

MODERNIZATION AND CONSUMPTION

On a hot day in June 1996, I sat with Xue and Yan at a large table near the wide-open storefront of their family's restaurant. It was midafternoon, and the temperature had soared well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Barley Market Street was nearly deserted, and there were few signs of activity in the neighboring restaurants and food stalls. Since the restaurant was nearly empty, most of the half-dozen employees were taking their afternoon naps, and we were free to talk. It was a familiar pattern for the three of us, reminiscent of many afternoons we had spent together during the eighteen months I had lived in Xi'an, the largest city in northwest China, in 1994 and 1995 (see Map 1).

That day we were talking about fashion. Of the three of us, Xue was the one with the most expertise; when I first met her she had been working at one of the city's largest and most popular department stores. Xue's interest in fashion was reflected in her clothing. She tended to dress up more than most of the Chinese Muslims who lived in her neighborhood. That afternoon, rather than wearing the flowered, rayon pajama set of matching long-sleeved shirt and trousers that was typical summer garb in the Muslim district, Xue wore a dressy teal blouse with lace and pearl decorations over her loose trousers. She commented that skirts, particularly short skirts, had recently become popular in Xi'an. More and more young women were wearing miniskirts—but not in her neighborhood. Thinking about this, Xue explained, "We Hui people are more feudal" (*Women Huimin bijiao fengjian*). Her sister Yan listened in tacit agreement.

This was not the first time that I had heard Xue describe herself and the other residents of the Muslim district as “feudal.” At the time I did not question her choice of words. During fieldwork in Xi’an, my experience was that people frequently spoke in terms of what and who was “feudal” or “traditional” (*chuantong*) and what was “modern” (*xiandaihua*), what was “backward” (*luobou*) and what was “progressive” (*xianjin*), what was “parochial” (*tu*) and what was “cultured” (*you wenhua*) or “civilized” (*wenming*). Ordinary Chinese used these words to describe people’s dress styles; the food they ate; the houses, neighborhoods, and cities they lived in; and their occupations. They also described different social groups in this way. Many times I heard Xue and her neighbors characterize themselves as “feudal,” or claim that other Chinese thought that the Hui people were “feudal.”

Later I wondered what it meant that Xue called herself “feudal,” and what wearing miniskirts had to do with being less “feudal,” or, as the residents of this Chinese Muslim neighborhood were more likely to say, more “modern.” Xue’s comments indicated that she made a connection between consumption practices, such as wearing miniskirts, and a process that she and other locals referred to as “modernization” (*xiandaihua*). The terms that Xue and her Muslim neighbors used to describe their own and others’ consumption choices (as well as other aspects of social life) had connotations that transcended their local setting. The ideas that these words conveyed were part of an ongoing Chinese dialogue about development and the conditions under which “modernization” or material and spiritual “progress” could occur.

Over the course of the twentieth century, successive Chinese governments had affixed the concepts, of which “feudal” is one example, through which “modernization” was understood. This discourse had emerged under the influence of Western theories of social evolution and the linkages between race, culture, and nation. During the mid-1990s, the developmental ideas expressed by words such as “feudal” affected how people like Xue understood themselves as individuals and as members of groups and influenced how they interpreted their experiences and how they

behaved. In this book, I argue that the residents of the oldest and largest Muslim district in Xi'an used consumption to manipulate ideas about social development and position themselves more favorably within a state-sponsored evolutionary ideology. Through their consumption practices, Xue and her neighbors appropriated "modernization" for themselves, and in the process they challenged the state's official role as purveyor of and guide to "modernization."

"Feudal" and Other Ideas

"Feudal" is the common English translation of the Chinese term *fengjian*, a word that comes from the Chinese classic the *Zuo Chuan* (Li 1971:78). Originally, *fengjian* described a decentralized system of political organization in ancient China. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals and officials resuscitated *fengjian* as a model for reforming the imperial government and limiting its powers (Duara 1995:153). Their efforts were stimulated by the Qing dynasty's inability to maintain sovereignty and control over its imperial territory and internal affairs. After China lost the Opium Wars and ceded the island of Hong Kong to Britain in 1842, the imperial government was forced repeatedly to acquiesce to the territorial and commercial demands of several Western nations and Japan. These concessions made an enormous impact on Chinese elites because they demonstrated China's weakness and vulnerability to foreign nations. Reform of the Chinese political system along the lines of a federated or *fengjian* state was one strategy that some scholar-officials devised to restore China to what most Chinese considered to be her proper international preeminence (Duara 1995:153-7).

