


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Land Reform in The Southern Yunnan Muslim Community: Growing Divergence Beneath The Socialist Rhetoric of Unity, 1949–1958

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Abstract

As one of the most influential CCP campaigns that dramatically transformed the Chinese pre-revolutionary society, the early 1950s land reform has not been fully explored in the case of China's ethnic periphery. This article sheds light on the CCP's land reform and its impact on China's ethnic frontier by examining the official policies, implementation, and the reactions of the southern Muslim community in Yunnan between 1949 and 1958. Drawing on county government work team reports and the Party's land reform policy and evaluation records, it argues that although southern Yunnan Muslims were able to selectively internalize some Communist secular ideologies to cope with social and political changes that land reform brought about, the inconsistency between the Party's freedom of religion policy on paper and its local implementation failed to mitigate the ideological discord between Maoist revolutionaries' atheist worldview and Muslim villagers' religiosity. This jeopardized the possibility of reconciliation between the class-struggle-focused radical state and the community life of its religious subjects.

Keywords: land reform; Islam; Maoist work teams; Southern Yunnan Muslims

On November 17, 1976, curious city people gathered in front of the stage at a public square in Gejiu, a city in southern Yunnan province, waiting to see what would happen to the so-called “small handful of the Ma Bohua-led counterrevolutionaries of Shadian.” Shadian was a town thirty miles from Gejiu. Carrying big cardboard plaques and labels on their necks and backs, on which their crimes, names, and sentences were written, Imam Ma Wenfu and his fellow villagers were frog-marched onto the stage with their hands tied behind their backs by the PLA soldiers. They stood in a row facing the crowds while a loudspeaker broadcast a sharp voice condemning their crimes. Accused as “the counterrevolutionary armed rebellion instigator,” Imam Ma was standing beside four other similarly designated “counterrevolutionary leaders” on the right, keeping his

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head down, looking devoid of feeling. He was seventy-five years old, the oldest among them. After seven days and eight nights of PLA bombardment, many of his fellow villagers, including his family, had been killed. His once peaceful homeland was entirely flattened, covered with bodies lying in the gun smoke. As he was bound and standing on the stage while two PLA soldiers held his back, the loudspeaker kept condemning:

Ma Wenfu was a reactionary Imam whose thoughts were extremely reactionary—he bullied the masses with his power before liberation and continued to hold his reactionary point of view ... Wearing the coat of religion, criminal Ma traveled to Hui villages in Jianshui, Kaiyuan, and Wenshan to conduct a counterrevolutionary secret linkup, inciting such counterrevolutionary propaganda as “action matches up with faith,” “going on an expedition for Allah,” “devoting one’s life to religion,” “sacrificing for religion is honorable,” which massively poisoned the youth and incited the rebellion.

The long charges ended sternly, “criminal Ma has committed the most heinous crimes that provoked the masses’ extreme anger, which cannot be pacified without him being executed. We thus sentence Ma Wenfu, the instigator of the counterrevolutionary armed rebellion, to execution, to be implemented immediately.”¹ Imam Ma’s life ended that day, together with three other men, Ma Canliang, Ma Xiliang, and Chen Qiwu, whom the Gejiu People’s Court deemed as the leaders of a rebellion. However, the memories, struggles, and controversies surrounding Imam Ma and his fellow villagers’ deaths and mass imprisonment of other surviving Shadian Muslims, what the party-state called “the Hui,”² following the 1975 massacre have never ended.³

A year earlier, in the middle of the night on July 29, 1975, the People’s Liberation Army had raided Shadian⁴ and surrounding Muslim villages with heavy artillery under the command of Party Center and the Chinese Communist Party Military Committee. The military raids, which lasted twenty-one days, killed 1,600 Muslim villagers, injured

¹*Gejiushi renmin fayuan xuanpanci* [The Pronouncement of Judgment of the Gejiu People’s Court], November 17, 1976, author’s collection, file 9, 227.

²Scholars have emphasized that the term “Hui ethnicity” 回族 is a nation-state-invented concept that negates the religious identity of Chinese Muslims. The implication of this term had been further consolidated during the CCP’s 1950s Ethnic Classification Campaign to categorize Chinese Muslims as an ethnic rather than a religious group. See Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), xx–xxv; Dru C. Gladney, “Islam and Modernity in China: Secularization or Separatism?,” in *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 180; Stevan Harrell, “Language Defining Ethnicity in Southwest China,” in *Ethnic Identity: Creation Conflict, and Accommodation*, edited by Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995), 97–102; Yang Bin, “Central State, Local Governments, Ethnic Groups and the Minzu Identification in Yunnan (1950s–1980s),” *Modern Asian Studies* 43.3 (2009), 744.

³In the southern Yunnan Muslim community, while villagers seemingly accept how the state defines them as “the Hui,” and sometimes publicly address themselves with this term, they have always had a strong religious awareness of being Muslims. This Islamic consciousness predominantly defines their identities and fundamentally distinguishes them from other ethnic groups, despite the impact of the state-sponsored secularization of Islam. Hence, I use Muslims instead of the Hui to refer to Shadian villagers’ religious identity. I keep the term “the Hui” used by CCP officials when I discuss official documents. Instead of using “Shadian incident,” a term that official narratives of the event use to downplay the devastating impact of the CCP’s military violence against civilians, I use the word “massacre” to define the 1975 tragedy.

⁴Shadian was a brigade belonging to the Jijie Commune of Mengzi County in Gejiu of Honghe Prefecture of southern Yunnan.

at least 1,000 more, and destroyed 4,400 houses, including all the mosques in Shadian. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), religion was one of the “four olds” that needed to be destroyed. Sent-down Maoist work teams violently targeted and humiliated Muslims in southern Yunnan for their “backward” religious practices. Conflicts between the two groups escalated in 1974 when the Jijie United Headquarters of the People’s Militia, supported by the Honghe Prefecture Revolutionary Committee, was formed to oversee the Muslim community after Shadian Muslims under the leadership of Ma Bohua organized a protest of more than 1,000 people in Kunming, the provincial capital, requesting that the Yunnan Revolutionary Committee respect freedom of religion. Accused of “making a disturbance” and “jeopardizing ethnic unity,” Shadian Muslims resisted by forming their own Muslim militia to obstruct the Jijie United Headquarters of the People’s Militia sent by the Honghe Prefecture Revolutionary Committee. On January 3, 1975, Shadian representatives went to Beijing to negotiate with the central government. The negotiation lasted for almost half a year but ended with the central leaders’ insistence on deploying PLA troops and official work teams. Shadian villagers continued to resist the official decision, which led to the massacre after the Politburo defined the conflict as a “counterrevolutionary rebellion.”⁵

The Shadian conflict was the largest religious resistance of the Cultural Revolution, but its local dynamics and sociopolitical impacts before and after 1975 are significantly understudied. Roderick MacFarquhar, Michael Schoenhals and Dru Gladney have provided a brief description of the major conflict that occurred in 1968 and the 1975 massacre, but they have left critical issues and questions concerning the causes and the legacies of the collision and the massacre unexplored.⁶ To Shadian villagers who survived the tragedy, this is a painful history to recall. Their struggles and resistance for what they believed to be righteous causes had led to broken families, permanent disability, the government’s wrongful accusations, and prejudice from urbanites. It is important to trace back to the start of their difficult journey to understand what happened, and more importantly, to shed light on how to make sense of the ongoing disputes and tension between the Communist state and religious communities across China⁷—some of which have resulted in explosive confrontations such as occurred in

⁵At the time of the massacre, there were sixteen production teams composed of 7,594 Muslim villagers and 1,578 households in the village. Cited in Sheng, Zhou, Xian Shadian gongzuodui bianxie xiaozu [Provincial, Prefecture and County Shadian Workteam Editing Group], *Shadian: neibu ziliao, gong yanjiu cankao* [Shadian: Internal Materials for Official Use Only], June 1976, author’s collection, file 5, 2 (The internal document aims to inform CCP officials of key events and conflicts that occurred in Shadian from 1950 to 1976); *Dangdai Yunnan dashi jiyao (1949–1995)* (Summary Record of Major Events in Contemporary Yunnan (1949–1995)) (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo, 1996), 434; *Yunnan Huizu wushinian* [Fifty Years Development of the Yunnan Hui] (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 2003), 148; *Shadian Huizu shiliao* [Historical Materials on Shadian] (Kaiyuan: Kaiyuanshi Yinshuachang, 1989), 48–57; Sheng, Zhou, Xian Shadian gongzuodui [Provincial, Prefecture and County Work Teams], *Jianghua tigan* (Speech Outlines), September 1, 1975, author’s collection, file 3, 77; Interviews with villagers, Shadian, Yunnan, China, July 2012.

