurt the court? What good will that achieve for my kind (wo jiao)? . . . That the religion of my fellow Hui (wo Hui zhijiao) has become more known since the Qing, . . . we cannot say that the court is not treating our kind (wo jiao) graciously.

(Ma Rulong 1953a, 139)

Throughout his appeal, Ma repetitively invokes phrases such as “co-religionists” (tongjiao), Muslims (Mumin), and Hui people (Huizhong, Huimin). Especially revealing is Ma’s usage of wo jiao and “the religion of my fellow Hui” (wo Hui zhijiao) instead of the term “Huijiao” when discussing the religious beliefs of the Hui. Ma obviously sought to distinguish “my kind” (wo jiao)—a phrase that in a traditional context would undoubtedly be translated as “Islam”—from “the religion of my fellow Hui” (wo Hui zhijiao). This somewhat clumsy turn of phrase is also significant in that it grammatically clearly upholds the distinction between being Hui and being Muslim while indicating their strong interrelationship. Finally, Ma, several paragraphs later, reinforces this ethno-religious division when he chided Du by stating, “[h]ow can I

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8Ma Zhu here is concerned with the tendency of Hui children to be educated only in the Confucian classics. It is significant in this context that he does not indicate that, without an Islamic upbringing, they would become Han. Rather, his usage of “Hanjiao” indicates his anxiety over Hui youth growing up in a Han-dominated culture without proper Islamic teaching.

not know that the Hui of western Yunnan are [part of] the Muslim family (mumin yijia)” (140)?

Plainly stated, the Panthay Rebellion either exposed or actually accentuated the gap between being Hui and being Muslim—a gap that Ma Rulong desperately sought to paper over in order to bring about the surrender of Du and his Pingnan regime—but it also raises quite a different question. If Ma Rulong and, as we will see, Du Wenxiu do not mean “Islam” when they use the term “Huijiao” (回教), what do they mean by it?

Present in all of the letters examined above is the usage of the Chinese term jiao. Often glossed as “religion” in modern Chinese or “teachings” in the early modern era, it appears to be employed in the multiethnic context of nineteenth-century Yunnan as shorthand for the broader cultural customs of a particular ethnic group. During the rebellion, jiao assumed the meaning of something closer to what today might be referred to as “culture.”

Ma Rulong and Du Wenxiu both employ the term san jiao in the course of their letters in an attempt to situate their actions as Hui into Yunnan’s larger ethnic context and to justify their decisions as acting in the interest of all Yunnanese regardless of ethnicity. Stressing his desire for peace in his 1868 letter to Du, Ma used san jiao in his continued efforts to rationalize his surrender to the Qing: “In 1862 I saw the peoples of the three cultures (san jiao) suffering great misery and killing [one another] and was afraid it would offend God. So I led the southern and eastern Hui (Huijiao) into the provincial capital to be pacified” (Ma Rulong 1953a, 140). Du, in his “Declaration of War,” a document posted throughout the Pingnan State in 1867, eloquently employs san jiao to promote the regime’s multiethnic agenda in its battle against the Qing: “Ponder for a moment that in Yunnan province the three cultures (san jiao) of the Han, Hui, and yi [peacefully] coexisting for [the past] one thousand years. . . . [But] ever since the Manchu Qing dynasty was founded, my people have been mistreated for two hundred years” (1953c, 131). Du’s formulation explicitly designates the groups constituting the three cultures as Han, Hui, and yi while implicitly suggesting that three groups forming the san jiao represent a distinctive dimension of Yunnanese culture. In this context, to interpret “san jiao” as the “three

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10 Distinguishing the differences in Du Wenxiu’s and Ma Rulong’s usage of “Mumin” and “Hui” is a complex issue, but there are several reasons that “Hui” unlikely simply refers to a Chinese subset within the larger global Muslim community (umma). If Hui were simply Han Chinese who practiced Islam, then one would think that such a relationship should be self-evident. At the very least, it would hardly seem to merit Ma’s testy reply to Du that he obviously knew that the Hui of western Yunnan are part of the Muslim family (mumin yijia).