Less than twenty years later, however, the use of *fengjian* as a positive political model had disappeared. By 1910, "feudal" had become the cause of China's crisis rather than the solution to her international defeats. *Fengjian*'s shift in meaning coincided with the rising popularity of socialist ideas among the many Chinese intellectuals who had studied abroad, particularly those who had

studied in Japan (Li 1971; Duara 1995:201). At this time, *fengjian*, intimately associated with the Chinese past and the classical Chinese canon, became the term used to translate the Marxist concept of "feudal." Marx viewed feudalism as a backward form of economic organization associated with medieval Europe and the precursor to capitalism (see Marx [1858] 1989; [1848] 1988). Following Marxist usage, *fengjian* moved from being a progressive political alternative designed to make China a modern state to become the antithesis of progress and a mark of stagnation. A negative understanding of "feudal" as a failure to develop and as the characteristic feature of Chinese tradition persisted in China up through the 1990s (see Cohen 1994a; Link 1992:155, 193, 200, 286). The political success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is in part responsible for this perspective, though the attack on Chinese tradition began well before the CCP took power (see Cohen 1994a; Schwarcz 1995; Spence 1981).

Marx's model of social development (historical materialism) was a sequence of evolutionary stages. Like most nineteenth-century developmental theorists, including Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer, Marx contended that societies progressed, when they did progress, through a series of developmental stages from primitive to modern social orders. Many late nineteenth-century social thinkers posited that human societies evolved along a unilinear developmental trajectory until they reached the culminating point: the "modern," urbanized, industrial nation-state. Western Europe and the United States exemplified the outcome of evolutionary progress. The result of these ideas was a new, teleological reading of human history as a universal progression from barbarism to civilization.¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, theories of social evolution in both Marxist and non-Marxist forms provided Chinese elites with a framework for interpreting their country's political and military inadequacies. This was because social evolution could be used both to interpret the particular past of a particular society and as a universal model for ranking contemporaneously existing societies. Each society was measured for its level

of civilization, with stages of advancement primarily determined by technology. Fengjian or "feudal" was one of many new words that were used to express this radical new model that could characterize the reasons for China's defeats and humiliation. Like "feudal," other developmental concepts were also created by appropriating words from ancient Chinese classics. These included "machine," "progress," "economy," "class," "revolution," "democracy," and "production." Other social evolutionary ideas required neologisms, most of which Chinese intellectuals borrowed from modern Japanese; these included such terms as "modernization," "science," "industry," "nation," "race," "culture," and "tradition."² All were necessary to locate China within a hierarchically ordered model of social development and to understand how "traditional Chinese culture" had affected "modernization."

"Race," "Culture," and "Nation"

"Race," "culture," and "nation" were three of the primary subjects of social evolution. In the social evolutionist framework, "race" does not refer to skin color or depend primarily on physiology, though many groups that were characterized as races were said to share physical traits. Race refers to a group that putatively possesses a shared descent or genealogy that is made manifest in a supposedly unique culture or "genius." According to much late nineteenth-century thinking, the proper destiny for such a collective unit was nationhood. This idea has continued to influence twentieth-century politics throughout the world (see, e.g., Hart 1999; Bringa 1995; Brubaker 1996). Racial identity was thus the political rationale for the nation-state, and it was often asserted that the nation's development depended on the quality of the race upon which it was founded (see Dikötter 1992:97-125; Duara 1995:17-50). A familiar Western term that may help clarify this relationship is the German idea of *das Volk*, the German "people" or "race" that justified the *Anschluss*, the movement to unify all Germans into one nation-state. The founding of the German Reich in 1870 and the unification of East and West Germany after

the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 were both predicated on the idea of the German “people” (see Brubaker 1996:2, 112–4). The Chinese term that I am rendering as “race,” *minzu*, was borrowed from Japanese at the turn of the twentieth century and is most likely a translation of *das Volk* (Lipman 1997:xx). *Minzu* means both “nation” and “race.” It is often translated as “nationality” in late twentieth-century English writing.

