

WANG, JIANPING. *Concord and Conflict: The Hui Communities in Yunnan Society in a Historical Perspective*. Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions, vol. 11. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1996. 292 pages. Glossary, bibliography. Paper, n.p.; ISBN 91-22-01718-6; ISSN 0284-8651. (Distributed by Almqvist & Wiksell International, S-116 91 Stockholm, Sweden.)

Yunnan Province is home to roughly half a million Hui: Muslims whose mother tongue is Chinese and who share much of their cultural inventory with the Han majority. *Concord and Conflict*, as the title indicates, seeks to examine the degree to which this Chinese-speaking Muslim minority is socially and culturally integrated with the non-Muslim majority, and the degree to which its alien origins and religious beliefs keep it separate from, and potentially in conflict with, Han Chinese society and civilization.

Islamists, as well as historians, anthropologists, and political scientists who specialize in China's national minority peoples and in Yunnan's social and cultural affairs, should be interested in this volume. Wang, a son of Yunnan, persevered with an alien language in a strange environment (see p. 12), and although his book is written in less than elegant prose, it is packed with important data, most of it hitherto available only in Chinese. (The Chinese-language section of Wang's bibliography, with some three hundred titles, constitutes a major bibliographic resource on the subject of Islam and Muslims in southwest China.)

Wang's time frame stretches from the late sixteenth century, when a regionally-distinct Muslim society was forged in Yunnan Province, to the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus it is essentially a historical rather than a present-day ethnographic study. The author claims that he has adopted a "two-pronged approach" to his data, combining a critical analysis of the (mostly Chinese-language) historical sources with "ethnological interpretation" based on fieldwork. It seems, however, that the fieldwork was mostly of the "recall ethnography" variety (in which Wang interviewed Hui elders and clerics about old times) supplemented by some folkloristic analysis and by sporadic participant-observation of Hui ritual activities. In so far as Wang seeks to reconstruct the past social conditions of Yunnan's Hui people from present-day sociocultural survivals, his "ethnological" approach is one with old-time Marxist anthropology and is subject to the same criticism—its hypotheses are unverifiable and unfalsifiable.

A more useful application of Wang's Marxist educational background in China is surely his insistence on seeing the Han-Hui relationship as exhibiting "dynamic and dialectical" characteristics. At times there is concord; at others, conflict. A major consequence of this dialectic is that "Islam in Yunnan manifests clear features of syncretism" (20). Indeed, Wang asserts, "there is... a Hui form of Islam" that preserves "the kernel of its Central Asian heritage" and, as such, is in stark contrast to "the polytheistic elements of Chinese religions" (20). But, he points out, the Hui version of Islam also has significantly accommodated itself to the Chinese worldview.

The core of Wang's book comprises six chapters (2–7) that deal respectively with community origins, Hui within the Yunnanese milieu, the community's integration with and differentiation from the Han majority, the social fabric of Hui communities, socioreligious divisions among Yunnan's Hui, and the relationship between Islam and Chinese religions.

On community origins, Wang traces Hui antecedents of Islamic civilization to such diverse centers as Central Asia, Persia, the Caucasus, and even Arabia; at the same time he emphasizes the strong and enduring ties between Muslims and non-Muslims in Yunnan, with the former absorbing "many Han and local (non-Han) elements through intermarriage

and inter-faith conversion" (59). Chapter three, on the cultural mosaic of Yunnan of which the Hui have become an integral part, is marred by an old-fashioned (and essentially untenable) linking of entire ethnolinguistic groups with single, apparently archetypal, religious traits, such as "Buddhism and the Bai," "Witchcraft and the Lolo" (doubtless this "witchcraft" is Wang's rendition of the Chinese word *wushi* that, in this instance, is better rendered as "shamanism"), "Totemism and the Tai," "Animism and the Naxi" (here Wang translates *dongpat*, the traditional Naxi priest-shaman, as "witch"). But the chapter is useful for its analysis of the religious life of the "Muslim enclaves" in Yunnan, communities that began as strategically located military garrisons with Muslim soldiers doubling as farmers. Wang concludes this chapter as follows:

After the middle of the Ming, the Muslims in Yunnan slowly and generally [sic] formed a new group, the Hui, or Huihui. They spoke Chinese and thereby amalgamated themselves into a loosely connected ethno-religious entity. Using Chinese helped them to communicate with each other and with the Chinese society at large; and using Arabic and Persian words and texts helped them to preserve their Islamic tradition and to practice their religious rituals; and keeping a partly Persian-Turkic way of life manifested their migrant identity. (87)