Of course, none of the above negates the fact that most Hui were Muslims. What I am suggesting is that by the nineteenth century Islam was not the sole defining factor of the Hui. Although Islam never ceased to be a meaningful part of their identity, Yunnan Hui identity was rooted in a broader ethno-religious spectrum of identities.

11 The modern Chinese compound for religion, zongjiao (宗教), is a twentieth-century neologism that was most likely borrowed from Japan and promulgated most fervently in the years after the 1911 revolution (Bodde 1991, 149). At the turn of the nineteenth century, debates among Zhang Binlin, Kang Youwei, and other revolutionaries of the period demonstrate that there was far from a consensus of whether Confucianism was a learning (xue), a way (dao), a religion, or simply a doctrine (Shimada 1990, 102), suggesting that prior to that there existed little tangible idea of religion in the organized and institutionalized way that it exists in the West. Pinpointing the meaning of jiao in the nineteenth century, the question is thus ambiguous, but it is most likely understood better as “teachings” than as “religion.” The context in Yunnan appears to be quite different, although perhaps not as unique as one might first assume, since the term “Hanjiao” (漢教) was in common usage throughout China and I have found examples in neighboring Guizhou of references indicating “Miaojiao” (苗教) (Ling 1932, 5:1b).
religions” would be nonsensical, but when understood in the triadic ethnic formulation of Yunnan society, it becomes far more intelligible (Du 1953b, 118).

In addition to the evidence already provided, there remains one final and highly suggestive clue to the Hui’s perception of their ethnic consciousness and of themselves as a group. Apart from “Mumin” and san jiao, a third term, “Huizu” (Hui group) appears fleetingly in both Hui and Qing documents (QPHF 1968, 6:12a; Du 1953e, 123; Ma Rulong 1953a, 142; see also Li 1902, 193). This term is, from a modern perspective, the most tantalizing of the three, since it mirrors the modern PRC ethnonym for the Hui (Huizu) that designates the Hui as one of fifty-six state-recognized nationalities. The appearance of the term “Huizu” during the rebellion seemed to reflect something more than the idea of lineages (its traditional meaning); the meaning was something closer to an ethnic consciousness but without the state-imposed politicized framework that it currently holds. Du Wenxiu stated in his “Proclamation from the Headquarters of the Generalissimo” (“Shuaifu bugao”), issued during his final offensive in 1867, that “this army expedition was caused by the Manchus’ taking China from us and staying in power for more than two hundred years, treating people as oxen and horses, having no regard for the value of life, hurting my compatriots, and wiping out my fellow Hui (wo Huizu)” (1953d, 123). This usage of “Huizu” by the Hui—together with the other terms examined above—appears to indicate that the Hui perceived themselves as something much more than simply “Chinese-speaking Muslims.”

The debate carried on between Du Wenxiu and Ma Rulong and the terminology that they employed highlights the complex formation of religious, ethnic, and political consciousness in China’s late imperial period. Although various labels did overlap and were often used to refer to the same people, these labels were frequently referents for quite distinct identities. For any analysis of nineteenth-century Yunnan, an awareness of these distinctions is critical. The Han Chinese very often employed terminology that referred to the Hui in a manner that erased all distinctions among religious, ethnic, and regional identities. Thus, to equate this Han lack of differentiation with an absence of Hui ethnic identity is to perpetuate that Han bias today.