In the 1860s, the concept of “survival of the fittest”—a synonym for natural selection—emerged as a characterization of international politics (Dikötter 1992:99). In the political struggle for survival, the states that possessed the most “modern” traits were destined to succeed, whereas those that had not developed such characteristics would decline and fail. China, frequently referred to as “the sick man of Asia,” was an example of a maladapted state. The crucial determinant of a nation’s successful evolution was the civilizability of its race. Races that were technologically inferior or “primitive” at the time when these theories became popular (which coincided with a period of Western colonial expansion) would not develop into modern nation-states, at least not of their own accord. Those states, namely the Western European nations, the United States, and (slightly later) Japan, whose “superior” racial populations had enabled them to modernize, embarked on a “civilizing mission” to assist those societies that had not reached such heights (see Macauley [1835] 1971 for a British example of this rhetoric; see Robertson 1995 for examples from Japan). Thus, theories of social evolution legitimated Western and Japanese imperialism.

Because the fate of the nation was predicated upon race, the question for Chinese elites faced with China’s political and military weakness was the civilizing potential of the Chinese “race.” The “genius” of the Chinese people, their culture and tradition, was evidence for the Chinese race’s capacity to develop. As my discussion of *fengjian* may suggest, intellectuals took different stances on the value of Chinese culture. Some elites, convinced of its superiority, advocated the adoption of Western science and technology while maintaining Chinese tradition. The belief that

Chinese society was the highest manifestation of civilization had a long history in China, although this notion had been undermined by the late nineteenth-century foreign incursions (Elvin 1994: 44; see also Duara 1995:56–61, Harrell 1995b:18–20, Schwartz 1994:246–7). For this type of elite, the central problem was, in the 1917 words of the scholar-official Hu Shi, “How can we best assimilate modern civilization in a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilization of our own making?” (cited in Schwartz 1994:73; compare Chatterjee 1993:116–34).

Other Chinese intellectuals, however, perceived modernization and Chineseness as fundamentally at odds (see Cohen 1994a; Schwarcz 1995; Watson 1995). Many members of the Chinese intelligentsia during the early twentieth century disparaged and rejected Chinese tradition, blaming Chinese culture for China’s supposed stagnation at a “feudal” stage of development. Their “ferociously iconoclastic antitraditionalism” was powerfully articulated during the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and expressed repeatedly throughout the twentieth century by the Nationalist and Communist governments of China, Chinese elites, and urbanites (Cohen 1994a; see also Link 1992; Schwartz 1995; Watson 1991b; Watson 1995). The solution that many elites proposed was to reform Chinese culture along “modern” lines: the members of the Chinese race should prove their capacity for nationhood by demonstrating that they were “civilized” according to the standards of Western culture (see Fitzgerald 1996). These intellectuals and officials faulted Chinese culture but did not accept that the Chinese had a racial impediment to modernization. The Chinese government (rather than foreign imperialists) would teach the Chinese “race(s)” to become civilized and modern (Anagnost 1997a; see also Dikötter 1992).

One preoccupation of the intelligentsia and the successive governments between the 1890s and the 1990s was how many races there were in China. The state needed to affix the number of races in China in order to evaluate their levels of social development. Although both the Nationalist and Communist governments

believed that all China's races required official guidance to progress, the amount, nature, and duration of governmental assistance would vary depending on where a particular race ranked on the developmental trajectory. The evolutionary stages of the peoples of China in turn affected where and how the national process of modernization would be implemented. They also showed which "race" was most qualified to lead the others to develop.

Racial discourse and racism had been present in China since at least the thirteenth century (Lipman 1997:35-7; see also Duara 1995:51-82; Crossley 1987), coexisting with the notion that anyone who behaved in a culturally Chinese fashion was or could become Chinese (see Harrell 1996a, 1995b; Cohen 1994a; Watson 1991b). During the twentieth century, officials and intellectuals combined indigenous Chinese racism with Western ideas about social evolution to determine the nation's racial makeup. The long-standing faith in the supremacy of Chinese culture and Chinese folk notions about non-Chinese "barbarians" were manifest in what groups counted as "races" and how their level of development was assessed. Not surprisingly, the race that the CCP identified as the most civilized and modern was the Han race, that group of Chinese citizens who the party took to epitomize traditional Chinese culture.

In some respects, the CCP took the Soviet Union as a guide when determining the racial composition of the Chinese nation and establishing a political order. In the USSR, the new Communist government had applied the term "nationality" to various "races" that it hypothesized existed within the former Czarist empire. Many of these "races" were endowed with corresponding political entities, such as the Central Asian "republics." The Soviet officials adopted these policies to control and channel the political expression of collective identities, draining them of their content while nominally legitimating them (Brubaker 1996:25, 31-2; see also Dreyer 1976:43-60). Ultimately, the state aimed for the disappearance of nationality identities as they became modern under official tutelage. The CCP designed its nationality policies to emulate the Soviet Union's, with similar goals in mind. However, in

the USSR and in China, Communist nationality policies had the opposite effect. Rather than promoting the disappearance of racial identities, the two governments created new categories of collective solidarity and the institutions to reinforce them (see Brubaker 1996:23–54; Gladney 1990, 1991, 1998b).