⁶Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 137–40; Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2006), 387–88.

⁷Melvyn C. Goldstein, Ben Jiao, and Tanzen Lhundrup, *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet: the Nyemo Incident of 1969* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); David Ownby, *Falun Gong and the Future of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Wang Haiguang, “Radical Agricultural Collectivization and Ethnic Rebellion: The Communist Encounter with a ‘New Emperor’ in Guizhou’s Mashan Region, 1956,” in *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday life in China’s Era of High Socialism*, edited

Shadian—since the establishment of the PRC until the present day. It starts from the Communist land reform in 1950, which began a drastic transformation of the southern Yunnan Muslim community, including Shadian. By 1958, rural villages that had been disconnected from China's core regions became communes that joined the rest of China for a march toward socialist construction. The experience of land reform in the early 1950s created tension between land reform work teams and Muslim villagers, which set the stage for intensified conflicts in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and the 1970s.

As one of the most influential and significant CCP campaigns that dramatically transformed the Chinese pre-revolutionary society economically, politically, and culturally, the early 1950s land reform and its impact have not been fully examined in the case of China's ethnic periphery. Scholarly discussions about communist campaigns, policies, and subsequent social transformations during the early PRC years mainly focus on China's northern industrial cities and surrounding villages. William Hinton's *Fanshen* has produced an unbalanced perspective, which sees the CCP as the only capable government that can lead the masses to realize socialism through land reform. Although Brian DeMare's new book has offered a crucial understanding that such positive assessments are one-sided, regional studies that focus on examining the CCP land reform's socio-political consequences in China's ethnic frontier remain to be investigated.⁸ Comparing land reform of Sunan in the People's Republic of China with that of Taiwan under the Nationalist government in the early 1950s, Julia Strauss argues that understanding the power consolidation successes of the two party-states requires micro-studies on how state administrators "communicated, justified, and implemented" central policies in local regions.⁹ Although Strauss points out that the mix of "the campaign and bureaucratic modalities"¹⁰ could lead to conflicts among different policy principles, undermining the initial goals of states' designated agendas, the full impact upon the lives of the grassroots society is yet to be examined. This article investigates how Maoist work teams' implementation of land reform policy had deviated from the Party's religious policy on paper in southern Yunnan and analyzes how the Muslim community in the region responded to such tension. Elizabeth Perry's recent work examines how work teams effectively carried out land reform campaigns in rural villages, "serving as a periodic but powerful counterweight against official inertia and an impetus for consequential grassroots citizen involvement."¹¹ Contrary to her assertion, I show that, in the case of the southern Yunnan Muslim community, rather than "delivering a significant political dividend,"¹² work teams exacerbated tension between the secular Party-state and the religious community, which contributed to the catastrophic violence of the 1975 Shadian massacre.

Scholarly works on the Party's socialist transition campaigns in non-Han regions have mainly focused on the late 1950s. Benno Weiner and Wang Haiguang's

by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 281–305 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Benno Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

⁸William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 607; Brian DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁹Julia C. Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign, and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 248.

¹⁰Strauss, *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, 16–17.

¹¹Elizabeth J. Perry, "Making Communism Work: Sinicizing a Soviet Governance Practice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61.3 (2019), 560.

¹²Perry, "Making Communism Work," 561.

investigations on the Tibetan uprising in Zeku County of Amdo and the Miao rebellion in Mashan of Guizhou during the late 1950s agricultural collectivization highlight the socio-political consequences of the socialist transformation project in China's ethnic frontier. They show how local Han cadres' policy implementation caused resistance and later rebellion from the non-Han populations, which led to Party Center's military crackdowns.¹³ Nevertheless, the absence of Tibetan and Miao voices in their examinations, which mainly focus on the late 1950s agricultural collectivization era, obscure how local cadres and villagers interacted with each other in the earlier years of the CCP's agricultural reform and how these interactions contributed to the motives of the Tibetans and the Miao behind their uprisings against the Communist Party in the late 1950s. Arguing that "revolutionary impatience" during CCP's agricultural collectivization harmed the CCP's "United Front gradualism," which caused the 1958 Tibetan rebellion in Amdo, Weiner acknowledges that the contradiction between "revolutionary impatience" and the Party's "United Front gradualism" cannot fully explain why Tibetans resisted. As he concludes, "it is unclear whether that resistance most often was based on principled opposition to policies that seemed to protect and even elevate a host of class enemies or a more quotidian struggle to survive and thrive in what for many seemed a hostile physical, cultural, and professional environment."¹⁴ The dynamics of how China's ethnoreligious communities reacted to the Party's land reform in the early 1950s require further investigation. Differing from Wang and Weiner's approaches, which mainly reflect official Han perspectives of the ethnoreligious uprisings in Guizhou and Tibet, I compare the official description on land reform in Yunnan Muslim communities with the accounts of Muslim villagers to show a new and essential perspective.

This article sheds light on the CCP's land reform and its impact on China's ethnic frontier in Yunnan, especially in Shadian. I examine how Maoist revolutionary work teams carried out policies on the ground and how religious individuals responded to this socialist transformation. As James Scott asserts, in a country with a closed political system, only by studying the patterns of subordinate groups' day-to-day resistance (the "hidden transcripts") and comparing them with the state's policies (the "public transcripts"), can one gain a better understanding of the socially and politically constructed relationships between the dominant and the subordinate.¹⁵ I investigate how contradictions between the Communist class-struggle ideologies of Maoist work teams and the Islamic faith of Muslim villagers play out, clash, and reconcile with each other. The CCP's land reform policies and its local campaigns in Shadian and surrounding Muslim villages contributed to collisions between Muslim villagers and the land reform work teams in the 1950s. The unresolved conflicts would shape the history of Party-religious community relations in the area during the 1960s and 1970s, and continue to the present day.

Drawing on county government work team reports and the Party's land reform policy and evaluation records,¹⁶ this article argues that although southern Yunnan

¹³Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*; Wang Haiguang, "Radical Agricultural Collectivization and Ethnic Rebellion," 281–305.

¹⁴Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*, 205.

¹⁵James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁶*My fieldwork between 2012 and 2019 was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarship, the Killam Doctoral Scholarship, the UBC History Department, the Esherrick-Ye Family Foundation, and the Association for Asian Studies. I traveled to Yunnan in the summers of 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2019 to spend nine months*

Muslims were able to selectively internalize some Communist secular ideologies to cope with social and political changes that land reform brought about, the inconsistency between the Party's freedom of religion policy on paper and its local implementation failed to mitigate the ideological discord between Maoist revolutionaries' atheist worldview and Muslim villagers' Islamic religiosity. This jeopardized the possibility of reconciliation between the class-struggle focused radical state and the community life of its religious subjects. With the tension unsolved and still developing, relations between the CCP work teams and Muslims in southern Yunnan continued to deteriorate from the early 1950s onwards. This article begins by introducing the 1949 social and cultural setting of Shadian before the CCP's arrival. Second, I examine the discrepancies of the CCP's land reform policies across Yunnan's Muslim villages. I then analyze how Maoist class-struggle ideology collided with Muslim villagers' Islamic faith by comparing the official description of land reform in Yunnan Muslim communities with the accounts of Muslim villagers about land reform. Finally, I conclude by explaining how tensions that originated during the 1951 land reform contributed to an escalating conflict that eventually culminated in the 1975 Shadian massacre.

