

Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims, by Maris Boyd Gillette. (2000), Stanford: Stanford University Press, xxi, 279 pp.

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This is a well researched, clearly written, and detailed ethnography of the micro cultural politics of everyday consumption practices among urban Chinese Muslims (also called Hui in China) in the post-Mao reform era. It is based on 18 months of fieldwork conducted during the mid-1990s in a large Muslim neighborhood in the northwestern city of Xi'an. The book examines the shifting relationship between material consumption and modernization as Chinese society turns to commercialization and global capitalism. It also explores some of the implications for understanding the changing dynamics between the Chinese state, local communities, and citizens.

Based on fresh and solid ethnographic materials, the study demonstrates that even though the majority of Xi'an Hui desire and embrace the modernization paradigm promoted by the Chinese party-state, the specific vision of modernization and meaning of being modern differ greatly from the officially sanctioned ideology. In other words, this group of people may have adopted the goals and language of modernization and consumerism offered by the state, but they frequently draw inspiration and social imagination from a quite different source "Arabized Islamic modernity" as their index of civilization and an alternative vision of modernization. This tendency is most clearly manifest in the Arabization of the architectural style of recently built mosques in the community. Because this alternative way of defining and pursuing modernization is located outside the state's purview and direct control, it often invokes anxieties and creates tensions between this Muslim community and local government (largely dominated by Han Chinese). The author shows nicely both the continued salience of state power and its limits in an increasingly marketized consumer society. On the one hand, the Chinese party-state is able to instill a meta-narrative of progress among its citizens, and presents itself as the sole legitimate director of state-guided modernization. On the other hand, there have emerged a number of unintended consequences in everyday practices of modernization that go beyond state control. With increased wealth, consumption power, and access to translocal and transnational flows of material goods, Xi'an Hui as well as other Chinese citizens have gained more personal freedom and space in their consumption choices and private life. Yet, often caught between the practical consideration of economic gain and the concern for social control, local government's response to these new consumption practices is largely ambivalent.

Consumption is the focal point of investigation in this book and there are two layers of consumption explored. First, the author devotes a substantive portion of the ethnography to a close examination of several key aspects of material consumption such as food, the architectural design of local mosques, and clothing (especially the emerging fashion of Western-style wedding gowns highly desired by young Hui women). She argues that these seemingly mundane practices are not simply choices of consumer goods and physical conditions; rather they are essential ways in which the Muslims in Xi'an seek to articulate a sense of self and their socioeconomic status, while demonstrating their ability to modernize themselves. These daily consumption acts thus constitute important arenas in which cultural contestation takes place. In particular, the book offers insights in the symbolic importance and the political economy of food and eating for Muslim Chinese. The detailed ethnographic account explains how and why, for Hui residents in Xi'an, food preparation and eating constitute a vital component in the formation of their cultural and religious identity and a sense of superiority in relation to Han Chinese. Focusing on the concept of qingzhen (literally meaning "pure and true"), the author analyzes two strikingly different ways that Hui and government officials define and understand qingzhen: For Hui it is most importantly linked to the notion of cleanliness and purity from the Islamic perspective; but for the state it is a racial matter measured by Hui ethnic membership of the cook and employees of a business. Yet, despite this difference, Hui residents make use of and capitalize on the state-advocated notion of itraditional Hui cuisine for their own economic gain. The commodification of Hui tradition (through food industry and tourism) is, however, a double-edged sword. Although it brings profits to Hui family-based restaurant businesses, it at the same time reaffirms their inferior social status as a less civilized, unchangeable, and backward people outside the modern world. Equally interesting is the author's discussion of how the recent flooding of mass-produced, machine-made factory food has quickly led to Hui's redefinition of qingzhen, allowing

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them to participate in what they conceive of as a progressive, modern way of life without losing their Hui identity.

The second level of consumption the author analyzes is how Hui people actively consume the dominant discourse of modernization and civilization in a way unintended by the state. Rather than rejecting state-initiated categories such as "Hui ethnic minority," "Hui tradition," "modernization," and "civilized society," they adopt such language but endow them with different meanings with reference to an Arabized Islamic cultural paradigm in order to use them to serve their own ends. In so doing, they are able to subvert the official evolutionary model of racial hierarchy that designates them as inferior to Han Chinese while asserting their moral purity and superiority.

Several questions remain to be addressed more fully. Why do urban Muslim Chinese today so aspire for the general blueprint of modernization even though they manage to manipulate its specific content and trajectory? What important differences exist among them in terms of generational, educational, economic, and gender backgrounds? To what extent are their counterhegemonic voices heard by the larger urban Chinese society? How can we link the study of consumption to that of production more effectively without privileging one or the other?

The rich ethnography presented in the book can easily speak to some central analytical issues pertinent to the field of anthropology at large. For example, throughout the book the author focuses on "modernization" and uses it as a key analytical category, but many of Hui's social and cultural struggles examined are not just about modernization, which tends to be related to relatively rigid economic and technological changes in the existing literature. Instead, what is fascinating in the author's account is the highly fluid, contested, and socially constructed meanings and understandings of what "the modern" or living a modern way of life is about for different people. In recent years, there has been a heated debate on the question of modernity and there has emerged a large body of literature on multiple or alternative modernities. This study would be more powerful if it engaged in this debate more fully. Nevertheless, as a whole this is a highly readable book with refreshing ethnographic materials on contemporary urban Chinese society. It should appeal to not only China scholars but also those interested in ethnicity, consumption, and social change brought by late socialism and globalization.

The Bakairí Indians of Brazil: Politics, Ecology, and Change, by Debra Picchi. Prospects Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press (2000), xx, 217 pp.

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Debra Picchi wrote this highly readable ethnography with an undergraduate audience in mind. However, it is also well suited for beginning graduate students and anyone interested in an introduction to political ecology or contemporary Amazonian Indians. The work is based on several field trips among a small group of Brazilian Indians, the Bakairí of the state of Mato Grosso. It is divided into eight chapters that cover a wide range of topics, among them, entry into the field and relations with field hosts, the evolving history of the group, mortality and fertility, subsistence strategies, ritual, leadership, and ethnicity. In addition, it includes an appendix—intended as a study guide—with key concepts and terms, discussion questions, and suggested readings for every chapter. Commentary on the suggested readings, some of general interest and others more theoretical, is also included.

Weaving together ecological analysis and political economy, Picchi situates her work within the theoretical framework of political ecology. She considers demographic data, observations about how the Bakairí and their neighbors have used their environment over time, and the impact of the Brazilian State on the land and its inhabitants. Moreover, she combines quantitative and qualitative methods in order to establish how micro and macro level decisions have affected the Bakairí. Readers will find the equations and various tables throughout the text particularly useful since they shed light on basic calculations employed by demographers and ecological anthropologists. To her credit, variables are clearly defined and the weaknesses of various techniques are taken into account (e.g., problems coding activities for time allocation studies) (p. 102). This book, then, is not your typical descriptive ethnography for it combines topics associated with a field account, a research methods guide, and a holistic ethnography. Picchi is able to integrate these topics and produce a coherent text that never loses sight of its main subject, the Bakairí.

In Chapter 1 Picchi focuses primarily on fieldwork and provides a useful checklist for fieldwork preparations which instructors and students can expand or modify. Her discussion on the use of qualitative research to produce verifiable accounts will help some readers move beyond the simplistic pro-science and anti-humanism polarity.

This chapter also contains a brief discussion on postmodernism, a perspective that Picchi believes has forced