

Re-creating Hui identity and the charity network in the imperial extension from Ming to Qing in Southwest Chinese frontier

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During the 13th to 15th centuries at Ming dynasty in China, more and more Huihui people were resettled from middle Asia and parts of central China to Yunnan. They had gradually lost their Muslim identities and original Islamic religious practice. After the 16th century, in the transformation from the Ming to the Qing dynasties, some Huihui scholars began to mobilize a movement to re-interpret Islamic ideas using the concepts of Neo-Confucianism. Through this change, the Hui identity has been gradually recreated. The Islamic education system was developed at communities, to extend this local network to become a national system as one of the important parts of the Hui internal network. All of these developments were mainly based on the communal charity resources coming from the minefields in mountain areas, especially on the Yunnan-Burma frontier. For example, when the Qing state tried to produce more and more silver and copper, many minefields were controlled by some powerful Hui minefields hosts. Through the extension of mine industry, the Hui elite established their communal charity at their home villages to be cultural construction for internal governance and trans-regional network for business management and goods transportation.

The above transformation created military powers, which was also attached with the state, but beyond the state administration. When the mine resources were shrunk, some serious social chaos rose up in the 1840s and then pushed the Hui Muslim uprising in from the 1850s to the 1870s. In general, the process of recreating Hui identity was linked with the charity network, but originally based on the decreasing and increasing of mine resources. This social mechanism also provided some inter-regional linkage for Chinese empires from its margin to its centers, as a part of empires construction on the frontier. On one hand it was a way of religious continuity; on the other hand it was a new movements of religious interpretation waved in the process of identity mobilization in a period political transformation from the Ming to the mid-Qing China.