Before the CCP's Arrival: Shadian in 1949

Before discussing the changes that swept through the southern Yunnan Muslim community following the establishment of the Communist government in Yunnan in January 1950,¹⁷ it is crucial to discover what Shadian village was like before the arrival of the CCP. Shadian is a Muslim village located two miles north of a nearby Han village called Jijie, where a train station sits along the central passage linking Kunming and Vietnam—the Dianyue railway. Even today, traveling from Kunming toward the south to Jijie, the Dianyue railway passes through the counties of southern Yunnan in the order of Yuxi, Tonghai, Jianshui, and Mengzi, a route along which several Muslim villages are situated. These villages have been closely connected with one another culturally and historically since the Ming dynasty, and they form the southern Yunnan Muslim community. Shadian has been the center of this community as a hub of Islamic learning and influence. Because of its tropical weather, sugarcane and bananas had been the main agricultural products in the past. Jiang Yingliang, an ethnologist who researched the society of Shadian village in 1949, described Shadian's landscape:

Standing at the Jijie train station looking north, there is a plain of about ten square miles surrounded by the mountains. A small mountain covered by red soil peeks through on the plain's north side, making it look like a phoenix turning its head or a resting golden chicken. At the space between the foot of the mountain peak and the plain lies Shadian, which was built along the southern foot of the mountain stretching three miles from the east to the west and consisting of two stockades

conducting fieldwork in Kunming and Honghe Prefecture, interviewing Muslim villagers of Yuxi, Shadian, and Wenshan who experienced the 1960s and 1970s events. In addition to rare archival documents that I obtained via private channels, I have collected oral testimonies of former Muslim militia members, Muslims who actively participated in the Cultural Revolution, Muslim petitioners and Party cadres, and ordinary villagers, including women, some of whom remained aloof from but were deeply affected by the conflicts.

¹⁷*Gejiushi zhi* [Gejiu City Gazetteer] (Kunming: Yunnan renmin, 1998), 23.

—the old Shadian village in the west and the extended new Jinji stockade in the east. A river named the Shadian River runs before the village.¹⁸

When Jiang arrived in Shadian and stayed in the village from September 2–13, 1949, he was surprised by “the economic prosperity of Shadian, a Muslim community with nearly 1,000 households, which could be rarely seen among ordinary villages within a poor province like Yunnan.” Here is what Jiang saw as he walked through a sugarcane field to Shadian:

I could already hear the sound of the river running through the village before I got there. Stepping onto the riverbank, I saw the Shadian River before me. It is about fifteen yards wide with century-old Chinese trees fully grown on both sides, groups of white geese floating on the waves, and village children swimming naked in the river. I walked across a stone arch bridge and arrived at Shadian village. Among 400 buildings in the village, which are well painted and tile-roofed, some are grand mosques with green tiles and red walls, some are family buildings with traditional courtyards planted with colorful flowers, and some are typical small village houses with narrow doors and white wooden stairs. Most families have yards of various sizes with pomegranates, bananas, figs, dates, bamboos and gardenia flowers on hundred-foot trees with luxuriant foliage. Oleander is planted in the garden of almost every household with its flowers that are two times as big as the ones we see in Kunming spreading out from the wall, adding such a prosperous atmosphere to this quiet and secluded village.¹⁹

Jiang depicted a rural village of striking peace and beauty. At the time of his visit, 900 households and around 5,000 villagers in Shadian were all Muslims, except for about ten Han temporary residents hired by the villagers to work as short-term labor. Shadian’s unique and pervasive religious atmosphere impressed Jiang even more than the village’s rare prosperity. As he describes:

Villagers pray five times a day. Every morning before the sunrise, the bell is rung from the mosques and a person using the Arabic language calls for worshiping, followed by the sound of rushing footsteps from families all around. After the sunset, sitting on the stone bridge beside the river and hearing the bell from the mosques, groups of the elderly and the young wearing white hats can be seen walking into the mosques. After a few minutes, they come out leisurely walking back on the village road under the shining stars.²⁰

There were three mosques in Shadian—a grand mosque in Shadian village that holds 300 people, a smaller mosque in Jinji stockade with a capacity for 100 people, and a

¹⁸Jiang Yingliang, “Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha” [Investigation on Southern Yunnan Shadian Hui Village] in *Yunnan huizu shehui lishi diaocha* [Social and historical investigation of the Hui in Yunnan], volume 1 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin, 1985). This article was originally published in the journal of the private research institution at Lingnan University in Guangzhou in January 1951. Jiang was a noted ethnologist teaching at Yunnan University at the time. The volume’s editor noted that Jiang’s independent work was included in the collection because it was rarely seen and was a thorough and in-depth examination of Shadian’s socio-economic conditions before liberation.

¹⁹Jiang Yingliang, “Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha,” 1–2.

²⁰Jiang Yingliang, “Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha,” 2.

private hall that can host 30 people in the Yangzheng private school that the village gentry Bai Liangcheng had established inside his house. Jiang comments that, compared with Han villages, Shadian was exceptionally clean and tidy because villagers believed in Islam. He explains that all villagers had excellent hygiene because they strictly followed the Islamic rule to wash their bodies and change clothes before each prayer session and because nobody raised pigs at home. There were no taverns, opium dens, or gambling houses, but only one teahouse and two restaurants in the whole village.²¹

Religious schools significantly outnumbered regular schools in Shadian. The village was home to only one primary school and no middle school, but multiple mosque-sponsored religious institutions including the Bai family-established Yangzheng private school flourished. These schools, characterized by programs including a six-year Imam training course, classes for women, and classes for children, taught Arabic language and Islamic theology to the villagers. Jiang also points out that, in Shadian, the number of female students was much larger than male students, who often traveled to other cities to study Islam while doing business. Women were interested in pursuing long-term Islamic studies because it offered them promising opportunities to become teachers in Islamic theology in order to earn a stable income and improve their social status in their villages. Until 1949, Shadian's rich religious tradition had cultivated five students who traveled overseas to study Islamic theology in Arabic countries. The most famous figure among them was Ma Jian, the nationally known scholar who translated the Quran into Chinese.²² Jiang expresses his admiration for the religious culture and history of Shadian and concludes that, unlike other typical villages in China, where bad habits and moral degradation were often seen, religion dominated all aspects of the lives of Shadian villagers, who "cultivated their good habits of being brave, diligent, and clean, as well as formed the harmonious atmosphere under which people were working cooperatively together."²³ Although the PLA's bombing utterly destroyed Shadian's landscape in 1975, the religious culture that Jiang depicted has persisted until the present day.²⁴

In 1949 Shadian was an unusual village not only because of its strong religious tradition but also because of its economic structure based on business and transportation instead of traditional farming. This also differentiated the region from many other rural villages in China. According to Jiang's research, among 900 households in Shadian, only 45 percent owned land. Specifically, only fifty-seven households could maintain a living by simply relying on farming. Even landlords had to combine farming with doing business or with managing transportation in order to sustain the wellbeing of their families. Therefore, rather than agricultural production, about 90 percent of the households conducted business and transportation around their nearby counties and villages.²⁵ The economic phenomenon existed thanks mainly to the geographical location of Shadian. It is located at the center of three counties, about thirty to forty miles away from each of them—Kaiyuan to the north, Mengzi to the southeast, and Gejiu to the southwest. At the time, Gejiu was the major tin mining city of Yunnan, where

²¹Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 2–3.

²²Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 12–13.

²³Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 3.

²⁴During my fieldwork, I lived with villagers and observed their religious practices. They continue to strictly follow the Islamic teachings, just as Jiang depicted. Villagers also recalled what Shadian was like before the 1975 tragedy, which corresponds to Jiang's description.

²⁵Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 6–7.

150,000 tin miners lived, which created opportunities for Shadian villagers to make a good income by transporting daily necessities to the city with horse carts. Some ambitious villagers even opted to travel long distances with horse caravans for months to the border or cross it to conduct business in Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, Vietnam, and Thailand.²⁶ Above all, Jiang's description of Shadian gives a strong impression that the village had very limited interaction with the then Nationalist government,²⁷ and that villagers were left to practice Islam and conduct business, even on the other side of the border in Southeast Asia. This dynamic, however, was to be dramatically overturned within a year.