The social fabric of Hui communities is taken up again, and in greater detail, in chapter 5, but first (in chapter 4) Wang presents his data on the degree to which Hui in Yunnan have accommodated their Islamic beliefs and practices to those of the non-Muslim, especially Confucian milieu of the Han literati. (Many Muslim Hui scholars joined the literati through mastery of the Confucian classics and subsequent success in the Imperial examinations.) This chapter and that on "Islam and Chinese Religions" (chapter 7) contain a mass of fascinating data and thought-provoking analyses of Hui religious syncretism in Yunnan. Against those who have seen in the Hui an "uneasy co-existence" of Islam and Chinese civilization, Wang argues, for example, that Hui accommodation to Chinese religious iconography actually safeguarded their Islamic institutions and beliefs. Somewhat poetically, and perhaps with undue hyperbole, he writes:

Without the functional shelter of the stone lion... to guard the mosque gate, and the icons of dragons to defend the prayer-hall, it is hard to imagine that the Hui in Yunnan could preserve their culture against the strong Confucian tradition and the heavy structure of the imperial patriarchal system. Chinese iconology [sic] and the symbols of Chinese religions have vitally stimulated Hui communities in their political, cultural and economic struggles. (225)

In his penultimate chapter, "From Concord to Conflict," Wang argues that "historical reality" fails to support the assumption of some Western writers that Chinese society is, in general, hostile to Islam. On the contrary, he says,

The periods of the Ming and Qing [his chosen time frame] saw many Hui in Yunnan pass the imperial examinations and become civil servants. Still more Muslims passed the imperial examination on Martial Arts and served in the imperial military troops during these two dynasties. So many Hui youths were successful in the imperial examinations that about two-thirds of the imperial and local troops in Yunnan were made up of Hui in late Qing. Hui gentry [i.e., Confucian scholars] elected by their kinsmen ran their own communal affairs, and their people had the right to practice their tradition,

carry out their religious education, and observe their living habits. (229–30)

But a bloody confrontation did occur between the Hui and their imperial Chinese rulers, Wang admits, in late Qing dynasty Yunnan. This breakdown of an otherwise harmonious relationship is attributed—not quite convincingly in this reviewer’s mind—to the general decline that Chinese society experienced under the late Qing emperors, and culminated in fierce discrimination against an erstwhile integral part of the Han-dominated Yunnanese polity.

Much more could be said of Wang Jianping’s work. I hope I have written enough to convince those interested in the subject that the book, despite many glaring editorial deficiencies, is well worth the often painful effort required to read it.

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## THAILAND

WAJUPPA TOSSA, translator. *Phya Khanḵhaak, The Toad King: A Translation of an Isan Fertility Myth into English Verse*. Original transcription by Phra Ariyanuwat. Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, 1996. xii + 164 pages. Indices, glossary, illustrations, bibliography. Cloth US\$29.50; ISBN 0-8387-5306-X.

*Phya Khanḵhaak* is Wajuppa Tossa’s second translation of an Isan epic poem into English—the first being *Phā Dāng Nang Ai* (Diller 1992). Both texts are based upon written versions recorded by the late Phra Ariyanuwat Khemajari of Mahasarakham Province in northeastern Thailand, the region often referred to as Isan. This second translation is closer than the first to achieving the translator’s aim of recounting Isan tales in a readable style of English without divorcing them from their cultural context. It is revealing to summarize the translator’s motivations for these works as they are representative of the changes in Thai attitudes towards their culture that have taken place in recent years.

The translator is on the staff of Mahasarakham University, formerly a campus of Srinakharinwirot University. This university is among those at the forefront of research into, and the preservation of, Thai-Isan culture and literature inside Thailand. This research into regional languages and cultures has been part of a recent trend away from the homogeneous, Central Thai-based picture of Thai culture that has been promulgated by the Thai government from Bangkok since the turn of the century in order to establish and reinforce the concept of the nation-state “Thailand.” The increased awareness of regional differences is now a generally accepted concept, both politically and academically, and is referred to by the term *thongthin-niyom*, “regionalism.” The Isan case is especially interesting because its language, traditions, and culture are closer to the Lao than the Thais of the central river plains region surrounding Bangkok. However, for a variety of reasons the Thais have avoided close identification with the Lao, not least of which was the fact that after the 1975 communist revolution in Laos, the political leaders of both nations were diametrically opposed. Only recently have changes in both countries led them to begin to resolve their major differences. As a result the term “Isan” was, and still is, used extensively to describe the language, culture, literature,