

THE CONSTRUCTION OF HAW MUSLIM IDENTITIES IN NORTHERN THAILAND

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The Hui constitute the largest ethnic Muslim minority in China, with a population of ten million, and their own autonomous region and county. Since the nineteenth century, caravans of Hui traders from Yunnan have traveled to Burma, and these Hui settlers became known as "Panthay" Muslims. Eventually, a number of Hui settled in northern Thailand near the Burmese border, where they became known as "Haw" Muslims.

This paper discusses the construction of the Haw Muslim identity in northern Thailand in the light of theoretical approaches to ethnic boundaries and ethnic identity. The Haw Muslims use their fixed, primordial traditions, such as Islamic teachings according to the *Hanafi* school, and their own ancestry in China, to mobilize their identities. The constructivism approach highlights how the Haw Muslim boundaries are relatively fluid and contextual, and can be adjusted over time.

The paper also addresses some transnational activities between their homeland in Yunnan, China, and their host community in northern Thailand. These activities include religious, economic, and educational interactions. I argue that these interactions constitute one of the greatest challenges now faced in constructing the new identities of second-generation Haw Muslims in northern Thailand. They have to explore a variety of identities, and reconcile the tensions between the role of local tradition (*adat*) and the normative standards of Middle Eastern Islam that have become enshrined as the purest form of the faith, as well as Islamic practices in the Chinese tradition.

Keywords: Hui, Yunnan, Haw Muslim, Identity, Northern Thailand