Land Reform Policies in Yunnan Muslim Villages

Under the new CCP government, the two unique traits of Shadian—the business-based economic structure and Islamic tradition—soon became primary targets that Maoist revolutionaries aimed to change and eliminate. After the CCP won the civil war against the Nationalist government, starting in 1950, it initiated nationwide land reform. The movement aimed to redistribute land ownership by executing former landlords, confiscating their private property and allocating it to poor and lower-middle peasants. On November 22, 1951, Yu Yichuan, director of the land reform committee of the Yunnan Provincial Government, gave a report titled *Striving to Accomplish Land Reform in Yunnan by the End of 1952* at the First People's Congress of Yunnan Province, which marked the beginning of the land reform campaigns across Yunnan.²⁸ Compared with other regions, Yunnan's land reform began a year later because of its multi-ethnic and religious frontier character, which confronted the Party with additional cultural and political complexity. Concerning this particular situation, the CCP designed specific land reform policies to be carefully enforced in Yunnan's Muslim villages. These included ensuring the participation of Hui cadres in the land reform work teams; respecting the religious customs and traditions of the Hui; making Hui peasants, rather than the Han, the leading force in conducting class struggles against Hui landlords; only distributing Hui landlords' land and avoiding distributing properties such as their houses, clothing, carpets, and copper teapots used for religious activities among Han peasants; giving a certain amount of land previously owned by mosques to Imams first before distributing it among Han peasants, after receiving the permission of the Hui masses; treating religious elites separately by avoiding attacking them; and protecting the industrial and commercial enterprises of Hui landlords who conducted business.²⁹

Although the CCP land reform policies for Yunnan's vast Muslim villages seem to be unitary on paper, actual implementation varied in different regions, especially in terms of local governments' treatment of mosque-owned land, Imams, and Muslim landlords. In some areas, work teams redistributed mosques' land among the public and struggled

²⁶Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 9–11.

²⁷The author mentions that the Education Bureau of the Nationalist government in Mengzi County wanted to turn the Shadian village primary school into a county-level institution without providing any funding. But it had to give up the plan after Shadian villagers protested, arguing that the government just wanted to take their land; Jiang Yingliang, "Diannan Shadian huizu nongcun diaocha," 12–13.

²⁸*Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi* [A Brief History of Contemporary Yunnan Muslims] (Kunming: Yunnan renmin, 2009), 31.

²⁹*Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi*, 44.

against Imams by labeling them as landlords, whereas they protected mosques' properties and Imams during campaigns in other places. For instance, in Weishan Muslim village of northwestern Yunnan, the local government allowed all seven mosques to keep most of their land that covered 93.71 acres, 1.6 percent of the total village land, even though the CCP general land reform policy mandated that all land owned by religious institutions and ancestral clans ought to be redistributed among the public. More importantly, local land reform work teams protected Bao Diankui, the Imam of the Huihuideng mosque and the main landowner in the village, from being struggled against, by hiding him in the mosque. The point was to distinguish him as a local religious elite whom Muslim villagers respected rather than as a member of the exploiting class. The work teams also invited him to participate in political sessions organized by the county government. In Zhaotong Muslim village in northeastern Yunnan, policies toward Imams and mosques' land differed from those of Weishan. The Zhaotong work teams stressed that Imams were the religious elites and intellectuals of Islam, stating that an Imam's class status must be determined based on his means of obtaining financial income three years before the establishment of the PRC rather than on his religious status or role. The local authorities also let Muslim villagers decide whether mosques' land should be included in land reform, and emphasized that violence, confession by torture, and language harmful toward ethnic unity were forbidden during class struggles against the Muslim landlords.³⁰

The approaches local work teams adopted in dealing with the Muslim population in the northern parts of the province such as Weishan and Zhaotong appeared to be relatively mild and cautious compared with the southern Yunnan Muslim community. This is because, unlike the inland Muslim villages, where residents barely had any foreign connections, Muslims in southern Yunnan had established strong business and cultural relations with overseas Muslim communities long before the CCP came to power. The region is China's border with Southeast Asian countries. This factor made the local authorities more sensitive to Muslim villagers' activities and their connections with the outside world, especially during the PRC's early years when the CCP strove to consolidate its political power. A document issued by the CCP Mengzi County United Front Department in 1954 reflected this point. It warned that local governments must remain highly cautious about the activities of Muslims of the region because "the counterrevolutionaries use religion and religious groups to carry out illegal activities," since residents of Shadian and its surrounding villages "all believed in Islam" and "lived around the key traffic lines" and the CCP "lacked a well-planned focus on limiting and targeting reactionary activities while allowing legal religious practices" in a region that had long been affected by complex problems of religion and ethnicity.³¹

Beginning of The Conflict: Land Reform in Shadian Through Official and Vernacular Narratives

Official narrations of land reform in the southern Yunnan Muslim community to which Shadian belongs appear positive. But they subtly hint at problems and conflicts. According to official narratives, the Yunnan government organized cadres, intellectuals,

³⁰Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi 34–35.

³¹Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu [The United Front Department of Mengzi County], *Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu guanyu yisilanjiao gongzuo de jixiang yijian* [Several Suggestions of the United Front Department of Mengzi County Regarding the Work on Islam], November 21, 1954, author's collection, file 19, 21.

and political party members to form land reform work teams to travel to Muslim villages to conduct campaigns. On February 11, 1952, the Kunming Municipal Government dispatched more than 2,000 teachers from elementary schools and colleges to carry out land reform policies across Muslim villages in Yunnan.³² In Shadian, from the beginning of the land reform on November 8, 1951, until the end of 1952, when the first People's Government of Shadian Village was established, Maoist work teams had confiscated the land of fifty-one landlords and thirty-one rich farmers. They distributed it among poor and lower-middle peasants, which, as official narratives declare, signified the success of Shadian's land reform.³³

Despite the CCP's overall positive tone in describing the results of these campaigns as the government's achievements of "taking care of the poor, spreading the Party's policies, motivating the masses, training land reform activists, establishing peasants' associations, and organizing class struggle teams,"³⁴ two oral sources along with the Party's later evaluation in 1953 indicate that the land reform work teams encountered resistance and caused conflict in and around southern Yunnan Muslim villages. In Maoke village of Wenshan Prefecture, a nearby Muslim village east of Shadian,³⁵ Tian Sunxi, a former member of People's Congress of Wenshan Prefecture who participated in a regional work team recalled:

Land reform in Wenshan began in 1952. Maoke village was a key area. At the time, Bao Guozhi was the biggest landlord and the director of the Maoke mosque. During land reform class struggles, he was tortured to death [...]. In the early years of the PRC, the Hui in Maoke and Tianxin sought refuge with bandits after believing rumors. During the anti-counterrevolutionary campaigns, many people were killed in Wenshan, but not many Hui villagers. There was a Hui deputy township head killed in Maoke. Not until 1952, when Wang Lianfang³⁶ led the ethnic work team to Wenshan to propagate the ethnic policies of Party Center, was land reform able gradually to get back on track.³⁷

Tian's account reveals two important local details that the Party's dominant narratives tend to ignore. First, work teams in Maoke village of Wenshan did not follow the central government's land reform policies in Yunnan's Muslim regions, which stated that religious elites must be treated separately and protected from class struggles. In Maoke, Bao was the director of the village mosque, whom villagers had embraced and selected. But because of his landlord status, the Maoke land reform work team determined that he deserved to die regardless of his religious role in the village and despite the United Front policy of the CCP. Second, unlike mainstream accounts, Muslim villagers did not

³²Yunnan Huizu wushinian 89.

³³Shadian: *neibu ziliao, gong yanjiu cankao* [Shadian: Internal Materials for Official Use Only], June 1976, author's collection, file 5, 26, 34; *Honghe huizu gailan* [The Overview of the Hui Ethnicity of Honghe Prefecture] (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2012), 84.

³⁴Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi, 37.

³⁵Maoke village of Wenshan is one of the seven villages the PLA military attacked in July 1975. The others are Shadian of Honghe Prefecture, Xinzhai of Kaiyuan County, Chebaini of Yanshan County, Tianxin, Maolong, and Songmaopo.

³⁶Wang was the vice director of the Ethnicity Committee of Yunnan, a CCP Muslim cadre who would later urge Party Center to redress the 1975 Shadian massacre in 1978.

³⁷Cited in *Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi*, 40.

enthusiastically embrace Maoist work teams' arrival and land reform in Wenshan. Instead, many of them were so concerned and afraid of the incoming changes that they went over to local strongmen whom they believed would provide them with safety and protection.