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), the CCP dispatched a series of ethnological missions, led by prominent Chinese anthropologists, historians, and sociologists, throughout China between 1950 and 1956. The goal of these missions was to amass sufficient information on the Chinese people so that the *minzu* could be identified and classified according to Marx's model as either primitive, slave, feudal, bourgeois-capitalist, socialist, or communist societies, in ascending order of modernization (Dreyer 1976:142; Harrell 1995c:80, 88 n. 17). Shortly after the 1956 series of missions were sent, two scholars (one of whom, Fei Xiaotong, was a student of Malinowski) published preliminary results in the *People's Daily*, an official channel of communication in the PRC. In the article, they indicated that local ascriptive criteria for collective identity did not constitute real *minzu* status. The article states:

A self-reported name of a nationality [*minzu*] cannot be used definitely for the establishment of the existence of such a nationality. For individuals may feel that they belong to a common community and this may not necessarily conform to the facts. This situation still exists in modern nations. And since many of the minority nationalities in our country are still in the precapitalist stage of development, the possibility for the conclusion above mentioned is all the greater. (Cited in Eberhard 1982:152; see also Dreyer 1976:142–4)

Officially, the policy for establishing *minzu* identification was to use the four criteria developed by Stalin: each race had to possess a common territory, language, form of economic livelihood, and psychology. Formal allegiance to Stalin's definition of "nationality" persisted through the first 50 years of the PRC's history (see, e.g., Jin 1984). Despite the government's pretensions to "scientific" method, however, pre-nineteenth-century Chinese racial categories strongly influenced the identification of *minzu* (see Gladney 1990, 1991; Harrell 1995c).

Although few Chinese (and too few scholars) ever question the label "Han," lack of adherence to Stalin's nationality criteria is nowhere more apparent than in the case of the Han *minzu*. The vast majority of Chinese citizens were classified as Han; in the late 1990s, the Han "race" constituted 91 percent of the total population (Gladney 1998b:108). In the 1950s, as in the 1990s, members of the Han *minzu* lived dispersed over the entire Chinese landmass. They spoke a wide range of Chinese dialects, including several mutually unintelligible languages. Han Chinese engaged in various forms of economic activity, including rice agriculture, wheat agriculture, aquaculture, numerous types of commerce, industrial labor, and clerical and academic work. As for their "common psychology," the multiplicity of belief systems to which members of the Han nationality adhered, which included atheism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Daoism, Protestantism, and several different syncretisms, indicated that they had none. The only way to make sense of the racial label "Han" is to view it as roughly analogous to the group most would call "Chinese," which basically meant those who were regarded as Chinese by Qing dynastic officials. Because late-imperial folk categories were the *de facto* determinant of racial classification, not all the people who considered themselves Chinese were included in the Han *minzu*, and some who regarded themselves as non-Han were placed in this group (see, e.g., Harrell 1990; Gladney 1991: 261-91).

Although from the perspective of international politics and modernization the Chinese race was backward, the PRC government viewed the Han as the most advanced of all the races within China (Dreyer 1976; Eberhard 1982:156-8; Harrell 1995b). Sinocentric ideas about the superior achievements of Chinese civilization affected the party's position on the Han "race." Although the CCP took the primary role in creating a new socialist civilization and modernizing China, officials regarded the Han *minzu* as the "older brother" who should guide, direct, and assist China's other, less advanced races. The government classified a few non-Han *minzu* as having achieved an equal level of development to

the Han. The rest, including the Hui minzu to which the residents of the Xi'an Muslim district were assigned, were placed at more primitive stages on the evolutionary paradigm (Dreyer 1976: 147-50; compare McKhann 1995:41 n. 4). Because I want to emphasize the fallacies upon which the idea of minzu are based, the prejudices behind minzu classification, and the extent to which minzu are accepted as natural, I generally have translated minzu as "race."