Conclusion

The Panthay Rebellion ended much as it had begun—in a bloody massacre of the Hui populace. On 26 December 1872, imperial troops surrounded Dali, the Pingnan capital. Du Wenxiu, in a move that he hoped would spare the lives of the city’s residents, made the decision to hand himself over to the Qing general. Swallowing a fatal dose of opium as his palanquin carried him to the Qing

12Within the field of Chinese studies, numerous scholars have recently begun to discuss the origins of ethnicity in the Chinese context, in particular by examining the ruling Manchus (Crossley, 1999; Elliot 2001; Rawski 1998; Rhoads 2000), but the majority of scholars of ethnicity in China begin their examination of its rise at the turn of the century when Sun Yat-sen promoted the idea of “five peoples of China living in harmony” (wu zu gonghe)—referring to Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, and “Muslim” peoples—in order to forward his discussion of Chinese nationalism. Sun’s usage of zu was almost certainly based on the Japanese term minzoku. The ideograph of zu in the PRC today is inextricably intertwined with the term minzu or “nationality.” Here it likely has a less reified meaning, yet it does appear to offer a distinct impression of an awareness of “Hui” being an ethnic category. Only rarely employed in the nineteenth century, its appearance in Yunnan might be traced to links between the Pingnan regime and that of the Taipings, who are also recorded to have used the term as it applied to other ethnicities (see Crossley 1990, 10 n. 13).
encampment, Du was already dead by the time that he was delivered to the Qing commander (Jing 1991, 315–29). Not to be robbed of the gratification of killing him themselves, Qing officials hastily dragged Du before the Qing troops to be decapitated (see fig. 2). According to Emile Rocher, a French adviser to the provincial officials in Yunnan at the time, Du's head was encased in honey and sent to the emperor (1879, 186).

Du's sacrifice, however, was in vain. Three days later, imperial troops began a massacre that, according to the government's own conservative estimates, took ten thousand lives by the time it was concluded—four thousand of the victims were women, children, and the elderly. Hundreds drowned trying to escape from Dali by swimming across Erhai Lake. Others attempted to flee through the narrow passes at either end of the valley. All were chased down and slain by the Qing troops. The imperial soldiers were ordered to cut an ear from each of the dead. These grisly trophies filled twenty-four massive baskets and, together with Du's severed head, were sent to
Beijing, where they served as a silent and unequivocal corroboration of the Pingnan regime's bloody demise (QPHF 1968, 47:5b-7b; Rocher 1879, 186; Miao 1986, 385).

The static, two-dimensional, and, for the imperial court, convenient portrayal of the Panthay Rebellion as simply a "Muslim rebellion" has endured until the present day. As the last of the mid-nineteenth-century rebellions to be suppressed, such a narrative of the rebellion meshed nicely with the court's efforts to bolster notions of itself as a powerful—not morally bankrupt—imperial government. Perhaps more curious is that representations of the Yunnan Hui in Western and Chinese scholarship have remained substantively unaltered since the Hui were assigned an ethnic classification separate from the Han and the yi in the nineteenth century. Few of the historical or contemporary accounts note the increasingly virulent nature of the Han massacres of the Hui in 1839, 1845, and 1856—nor do these accounts, rooted in Han-Hui dualism, reveal the strong multiethnic support behind the Pingnan regime. The perpetuation of such biased representations today, like 150 years ago, continues to reify the nature of the Yunnan Hui as well as the interactive nature of Yunnan society. Although such a schema does reveal how the Han Chinese and the Qing framed the rebellion events in Yunnan, it sheds little light on the complex manner in which the Hui and other ethnic groups living in Yunnan (including some Han) resisted the violent attacks of the Qing state—neither does it show how the diverse groups making up the Pingnan State constructed a new political framework reflecting their multiethnic perspective.

This reexamination of the Panthay Rebellion calls into question central assumptions of past depictions of the rebellion itself and also questions assumptions about Yunnan Hui identity in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the above analysis is not centered on ethnicity per se, many of its conclusions point to the fact that the Hui, as well as those with whom they interacted, clearly considered themselves an ethnic group. In the past few years, a number of scholarly works in Chinese studies have appeared which propose that “ethnicity is a concept that developed fully only with the emergence of the modern nation-state, first in Europe and then elsewhere” (Rawski 1998, 5; see also Crossley 1999; Lipman 1997). Such a proposal seems, in effect, to sweep any perception or understanding of ethnicity in the pre-nation-state period under an early modern rug.