The other oral source indicates an entirely different dynamic of how land reform was done in Shadian and its nearby village, Jijie. Although the storyteller did not mention anything about the encounter between his team and Muslim villagers—as if they had arrived in a place no different from Han villages—his account gives important insights into the perspectives of work team members who conducted campaigns in Shadian. As a former member of land reform work teams sent to Shadian and surrounding villages, Na Rongguang recalled working at the Kunming Hui Association, which nominated him and another Muslim member to join the Jijie-Shadian work team. The Yunnan Provincial Land Reform Committee chose him alone to form a team with other Han teachers, students from colleges and middle schools, and political party members. Na mentioned they studied land reform materials for several days in a dormitory in Kunming, listened to a land reform policy report, attended discussion sessions twice at the Yunnan University Auditorium, and visited a real class-struggle demonstration in Cangzhu village.³⁸ After Na and his work team arrived in Mengzi County of Honghe Prefecture in October 1951, they stayed at a government-appointed hostel at night while carrying out land reform during the day. Their activities included visiting poor peasants, organizing farmers to study and spread land reform policies, and inspiring villagers to conduct class struggles and land redistribution. Na recalled how his work team found and executed the big landlord in Shadian:

There was a despotic landlord who was a former Nationalist district chief named Wang Shiqi. He had a vast fine property, sold drugs, dealt in weapons, and practiced usury. He was associated with a murder case, and the masses loathed him. Everybody had to obey him in Shadian. We later executed him. We went to Shiyan village later and stayed in an elementary school. One time somebody tried to shoot us with a gun from a roof but failed. Land reform was a war without gun smoke, as despotic landlords, bandits, and counterrevolutionaries showed up to confront us. Work team members' lives were always in danger.³⁹

Surprisingly, Na never mentioned the Party's land reform policies toward Muslim villages, which his team was expected to understand and strictly follow, nor did he talk about how the work team engaged with Muslim villagers in conducting class struggles. Either Na intentionally avoided talking about problems associated with Muslim villagers during their campaign, or his team ignored specific policies designed for Muslim villages and conducted land reform with the same methods applied to the Han at the time. The silences in Na's account reveal that what happened between the CCP work team and Shadian villagers during land reform is crucial for understanding the origins of the conflicts between the Muslim villagers in Shadian and CCP work teams.

³⁸Na stressed that he realized class struggle was a real thing when he dealt with a landlady in her sixties or seventies who dipped a knife into an ox's food and killed the animal because she was upset with the land reform.

³⁹Cited in *Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi*, 37–38.

One key source of ongoing tension was villagers' resentment of the Communist policymakers for not understanding that mosque land provided crucial financial support for the community's religious activities. Furthermore, local work teams' confusion about Muslim merchants and elites' social and religious identities when they assigned class status labels to villagers also generated conflict. In some cases, the anti-Muslim attitude held by some Han work team members plus bureaucratic corruption in work teams shaped the standards for how class labels ought to be assigned in Muslim villages. For example, an official evaluation of land reform across Yunnan's Muslim villages pointed out three major problems of the campaign in its policy review in 1953. It stated that confiscation of mosques' land caused significant financial difficulties for Hui villagers in maintaining mosques' self-sufficiency, conducting Islamic festivals, and running Arabic language schools. It further explained that mosques' land was an accumulated property that mosques bought using their public savings over many years—even hundreds of years in some cases. The land was often rented out to Hui farmers. The income was meant to fund public participation in Islamic festivals, salaries of Arabic language teachers and Imams, and subsidies for their students.⁴⁰

The review admitted that, after the government's reexamination, the problems of wrongfully determining class status labels were severe and prevalent among Hui villages in Yunnan compared with other regions. It attributed this to some cadres and land reform activists mistakenly considering rich Hui peasants as the exploiting class, who did not farm and only did business. They thought that, because many Hui conducted business and were rich, there must have been more landlords in the Hui community. Some work team members believed that even though many Hui industrialists and merchants had little land, they were all rich, and their land could only have been obtained from their exploitative business. This led to the work team labeling many Hui as landlords. The review pointed out that some cadres even held "narrow-minded nationalism" by resentfully saying, "The Hui are rich. There are more rich people among the Hui than any other ethnicities. We should single out more rich peasants and landlords from the group."⁴¹ Finally, the CCP also discovered that corruption often occurred during class struggle campaigns. For instance, some people in charge of work teams or peasant associations changed landlords' class status labels to poor and lower-middle peasant status after receiving bribes.⁴² These problems were widespread across Yunnan's Muslim villages during land reform. The following specific case of a Muslim village in southern Yunnan shows a subtle yet crucial religious factor that caused misunderstanding and later conflicts between Maoist revolutionaries and Muslim villagers in southern Yunnan.

Discord between Islamic Religiosity and Maoist Class-Struggle Teachings

A 1958 official assessment of land reform in Yuxi⁴³ revealed specific problems related to villagers' Islamic beliefs during class struggle campaigns. It indicated that Islamic teachings and ideologies, which villagers faithfully followed and firmly held, conflicted with the Maoist class-struggle mentalities that work team members promoted.

⁴⁰Yunnan Huizu wushinian, 42.

⁴¹Yunnan Huizu wushinian, 43.

⁴²Yunnan Huizu wushinian, 44.

⁴³The first time the PLA attacked a Muslim village was on March 5, 1975, two months before the Shadian massacre.

This clash caused tremendous obstacles for the local authorities to carry out land reform campaigns in the region. The report mentioned that Hui villagers commonly supported peaceful land reform and believed all Hui in the world belonged to one family (天下回民是一家). Therefore they could struggle against Han landlords but never against the Hui. It concluded that, because of the “narrow-minded nationalism and the benevolent attitude of religion, which influenced and blurred class boundaries,” the Hui regarded class struggle as something against Islamic teaching and regarded land redistribution as alms from landlords.⁴⁴ The assessment accused landlords of using religion to sabotage land reform by proclaiming that there were no class divisions in religion and confusing farmers’ class-consciousness. This made mosques into the “bomb shelters” of these landlords.

The official record depicted a specific example, in Dongqu village of Yuxi, where Ma Zhenghe, a Hui landlord, “bribed farmers by vigorously promoting the idea that all Hui belonged to one family and the benefits of building mosques, aiding the poor, and establishing schools. Deceived by him, the masses did not or dared not hate him. Only land reform activists asked to struggle against him.” It indicated that the Party had to educate villagers about land reform’s political significance to stimulate their class hatred during many meetings. Only after that did the masses change their attitudes from opposing class struggles against landlords to actively requesting that these people be suppressed. Villagers allegedly came to realize that:

Dismantling the landlord class was the biggest advantage for the Hui and the most important policy. Other ethnic policies must be subordinated to this one. The idea of all Hui belonging to a family was wrong because it must exclude landlords. Chairman Mao only gave preferential treatment to the peasants of ethnic minorities but not the landlords. Chairman Mao is our sage.⁴⁵

Whether the villagers truly believed Chairman Mao was their sage in the end after going through the CCP’s revolutionary education is very questionable. Nevertheless, the source’s key message is that work teams regarded Islamic religion and teachings as mere tools that purported anti-communist reactionary forces used to manipulate villagers. This mentality had become the dominant perspective of the CCP authorities in making sense of villagers’ preferences for Islam and religious activities over Maoism and class struggle. It hindered work team members in understanding the crucial role of Islamic belief as Muslim villagers’ essential identity no matter how forcefully Maoist ideologies assailed them during the revolutionary era.

The official interpretation of Shadian Imams and villagers’ insistence on practicing Islam and learning Arabic was based on this mentality, which determined that Nationalist spies were using religion to sabotage land reform. An internal document compiled by the Shadian work team after the massacre in 1976 introduced the social history of Shadian. It portrayed the local land reform, which started on November 8, 1951, as a significant success that laid the groundwork for establishing the Shadian People’s Commune in 1958. But it also noted that class struggle in Shadian was common because class enemies such as the Nationalist spies often took advantage of religion

⁴⁴Yuxi xiezuozu [The Yuxi Village Cooperative], “Yuxi diqu huizu shehui jingji diaocha,” [The Economic and Social Investigation on the Hui Village of Yuxi], in *Yunnan huizu shehui lishi diaocha*, (Kunming: Yunnan renmin, 1985), 70.

⁴⁵Yuxi xiezuozu, “Yuxi diqu huizu shehui jingji diaocha,” 70.

to carry out their counterrevolutionary activities. The document called the Imams of the southern Yunnan Muslim community including Ma Wenfu, Zhang Jingxuan, and Hu Ruqing “evil landlords and Nationalist hooligans who aimed to organize villagers to resist the government’s land reform policies by establishing the Shadian Hui Association.” It alleged that the Shadian Hui Association attempted to take power by sending its members to join the farmers’ union and the village people’s government. More importantly, it accused these Imams of inciting villagers to protest against the government for turning the mosque-sponsored Yufeng primary school, which taught Islam and the Arabic language, into a state-sponsored institution. Even worse, according to the document, Ma and his followers were also guilty of resisting the land reform work team. They allegedly organized the masses to celebrate Islamic festivals and promoted Islamic ideologies rather than Maoist thought by leading a Chinese-Arabic travel team to link up villages across southern Yunnan in 1953.⁴⁶ The Ma Wenfu-led travel team deserves scholarly attention because of its significance in the southern Yunnan Muslim community at the time.