The Hui Minzu

Through the first 50 years of the twentieth century, "Hui" was primarily a religious category. All Muslims in China were called Hui. The term for Islam was "the religion of the Hui" (*Huijiao*), and to call oneself a "Hui person" (*Huimin*) was to state a religious affiliation. Yet while "Hui" meant "Muslim" for several centuries after Islam's entry into China, the concept also contained a racial component. This derived from three sources. First, the early Muslims in China were from "the West" (*xi yu*), places usually identified as Arabia (*Dashi*) and Persia (*Bosi*), and were strikingly different from the Chinese in culture, language, and physiognomy. Like other foreigners in China during the seventh through ninth centuries, these Muslim traders were known as "foreign sojourners" (*fan ke*). Second, although the Hui people of the late-imperial period spoke, looked, and acted Chinese in most respects, their practice of Islam produced some striking cultural differences between them and non-Muslim Chinese. Third, between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, the Hui people of northwest China were involved in numerous bloody conflicts that caused many Chinese (including a number of government officials) to believe that they possessed a racial predisposition to violence and were inherently uncivilized.

By the late-imperial period, the perception of Hui as non-Chinese had more to do with Islamic practice than any discernible Arab or Persian physiological traits or cultural practices. If, as James L. Watson has proposed, being Chinese before the mid-

twentieth century was based on knowledge of a shared oral tradition and adherence to a set of standardized ritual practices (see Watson 1993, 1991b, 1988; see also Cohen 1994a), then Islam was the factor that caused the Hui to be excluded. Those known as Hui at the turn of the twentieth century were well versed in the oral lore that Watson describes, and historic and contemporary evidence suggests that the Hui followed Chinese ritual in most respects (see, e.g., Ting 1958; Warren [1920-1921] 1940; Broomhall [1910] 1966; Gillette 1998). Where the Hui deviated from Chinese patterns it was due to Islamic observance (see Lipman 1987; Gladney 1991:21-6; Aubin 1991).

The first record of Chinese racial slurs against Hui people dates from the thirteenth century. Not coincidentally, this period was a time when "barbarians," namely Mongols, ruled China; during this dynasty (the Yuan) substantial numbers of Muslims were given government offices because of Mongol anti-Chinese bias (Lipman 1997:31-8).³ By the early twentieth century, a perception of Hui as violent and irremediably savage was common in China. This derived from the three centuries of violent armed conflicts that had occurred in northwest China between different Muslim communities and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Many of these outbreaks were couched in terms of religious differences, primarily differences among different Muslim factions, but economic and political concerns were always also at stake (see Lipman 1997:89-166).

The case of a group of Fujian Hui studied by Dru Gladney illuminates how the Chinese government divorced the term "Hui" from religion and enhanced its racial content during the PRC's first 50 years of existence (Gladney 1991:261-91). When the government conducted its ethnological missions during the 1950s, a group of Fujianese who were descended from foreign Muslims were assigned to the Han nationality. Although these people possessed written genealogies that demonstrated their Muslim ancestry, they were not included in the Hui *minzu* because they were not practicing Muslims. In 1979, however, this group was awarded Hui status on the basis of its genealogical claims. The

Fujian Hui story demonstrates that in the first half of the twentieth century, the government, like most Chinese, equated being Hui with being Muslim. Those who did not “act Hui” but, like the Fujian Hui, fit Chinese cultural norms, were given Han nationality status. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the category “Hui” was no longer dependent on Islamic observance. The “Hui nationality” were a “people,” a “race” whose membership was determined by descent, not by religious practice.

When the CCP was evaluating the evolutionary stage of the Hui “race,” the Hui were designated as backward relative to the Han; religion was the primary reason (Dreyer 1976:149). When, during the Maoist era, the Hui were “accused of maintaining feudalistic, anti-socialist and exploitative practices” (Gladney 1998b: 108), practices related to Islam and to religious institutions provoked these criticisms. However, because the CCP had determined that the Hui were a race and not a religious group, Hui feudalism was attributed to their race’s arrested evolutionary development. The government, which tended to equate “civilization” with Chineseness (see Dreyer 1976:264; Harrell 1995:15–6, 23), saw the Hui race’s lack of cultural achievements as indicative of their need for tutelage from the Han race and the (largely Han) party.