In current scholarly discussions, the concept of ethnicity is fraught with controversy. Stevan Harrell offers some useful advice in the course of his examination of the civilizing process in southwest China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He proposes a distinction between ethnic consciousness, which he defines as “the awareness of belonging to a group,” and ethnic group, defined as a group that perceives itself to share common descent and common customs and that also sees itself in opposition to other such groups (1995, 28). He argues that a group can evolve from such an ethnic consciousness to perceive itself as an ethnic group “in situations where a group is confronted in some way by an outside power with whom it is in competition for resources of some kind whether they be material . . . or symbolic” (28).

Equally pertinent is Frank Proschan’s recent critique of Benedict Anderson’s claim that conceptions of ethnicity only came about after colonial conquest. He insists instead that “indigenous local peoples had already themselves imagined ethnicity well before the colonial era. . .” (2001, 1000). Through a nuanced examination of the flood myth of the northern Laos Kmhmu highlanders, Proschan demonstrates that conceptions of ethnicity and, perhaps even more significantly, interethnic consciousness occurred prior to colonial contact. The Kmhmu’s strong sense of a multiethnic society offers abstract evidence to counter those in Chinese studies who resist the notion of ethnicity in the early modern era. The Kmhmu’s participation in the broader Yunnan world of the Hui also provides even further historical evidence
that the Muslim Yunnanese were active in a “stubbornly ethnoeccentric” society which placed a premium on one’s ethnicity (1027).

The Panthay Rebellion offers clear evidence that the Hui demonstrated an ethnic consciousness and that they also exhibited some indication of perceiving themselves as part of a larger ethnic group. This perception was reinforced not only oppositionally from within but prescribed from the outside, violently, by the Han, and, peacefully, by the yi. We find in the Pingnan regime’s confrontation with a strong outside power a raised awareness of an ethnic identity and, as is shown by Hui actions and the language that the Hui used to explain those actions during the Panthay Rebellion, a raised perception of themselves as an ethnic group.

This explication of what it meant to be Hui and Muslim in Yunnan during the years leading up to and including the Panthay Rebellion is more than an attempt to clarify terminology in one corner of the Chinese empire or the Islamic world. This article strives through its discussion of the Panthay Rebellion, in all of its complexity, to reveal, in the words of Sherry Ortner, “[t]he ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance itself” (1995, 190). By highlighting the intentions, projects, and internal politics of the Hui community in the multiethnic context of Yunnan, I have sought to remedy the narrow and imperial-centered perspective that colors most past and present treatments of this period. Only by understanding the multiplicity of ethnic, religious, and political actions that formed the Panthay Rebellion can we begin to see that such resistance was more, much more, than the simplistic opposition previously portrayed in the written histories of the period and the majority of contemporary analyses.

Glossary

Cangshan 蒼山
Dali 大理
daojia tu 道家徒
Dasi fan 大司番
Du Wenxiu 杜文秀
Erhai 洱海
fojiao tu 佛教徒
gesha wulun 恢殺無論
Han 漢
Han mie Hui 漢滅回
han 悍
Hanjian 漢奸
Hui 回
Huife 回紇
Huijiao 回教
Huimin 回民
Huiren 回人
Huizhong 回眾
Huizi 回子
Huizu 回族
jiao 教
jiaomen 教門

Jingpo 景颇
Kunming 昆明
Lin Zexu 林則徐
Mai Rulong 馬如龍
Miao 苗
Miaozǐ 苗子
Miaojiào 苗教
minzu 民族
Mumin 穆民
Mumin yijia 穆民一家
Nanzhao 南詔
Pingnan Guo 平南國
qiang 僱
quanzi pang 犬子旁
ruijia tu 儒家徒
san jiao 三教
Shuxing’a 舒興阿
Shuafu bugao 部府布告
wo Huizhijiao 我回之教
wo Huizu 我回族
wo jiao 我教
wu xiucai 武秀才
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