The Chinese-Arabic School Travel Team

What did the 1953 Chinese-Arabic school travel team do?⁴⁷ Were they related to the reactionary forces? A comparison between the official narrative of the Ma Wenfu-led travel team and a private and detailed report about this event can help answer these questions. Understanding the purpose of the travel team will also help explain why this regional tour triggered local authorities’ suspicion against Muslims under the leadership of Imam Ma Wenfu in southern Yunnan. Such Islamic teachings as “all Hui belong to one big family,” which the Muslims in southern Yunnan faithfully embraced, indeed contradicted the communist idea of class divisions. The unity of Muslims in southern Yunnan certainly worried CCP Mengzi County United Front Department officials, who became unsure of the influence of communist ideology over these religious people. The official document and the confidential report indicated that the team of fifteen members traveled through ten counties, thirteen Hui villages, and twenty-seven mosques over one month and two days.⁴⁸ The purpose of the trip, as articulated by Imam Ma Wenfu, was: (1) Revitalize Islam; (2) Defend religion by fighting against the obstacles and forces that are against Islamic teaching; (3) Affirm that Islam is the best and being a Hui is virtuous. The official document concludes that Ma and his followers aimed to expand the influence of Islam and to use the “one big Hui family idea to blur the class consciousness of Hui farmers, who had just awakened after land reform They wanted to turn Shadian into the Islamic pilgrimage site of

⁴⁶*Shadian: neibu ziliao, gong yanjiu cankao*, 34.

⁴⁷In early 1929, Bai Liangcheng, the well-known member of the Shadian village gentry, established the Shadian Chinese-Arabic School (沙甸中阿学校). Unlike traditional Quran studies that were taught either in Arabic or in Chinese, Bai strongly advocated combining both languages in teaching Islamic scriptures to advance the educational reform of Chinese Islam. This method has been widely used for Islamic learning among Shadian villagers to the present day. Wang Zihua, *Shadian de zuotian jintian* [Shadian’s Past and Present] (Kunming: Yunnan minzu, 1996), 233. Imam Ma Wenfu’s Chinese-Arabic travel team (中阿学校旅行队) carried on Bai Liangcheng’s educational principle by using Chinese and Arabic language to preach as they travelled through southern Yunnan Muslim villages.

⁴⁸The thirteen Hui villages are Jianshui, Huilong, Guanyi, Tonghai, Hexi, Najiaying, Gucheng, Xiaxiaohuicun, E’shan, Yuxi, Daying, Panxi, and Xinzhai. Muslims of these villages participated in the 1970s petition for religious freedom under the leadership of Ma Bohua from Shadian.

southern Yunnan—a base for all reactionary forces—through linking up people with whom they had lost contact during land reform.”⁴⁹

In the confidential report, He Xiaoming, one of the fifteen Shadian villagers who participated in the Chinese-Arabic travel team, depicted details of the trip, including team members’ names, travel routes (with a hand-drawn map), travel dates, and the team’s day-by-day activities. It records the public speeches of Imam Ma Wenfu and his private conversations with the other Imams of the Muslim villages the team visited. Judging from the writer’s tone, it seems that He wrote the report to the local authorities who appointed him to spy on the activities of the travel team.⁵⁰ A document issued by the CCP Mengzi County United Front Department in 1954 supports this point. It urged the CCP authorities of the region to investigate and report the following conditions with local police’s help: (1) Investigate the local situation and only allow “legal activities” before permitting any gatherings for Islamic festivities where all religious elites often get together, such as the date of November 12, Mohammad’s birthday; (2) Continue to systematically and deeply investigate and monitor religious leaders’ political attitudes and report them to the upper-level government. (3) Investigate the accurate numbers of Imams, mosques, and their students.⁵¹ Although there are no other sources available to verify He’s relationship with the CCP leadership, it is clear that He was a Shadian Muslim whom Imam Ma chose to join his team. Regardless of the reporter’s motives, his account offers an in-depth look into the hidden conflicts and problems that emerged during and after land reform in the southern Yunnan Muslim community.

The report first mentioned that the Ma Wenfu-led travel team was a well-organized public event operating with the permission of the CCP, in which its organizers sent letters to notify other Hui villages about their visit, raised funds, applied for and received approval from the local authorities in advance of the trip. Beyond this, the contrast between Imam Ma’s speeches in public and his conversations with fellow Muslim villagers in private is very much worth noting. At several public get-togethers, Ma preached to his followers about applying Islamic teaching and philosophy to cope with the changes brought about by the socialist revolution. However, in private, contrary to such positive attitudes toward the CCP’s religious policy, Ma voiced his concern and disapproval about the cruelty of land reform and the CCP state-sponsored Islamic association during his conversations with other Imams:

On September 8, [1953], we walked to Huilong village, where more than 300 households were all Hui. We stayed at the mosque. In the afternoon, Imam Ma Junwen, sixty-three years old, gathered all villagers to listen to Imam Ma Wenfu’s preaching. Ma said, “Islam represents peace, which can unite all Muslims together to promote its ideology. Because the government promises us freedom of religion, we must become united to revitalize our religion.” In the evening, Imam Ma Junwen invited us to have dinner. Ma Wenfu said, “this is a huge change. The whole world was turned upside down. Did Qing Jiao die? Ma Junwen answered, “How could people like him still be alive? He was executed in the very beginning ... I say this crackdown was too cruel. About three people were killed in every village. There are so many villages and counties across the country, which

⁴⁹Shadian: *neibu ziliao, gong yanjiu cankao*, 35.

⁵⁰He Xiaoming, *Sha’a xiao luxingqingkuang* [The Chinese-Arabic Travel Team Journal], October 11, 1953, author’s collection, file 14, 5–18.

⁵¹Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu, *Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu guanyu yisilanjiao gongzuo de jixiang yijian*, 21.

means about 4 or 5 million people were killed.” Ma Wenfu deeply sighed, “Ah! Huge change.” [Reporter’s comment:] This Ma Wenfu-led trip is indeed an organized mass propaganda and reactionary work.⁵²

On September 9, we took a horse carriage to Guanyi village. The cart driver was a former landlord from Quxi who was sentenced to the labor camp for two years. Ma Wenfu happily chatted with him about beautiful memories and the life of the past while complaining about the present society and government. Ma comforted him, “this is only temporary, and things will get better after a while.”⁵³

Reading from the report in which Imam Ma’s preaching and private conversations were recorded, one also senses that he was worried that the atheist values of the CCP would eventually erode Islamic teachings, jeopardizing the survival of Islam, especially after witnessing the CCP’s violent purges against so-called reactionaries and landlords during the early years of the PRC:

On September 10, we stayed in Guanyi village. In the evening, we gathered more than 400 people in the old mosque to listen to Ma Wenfu’s preaching. Ma Caizhong notified him that some comrades from the village people’s government would also participate. Ma Wenfu said, “We must increase production as well as promote our religion. We need to take care of both of them.” Ma Caizhong said, “Zhang Zeng, landlord of Guanyi, was executed.” Ma Wenfu replied, “He sure made some mistakes, but he also did some good things. If it was not for him, our Hui would have been bullied by the Han long ago.” [Reporter’s comment:] Ma attempted to blur class-consciousness and to foment estrangement.⁵⁴

On September 11, we stayed in Quxi. Imams gathered more than 200 people to listen to Ma Wenfu preaching. Ma said, “Islam is a religion that is suitable for any era. Now that the government permits our religious freedom, although our religion is declining, we still have mosques. We must regard mosques as our foundations and develop our religion and culture within the scale permitted by the government. Islam is the best. Being the Hui is the most virtuous.”⁵⁵

It is also apparent that Imam Ma and his fellow Muslim villagers were skeptical about the CCP’s proclaimed United Front policy. This was not an unreasonable worry. The power of determining who became Imams was no longer in Muslim villagers’ hands regardless of the Party’s public embrace of religious freedom on paper:

On September 12, we walked to Hexi. During the breakfast, Ma Wenfu asked Ma Caizhong, “do you guys know about the government-sponsored Islamic Association in Beijing? On the surface, it seems to be good for us, but it actually is a pure political tactic that the CCP uses to deceive us domestically to obtain the support of Muslim countries such as Turkey and Egypt internationally.”