To promote and disseminate its classification of the Hui (and the other non-Chinese “races”), the PRC government (inspired by the USSR) funded scholars to write “concise histories” (*jianshi*) and other texts that established the “facts” about the Hui race. These texts discuss racial “origins,” characterize the Hui nationality’s essential traits, and illustrate where the Hui fall in the universal progression of history and the nation’s developmental hierarchy (see, e.g., HZJS 1978; see also Lipman 1997:xxiii–xxiv; Litzinger 1995). For the Hui, such work has established that the Hui race “originated” (*xingcheng*) in the Ming dynasty from a mixture of Arab, Persian, and Central Asian roots (traced patrilineally); that the Hui possess an inherited predisposition for commerce; and that, although “culturally backward” (*wenhua luohou*), illiterate, and poor at the time of the PRC’s founding, the

Hui have made great progress under the CCP's guidance and assistance (Bai 1951; Lai 1992; Xiang 1983:103; see also Gladney 1998b).

Modernization

The PRC government (and the Nationalist government) engaged in social classification in order to determine what was required for China to modernize. Modernization was measured primarily in material terms, with technology serving as the main index; "civilization" was its ideological and ethical counterpart. After the CCP gained power in 1949, increasing industrial and agricultural production was defined as a critical task. To do so, Mao's government implemented new forms of economic organization, creating a Soviet-style planned economy and placing production and distribution under central control. The state collectivized property and put land under government ownership. Agricultural labor and production were reordered to more closely resemble the organizational modes of industry, and the party created a national work unit system to rationalize labor and the distribution of health care and other benefits. The CCP paid special attention to developing heavy industry and improving the military, and with the technological assistance and aid of the Soviet Union (until the Sino-Soviet split in 1960), undertook numerous construction projects. The results of some Sino-Soviet joint projects, including a number of buildings, still stood in Xi'an during the late 1990s.⁴ These changes were not solely material, organizational, or economic, of course; they were also integral aspects of the party's program for (re)socialization.

Although a great deal of "modernization" occurred during the first 30 years of the PRC's existence, the CCP failed to achieve its goal of "surpassing Great Britain and catching up with the United States" (*chaoying ganmei*) by the time of Mao's death. One problem that kept the state from meeting its goals was the lack of work incentives that resulted when benefits were disassociated from performance under the socialist system. Even more damaging were

the repeated, violent political campaigns that the party conducted to root out "counter-revolutionaries" (variously defined). When Deng Xiaoping assumed power in 1978, he promised to speed up modernization and end ideologically inspired social turmoil. Deng proclaimed as his goal the "four modernizations" in agriculture, industry, military affairs, and science and technology (science and technology being considered one category). Although it would be erroneous to characterize Deng as having had a tightly formulated plan to modernize China, he regarded creating an economically efficient society as the necessary first step (Lieberthal 1995:126). The economic reforms that Deng implemented centered on privatizing state and collective enterprises, creating a free market, and soliciting foreign investment. During the nineteen years of Deng's reign, the number and kinds of institutions that the CCP turned over to the private sector and the size and scope of the free market expanded almost continuously, except for a short period following the 1989 student protests and government crackdown.

Like the Maoist regime, the Deng government stressed material development and technology to demonstrate China's successful progress toward and achievement of modernization. In his first ten-year plan, Deng proposed that China complete 120 major projects, including the construction of steel and iron plants, power stations, oil fields, and rail lines (Spence 1981:357-8). During the 1980s and 1990s, CCP leaders continued to single out technological feats such as the Three Gorges Dam hydroelectric project and the building of a proton accelerator as indications of China's progress (Link 1992:67). However, under the Deng regime the CCP's emphasis on major technological accomplishments and infrastructural development was coupled with increased investment in consumer goods and state promotion of personal consumption (Lieberthal 1995:146-9; see also Davis 1999a; Gold 1993).

Most ordinary Chinese citizens shared the government leaders' material standard of modernization. For example, many residents of the Xi'an Muslim district pointed to such infrastructural improvements as electricity, paved roads, and running water as evi-

dence of China's modernization since the 1940s. Where these urbanites may have differed from national leaders was in their tendency to be most concerned with the material changes that had led to visible improvements in their own lives. For example, some local residents referred to the new street lights that the Xi'an municipal government installed and the new underground shopping mall it completed in 1997 as "modernization"; this kind of development received little attention as a symbol of modernization at a national level. Commodities such as washing machines, motor scooters, televisions, VCRs, and a host of clothing and other personal fashions also served as powerful and personally relevant indices of modernization (see also Gladney 1998a; Upton 1996).