⁵²He, *Sha’a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 8–9.

⁵³He, *Sha’a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 9.

⁵⁴He, *Sha’a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 10.

⁵⁵He, *Sha’a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 10–11.

On September 13, we stayed in Najiyang village in Hexi County. We went to the old town to visit Ma Zaichen, a former landlord whom the government barred from becoming an Imam. Ma Wenfu commented, “Why did the government not permit Ma Zaichen to come to Shadian to be the Imam? What is the matter with being a landlord? He is old. How can he do anything?” In the evening, there were more than 300 villagers gathered to hear Ma Wenfu’s preaching. Ma said, “Life is short. The affairs of this world are inconstant. We must wake up to follow Islam and carry it forward by endorsing Imams.”

On September 15, we stayed in Shanghuicun village. During our worship, where 300 people gathered, Ma Wenfu gave a talk titled “strive for production and promote our religion.” He talked about how the government took care of ethnic minorities and then smoothly directed our attention to religion. He said, “our religion fits the times, but whoever only cares about material world and not our faith, Allah will send him to the burning hell ...”

On September 16, we visited Yuanming Temple, an old Buddhist temple in Hexi town. Ma told us, “The CCP wants to eliminate religion. They do not directly say it but wait until we die out ourselves. If we do not strive, Shadian will become just like this temple.”⁵⁶

The following passages reflect how the secularist ideas of Communism clashed with the religious values of Islam in the words of Muslim villagers, who struggled to understand and resisted the acceptance of the CCP’s materialist goal-oriented call to spare no effort to realize socialism. In their minds, a perfectly ideal world such as the one the CCP depicts is an illusion in reality because it only exists in the afterlife, and it was wrong to sacrifice human lives for something meaningless. Nevertheless, facing the changes brought about by the political environment, Imam Ma found a way to reconcile the contradiction between communist and Islamic values by selectively embracing the similarity the two beliefs commonly share—that is, to care for the poor:

On September 19, we walked from Xiahuicun to Dabaiyi village in E’shan County. Ma Wenfu rode horse. On the way there, Li Wengui talked about the political situation. He said, “Striving for peace? Actually, the world will not achieve peace, because the Quran says, ‘half of you will fight with the other half until the end of the world.’ It means the end of the world has come if real peace exists.” “The CCP wants to realize Communism, which is an illusion. If we want to see a perfectly ideal world, we have to wait until the afterlife. You see how many people like Lenin and Stalin have died fighting for Communism ...” “The glory of laboring? People could not even straighten their back after extreme hard work, and the Party still asks people not to lower their heads before difficulties.” [Reporter’s comment:] I think all these people wanted to prove that the CCP’s rule would not last long.

On September 20, we stayed at Dabaiyi village. In the evening, Ma Wenfu preached to the villagers about young Mohammad. He said, “Prophet Mohammed was the poorest person. He established Islam, which is, of course,

⁵⁶He, *Sha’a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 11–13.

the religion of the proletariat and is the most suitable for the new society. We should protect and develop it.”⁵⁷

From September 25 to October 8, 1953, which was the end of the Ma Wenfu-led Chinese-Arabic trip, instead of recording detailed conversations and preaching of Imam Ma, the report briefly mentioned that the team had several meetings in Kunming before taking the train from Kunming back to Shadian. It concluded the success of the trip in spreading Islamic awareness around the southern Muslim community.

What this report can show that the official assessment of land reform cannot is how Muslim villagers like Imam Ma, who were affected by the social and political changes of land reform, felt about and reacted to the CCP's political campaigns. Their concerns revealed their frustration about the contradictions between the CCP's United Front policy purportedly guaranteeing religious freedom and its actual local implementation restricting religious practices. Their voices reflected the hidden conflict between Islamic belief and communist ideology underneath the CCP's rhetoric of religious and ethnic unity. Muslim villagers like Imam Ma sought to reconcile such ideological differences by encouraging his followers to embrace the shared values between Communism and Islamic teachings. Would that be enough to solve the divergence between the villagers' main concern about the survival of Islam and the Party's focus on class struggle and material production? The possibilities of reconciliation became slim as the Party launched more radical campaigns during the mid- and late 1950s.

Agricultural Collectivization—Divergence Intensified

Although the central leadership continued to uphold its United Front policy on paper, its actual focus had significantly shifted to conducting mass agricultural, industrial production, and radical political campaigns against so-called rightists between 1953 and 1961. As a result, local authorities had no actual means to address Muslim villagers' religious concerns during this period. Yunnan Muslims faced intensified suppression as the anti-rightist campaign, communization, and the Great Leap Forward unfolded during these years. Like in other regions across the nation, Yunnan Muslims participated in the Party's mass agricultural production movement following the completion of land reform, starting from 1953. CCP cadres encouraged farmers to join in agricultural production cooperatives, where the production capital and output were collectively distributed among team members. In the beginning, each mosque was allowed to keep a certain amount of land on which Imams conducted farming. However, by 1958, the central leadership had ordered all mosques' land to be confiscated to prepare for the establishment of People's Communes. Meanwhile, it rejected Imams' requests for distributing the earning of confiscated land (分红).⁵⁸ In 1958, the central United Front Department issued *Suggestions on How to Carry Out the Reform of the Religious System Among the Hui Ethnicity* (关于在回族中改革宗教制度的意见) at a conference in Qingdao. After Party Center approved its proposal on the “necessity to abolish the ownership of means of production of all temples and mosques,” the Yunnan government responded by confiscating mosques' remaining land and turning them into

⁵⁷He, *Sha'a xiao luxing qingkuang*, 14–15.

⁵⁸*Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi*, 62, 70.

grain barns of production brigades in Muslim villages.⁵⁹ Mosques' land was no longer allowed to generate income for the Muslim community, but could only be used for socialist mass production.

In the meantime, southern Yunnan Muslim villagers' enthusiastic commitment to Islam and Arabic language learning had never faded, despite the CCP's emphasis on production and class struggle. In the Yunnan Provincial United Front Committee's response to the Mengzi County United Front Department's request for permission to deal with Mi'le villagers' petition to establish Arabic language schools, the County United Front Department stated that the village's 533 Hui households "had deep feelings for the Arabic language and mistakenly regarded it as the language of the Hui." Thus, all kindergarten and primary school children had been learning Arabic before 1949. After 1949, however, "because of various restrictions and reasons," the number of Arabic language schools was declining, making the religious elites of the region worried that their religion might die out. They thus had petitioned the People's Government of the county to establish Arabic language schools many times since 1954 but never received a response. As a result, some Hui villagers moved out of the region to other villages such as Kaiyuan, Panxi, and Huaning so that their children could go to Arabic language schools. The situation deteriorated as more and more villagers were preparing to leave their original homes. Some already moved to the other villages after failing to be dissuaded by the district party committee.⁶⁰

According to the document, the Mengzi County United Front Department believed that the problem must be solved to avoid "undesirable consequences" among Hui villagers. It suggested three solutions: (1) Instead of creating Arabic language classes in primary schools, the local authorities must explain to the villagers that learning Arabic would increase students' burden and hinder their study progress. For those primary schools offering Arabic language classes, do not stop them now, "but rather wait until the masses come to their senses." (2) In the densely populated Hui regions where the masses strongly ask for Arabic learning opportunities, the government could allow them to study Arabic in mosques under the condition of self-financing. At the same time, it must forbid religious figures to expand their influence by forcing Hui children to learn the Arabic language. (3) Select a progressive person among the Hui to go to Beijing to study at a theological school to become an Imam in the future.⁶¹

The Yunnan Provincial United Front Committee approved all these solutions but pointed out that, besides the issue of Arabic learning, the Mengzi County Government should also look for other factors such as problems in production and family lives that made Hui villagers want to move away. It also commented that sending a student to Islamic theological school in Beijing could not be promised since the school had not received a new student in the current year.⁶² Although there is no further

⁵⁹Yunnan Huizu wushinian, 109.

⁶⁰Zhonggong Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu [The CCP United Front Department of Mengzi County], *Guanyu Mile yizu zizhixian huimin yaoqiu xuexi a'wen de qingkuang de baogao ji women duici wenti de chuliyijian* [Report on the Petition of the Hui of the Mile Yi Ethnicity Autonomous County for Studying the Arabic Language and Our Suggested Solutions Regarding this Issue], August 15, 1956, author's collection, file 19, 2-3.

⁶¹Zhonggong Mengzi diwei tongzhanbu, *Guanyu Mile yizu zizhixian huimin yaoqiu xuexi a'wen de qingkuang de baogao ji women duici wenti de chuliyijian*, 3.

⁶²Zhonggong Yunnan shengwei tongzhanbu [The CCP Yunnan Provincial United Front Committee], *Pifu* [Response to the Report of The CCP United Front Department of Mengzi County], August 22, 1956, author's collection, file 19, 1.

information indicating whether the government solved the issue, it appears that the Mengzi County United Front Department lacked solid plans and effective means to address the problem at the time. This is because the Yunnan Provincial and the Mengzi County governments saw Muslim villagers' insistence on Arabic language learning as false consciousness⁶³ and because the government could not provide any financial resources to deal with the religious issue. The situation only became worse as Mao launched the anti-rightist campaign in 1957. The anti-rightist campaign in Shadian started in 1958, and primarily targeted religious elites such as Imams and directors of mosques. During this period, the CCP local authorities labeled many Imams as rightists, some of whom the work teams violently tortured and sentenced to labor camps.⁶⁴ These political purges aggravated the tension that had emerged between Muslim villagers and Maoist revolutionaries during the early PRC land reform period, when the Party had repeatedly but unconvincingly affirmed in public its advocacy for religious freedom and the United Front policy.

Conclusion

In 1979, when Party Center rehabilitated what Mao's revolutionary government called "the Shadian counterrevolutionary rebellion" it blamed Tan Furen and Zhou Xing, former chairman of the Yunnan Revolutionary Committee (YRC) for causing the tragedy because they were the "followers of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four in Yunnan."⁶⁵ By attributing the Shadian massacre to the two party officials, who lived in Kunming and gave orders from afar at the time, this official explanation obscures the original source of the conflict that was on-the-ground confrontations between Muslim villagers and Maoist work teams that began during the 1951 land reform, in which the Party mobilized the masses to redistribute production capital through class struggles. This nationwide state-sponsored mass movement was a violent and aggressive intrusion into a religious community like Shadian because of the Muslim village's unique business-based economic structure and Islamic culture.

The tension intensified in the 1960s, as the sudden influx of Maoist revolutionaries into Shadian created sharp divisions among Muslim villagers who had lived in a relatively cohesive religious community. The growing conflicts between Shadian villagers who insisted on practicing Islam and CCP Muslim cadres who collaborated with sent-down work teams on closing mosques and banning Islamic practices had manifested throughout the Four Cleanups campaign (1964–1966). The spread of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the development of secular factional fights exacerbated the antagonistic relations among sent-down work teams, Muslim collaborators (Muslim brigade cadres), PLA

⁶³The Mengzi County United Front Department stated that Hui villagers "had deep feelings for the Arabic language and mistakenly regarded it as the language of the Hui." In Document *Guanyu mile yizu zizhixian huimin yaoqiu xuexi a'wen de qingkuang de baogao ji women duici wenti de chuliyijian*, August 15, 1956, author's collection, file 19, 2–3.

⁶⁴*Shadian Huizu shiliao* 117; *Yunnan Huizu wushinian*, 108.

⁶⁵Zhonggong Yunnan sheng weiyuanhui [The CCP Yunnan Provincial Party Committee], Zhonggong Kunming junqu weiyuanhui [The CCP Kunming Military Region Committee], *Guanyu Shadian shijian de pingfan tongzhi* [Notice on the Decision to Redress the Shadian Incident], February 17, 1979, author's collection, *Document* 7.

soldiers, and Shadian villagers.⁶⁶ On the one hand, the Cultural Revolution had provided Muslim villagers with a legitimate platform to openly resist work teams and Muslim brigade cadres by siding with the Paopai faction that claimed to protect religious freedom against Bapai that wanted to eliminate religion. On the other, it also complicated the situation where the religious motives of politically active Muslims became entangled with the competing secular factions that sought to expand their influence in Shadian.

By August 15, 1968, with Party Center's backing, Bapai's victory over Paopai marked the end of the factional struggles. The YRC justified the reason to target Shadian Muslims during its "stab open the hornet's nest" (捅马蜂窝) campaign. Labeling Shadian villagers' support for the defeated faction as "counterrevolutionary acts," it dispatched a reinforced battalion of nearly 1,000 PLA soldiers and support-the-left work teams (支左工作队) to occupy Shadian on December 8, 1968.⁶⁷ This secularization of the religious-based motives of Shadian Muslims obscured the underlying ideological confrontation between Islam and Maoism, which had developed since land reform in the early 1950s. It also sharpened the antagonistic contradiction between the villagers and the CCP work teams, which led to severe conflicts between the polarized groups in the later stage of the Cultural Revolution from 1970 to 1975.

The origin of the collision hidden beneath the CCP's early 1950s rhetoric of ethnic and religious unity is the contradiction between the atheist worldview of Maoism and Muslim villagers' Islamic faith. During land reform, Muslim villagers tried to find common ideological ground to cope with changes that the radical socialist revolution had brought about. However, the divergence between the Communist secular state and the religious community escalated as the Party's proclaimed religious freedom policy failed to mitigate the inherent tension between Communism, which stresses class divisions and socialist reform, and Islam, which emphasizes religious unity and the metaphysical meaning of life. Maoist work teams' misunderstanding and suspicion of

⁶⁶In response to Mao's call for the Cultural Revolution, ordinary citizens in Yunnan, especially factory workers and college and middle-school students, established rebel militias to seize political power from the hands of party officials at provincial, prefecture, municipal and county levels—the so-called "capitalist roaders in the government." Whereas rebels linked up with sent-down red guards from northern China to charge government offices and institutions, party officials also teamed up with local police forces and their supporters to fight back. Through linking up with those newly established mass revolutionary organizations across Yunnan, they formed into two major confrontational factions—Paopai (炮派), with most rebels as its supporters, versus Bapai 八派, with most previous party officials as its members. Both sides accused each other of being "the capitalist reactionary class" while calling themselves the true vanguards of Maoist thought. Shengwei jiguan wuchanjieji gemingpai lianhe zongbu [The United Headquarters of the Proletarian Revolutionary Alliance of Provincial Party Organs (Belonging to Bapai)], *Chen Kang de bada zuizhuang* [The Eight Crimes that Cheng Kang Committed], July, 1968, Author's collection, file 16, 89–121; Xinhonghe wuchanjieji gemingpai dalianhe silingbu [The Headquarters of the New Proletarian Revolutionary Great Alliance of Honghe Prefecture], "1.28" *he xicheng de wenhua dageming* [No. 128 Faction (Belonging to Paopai) and the Great Cultural Revolution of Tin City (Gejiu City)], June 1, 1967, Author's collection, file 16, 127–40.

⁶⁷Work teams and the PLA arrested 571 Paopai members and Muslim villagers. They also violently beat and tortured more than 200 people. Among them, 160 were injured, and fourteen were beaten to death. Muslim villagers remembered that PLA soldiers blasphemed against Islam by forbidding worship and dumping pork bones into the well of Shadian's mosques, which work teams occupied and turned into entertainment palaces. *Dangdai Yunnan jianshi* [A Short History of Contemporary Yunnan] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe 2004), 307; *Dangdai Yunnan Huizu jianshi*, 113; "Mafengwo jiushi yao-tong," [The Hornet's Nest Must be Stabbed Up], *Yunnan Daily*, August 29, 1968, 1; Interviews with villagers, Shadian, Yunnan, China, July 2012.

Muslim villagers' enthusiasm for participating in Islamic festivities and learning the Arabic language over class struggle sessions and Maoist thought jeopardized the possibility of reconciliation. These local authorities regarded Muslim villagers' religious determination and faith as reactionary forces' ideological manipulation of the masses. This mentality, which denied Islamic belief as the essential identity of Muslim villagers, only continued to intensify as China under Mao's leadership marched toward the much more politically radical era of the 1960s and the 1970s, eventually leading to the Shadian massacre in 1975.

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