Consumption

Some scholars have suggested that consumption is the most common form of expressive activity that exists in industrialized, urban societies (Willis 1991; Miller 1987). Historically, social theorists (including most thinkers concerned with modernization) have tended to privilege production as the most significant and creative social act. Consumption has often been portrayed with a negative cast, as, for example, Marx's description of insatiable consumer desires driving a relentlessly expanding and horrifyingly destructive market (Marx [1848] 1988) and Veblen's contrast between productive "efficiency" and wasteful "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen [1899] 1953). More recently, however, consumption has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention as a domain in which individuals and groups engage in the work of the imagination, producing social and cultural identities (see, e.g., Agnew 1993; Appadurai 1986, 1996; de Certeau 1984; Douglas and Isherwood 1980; McCracken 1988; Miller 1987, 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Orlove and Rutz 1989; Wilk 1994; Willis 1991). Consumption is a venue in which consumers can assert or affirm values, enunciate and sometimes realize wishes, and create and maintain public, semipublic, and private images.

In some respects, consumption is an arena in which urbanites and industrial workers exercise considerable control. When buying, renting, and using commodities, consumers make choices and put products to uses as they see fit (see de Certeau 1984; Miller 1995b; Mintz 1996; McCracken 1988; Friedman 1990; Belk 1995). As Willis points out, even window-shopping can be seen as an assertion of control in an imaginative realm; window-shopping enables individuals to appropriate the images and goods they have seen for creative reuse (Willis 1991:31).

The potential for consumption to provide individuals with opportunities to exert control over and exhibit creativity in their lives must nevertheless be reconciled with the presence of constraints on consumer agency. Consumption practices are affected by a number of variables, the most obvious being budget constraints. The kinds of services and goods that producers make available also limit the opportunities and options of buyers, renters, and viewers (Appadurai 1996; Miller 1995b), as do the social networks within which they function (Orlove and Rutz 1989). Advertising too plays a role in shaping consumption; corporations and marketing personnel strive to create demand and manipulate desires and needs.

This study investigates the relationship between an ideology of modernization and a set of consumption activities that I witnessed in the Xi'an Muslim district during the mid-1990s. In a broader sense, it is a study of how ideology affects consumption and how consumption can be used to manipulate ideology. The group of Chinese Muslims that I studied were influenced by a set of conceptual categories about race and development. They used a state-sponsored evolutionary framework to make sense of themselves and the world around them. However, although the residents of the Xi'an Muslim district worked within this conceptual apparatus, they used their consumption practices to actively pursue modernization for themselves (rather than wait for the government to provide it) and to reposition themselves within an ideology of social development. Through the goods they bought, rented, and used; the styles they adopted; and the commodities they rejected,

these Chinese Muslims combated the racial stereotype that the Hui people were “feudal” and poorly equipped for modernization. They showed themselves to be more “civilized” than their Han neighbors or the local government. They turned “tradition” into an economic asset, and challenged the CCP’s monopoly on “progress” by appealing to an alternative set of criteria for evaluating society.

The next six chapters focus on related sets of goods and fashions and how they were (or were not) consumed. In Chapter 2, I examine consumption practices that relate to the Xi’an Muslim district as a physical space. Residents characterized their neighborhood according to racial traits they believed the Hui *minzu* possessed and to architectural and spatial standards they saw as representing developmental stages of modernization. In Chapter 3, I look at two other elements that define the Muslim district as a place: the mosques and mosque schools. Consumer practices related to these institutions showed local residents’ efforts to locate themselves within an international Muslim discourse of authenticity and to grasp an Islamic locus of progress. In Chapter 4, I investigate the production and consumption of foods that locals defined as “pure and true” (*qingzhen*) and as “traditional” (*chuantong*). Here I explore the positive significance of “traditional,” despite its place in the government’s evolutionary history. In Chapter 5, I discuss the consumption of food that residents saw as quintessentially “modern” and “scientific.” Locals used such foods to present themselves as progressive and to prepare their children to succeed in a “modern” world. In Chapter 6, I follow the rise of an antialcohol movement in the Muslim district. This movement called into question the state’s developmental paradigm and modernization trajectory by locating the source of “civilization” in Islam. In Chapter 7, I look at trends in bridal appearance and wedding consumption. Through selectively appropriating goods and images associated with modernization, Xi’an Muslims resituated themselves within national evolutionary hierarchies and universal history. In the final chapter (Chapter 8), I discuss how residents of the Muslim district worked within an evolutionary

paradigm while rejecting certain aspects of the state's model of progress. I reflect on the role that Islam played in enabling residents to reconceive "modernization," and I evaluate how the government's own policies created opportunities for this group of Chinese Muslims to reframe the state's evolutionary paradigm.

Fieldwork and Writing

This book is based on eighteen months of field research that I conducted in Xi'an between January 1994 and August 1995 and during four short visits in the summers of 1992, 1996, 1997, and 1998. Conducting ethnographic research in China was much less difficult during the mid-1990s than it had been even ten years previously, but as a foreign researcher I was still subject to certain constraints. Visiting scholars required an institutional sponsor to conduct research in China, so I became affiliated with the history department of the Shaanxi Academy of Social Sciences. I was fortunate that they were willing to host me: the Hui were considered a "sensitive" (*mingan*) topic to study. This was in part because of racial relations and in part because of Muslim protests over books regarded as offensive to Islam (see Gladney 1991 for a description of Hui protests during 1989). During 1993, residents of the Muslim district organized public marches over a book that Hui throughout the northwest found offensive; this "social unrest" delayed my fieldwork for several months while officials stewed about granting permissions. As my colleagues at the academy told me, everyone wanted assurance that "nothing would happen" while I was there. After arriving, I was gently warned against disrupting the local community or espousing views that did not depict the Xi'an Hui in a favorable light. All survey and questionnaire work was prohibited. I was also refused permission to live in the Muslim district and ultimately lived in the foreign students' dormitory at Northwest University (*Xibei Daxue*), a fifteen-minute bicycle ride from the area.

That being said, I was subject to no other restrictions. I came and went freely in the Muslim district, as frequently as I wished. I

was not required to be accompanied by a member of the Academy, but could visit the area's mosques, businesses, and households alone. Published materials on the Hui were available at local Muslim bookstores, and the district's Religion and Nationality Office, the branch of the district government that dealt specifically with Islam and "minority nationalities," occasionally provided me with official documents to peruse. Officials who worked there and the vice-director of the provincial Religion and Nationality Affairs Commission agreed to unlimited interviews. I rode my bicycle into the Muslim district almost every day and spent most of my time in the homes and businesses of local families, the ten mosques, and the Hui Middle School.

Most of my insights into the Muslim district come from intensive contacts with six extended families. Aside from these informants, whose friendship, generosity, and tolerance for stupid questions was remarkable, I interviewed and spoke casually with an estimated 200 adults and had contacts at each of the ten mosques. Despite the large size of the Muslim district (30,000 in 1994, according to official sources), I never ceased to be amazed by the intimate and detailed knowledge that residents possessed of one another. It was never the case that I could speak of a particular religious specialist or family without others knowing who they were or being able to link them to someone they knew, even if the people being discussed lived on the opposite side of the district. A number of factors contributed to this intimacy: the smallness of the physical area that comprised the district, high levels of intermarriage between the families living there, the schooling system that was based upon residence, and residents' preference for operating private enterprises in or near their homes.

My extended presence in the Muslim district was somewhat puzzling to most people, because I am neither Chinese nor a Muslim. Almost three months into my fieldwork, I wondered if any Hui were ever going to talk to me for more than five minutes; unlike the Han people I had met in Xi'an, residents of the Muslim district were guarded and seemed uninterested in speaking to a foreigner. My first break came through Yan, one of the young

women with whose story I began this chapter. I visited Yan's family's restaurant frequently during my first few weeks in Xi'an, and one day a woman approached me about giving English lessons to her daughter. A few days later I was teaching Yan English at her family's home. Yan's desire to study English faded after about two months and disappeared entirely as she prepared for her wedding in October 1994, but she and her family became some of my closest friends and most valuable informants. Other contacts came from volunteer teaching at the Hui Middle School and persistent visits to the local mosques, which tended to be places for socializing as well as worship.

This is not the book that I imagined writing when I first began visiting Xi'an in 1992. At that time I had not thought about investigating consumption behaviors, and although I knew that the PRC government promoted modernization and an evolutionary ideology of progress, I never imagined that the people I was interested in paid much attention to such things. However, as anyone who has conducted ethnographic research will know, the researcher is led by the interests of his or her informants. During the weeks and months of fieldwork, I was struck by the importance that residents placed on consumption and commodities and by the way they interpreted consumer acts. Residents of the Muslim district used consumption to evaluate their own and others' status, not merely in terms of wealth, but in terms of social development. Their words and acts forced me to think about "tradition" and "modernization" in a new light, causing me to recognize even more clearly the real sociological consequences of the ideas and concepts that we use to make sense of the world.