

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.36722/sh.v11i1.5437>

The Reflection of Chinese Hui Muslim Life in Huo Da's Novel: Funeral of A Muslim (穆斯林的葬礼)

Malikah Kautsar Ilmi^{1*}, Razia Sultana Soronika¹

¹Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature, Beijing Normal University,
Xinjiekouwai St, Haidian District, Beijing, 100875.

Corresponding Author/E-mail: 202329080001@mail.bnu.edu.cn

Abstract – This study explores the reflection of Hui Muslim life and Islamic religious practices in Huo Da's novel *Funeral of a Muslim* (1988), an outstanding work in Modern Chinese literature that centers on minority religious experience in China. Set within the historical and social transformations of twentieth-century China, the novel traces three generations of a Hui Muslim family in Beijing and offers a rare literary portrayal of Islamic life in a predominantly Han cultural context. Employing a Qualitative Literary Methodology through close reading, this research analyzes selected narrative passages and dialogues from the English translation of the book to examine depictions of Islamic rituals, including greetings, ablution, prayer, marriage and funerary practices. This study finds that *Funeral of a Muslim* not only contributes to Chinese literary fiction through its depiction of ethnic minority religious practices, but also reveals that Hui identity is constructed as a dynamic process of dialogical interaction between self-perception and sociopolitical structures.

Keywords - Chinese Hui, Contemporary Chinese Literature, Hui Muslim Life, Religious Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are often shaped by the societies in which they are produced. They reflect not only social change and cultural development but also the diverse beliefs and values that exist within a community. Among these elements, religion occupies a significant place in shaping social identity, cultural practices and collective memory. Cultural theorists argue that literature functions as a medium through which social meanings and identities are represented and interpreted. According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation in cultural texts plays a crucial role in constructing meaning and shaping how communities and identities are perceived within broader social discourse. However, minority religions are often less visible in mainstream narratives and may be marginalized within dominant cultural representations.

In the context of modern Chinese literature, novels that explicitly engage with Islamic themes are relatively rare. Although China is home to several Muslim ethnic groups, literary portrayals of Islamic life have historically received limited attention.

Scholars have noted that religious expression, particularly that associated with minority communities, was often constrained by political and ideological conditions during much of the twentieth century (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). Against this backdrop, the publication of *Funeral of a Muslim* (穆斯林的葬礼 *Mùsīlín de zànglǐ*) in 1988 by Huo Da marked an important moment in contemporary Chinese literature. The novel later received the prestigious Mao Dun Literature Prize and sold more than two million copies, demonstrating both critical recognition and broad popular appeal.

The Hui (回族 *Huízú*) Muslims represent one of the largest Muslim communities in China. Historically, they are descendants of Arab and Persian traders who settled in China during the Tang and Yuan dynasties and gradually integrated into Chinese society. While they share many linguistic and cultural characteristics with the Han majority, their adherence to Islam remains the primary marker of their collective identity (Dillon, 2015). Historians such as Jonathan Lipman (2011) emphasize that Hui identity developed through a complex interaction

between Islamic religious traditions and Chinese cultural environments. Similarly, anthropological studies have highlighted the ways in which Chinese Muslim communities have maintained distinct religious practices while simultaneously adapting to broader social and cultural structures (Gladney, 2020).

Another explanation of Hui identity is provided by Yang Wenjong, who approaches the issue from a historical-anthropological perspective. He argues that the Hui community originated from foreign Muslim migrants who were initially regarded as “guests” residing within China. Over time, particularly during the Yuan Dynasty, these communities gradually settled, integrated into local society, and came to be recognized as part of the Chinese nation. Yang further conceptualizes the Hui as a “secondary ethnicity,” formed through the interaction of the Islamic religious community, interethnic contact, and the influence of state power. In this sense, Hui identity is not primordial or fixed, but historically constructed and continuously negotiated. Therefore, contemporary Hui identity can be understood as the product of historical migration, cultural adaptation, religious affiliation (Islam), and ongoing interaction within a multi-ethnic society (Wenjong, 2006).

For much of the twentieth century, religious expression in China, particularly among minority communities, was shaped by political and ideological constraints. As a result, literary representations of religion and ethnic identity were often limited or indirectly expressed. It was not until the period of reform and opening-up under Deng Xiaoping that literary discourse gradually reopened to discussions of religion, ethnicity and cultural diversity (Ouyang, 2014). Within this more permissive cultural environment, *Funeral of a Muslim* emerged as one of the few novels to foreground Islamic life and Hui Muslim identity in modern Chinese literature.

In *Funeral of a Muslim*, representations of Muslim life are conveyed through both narrative description and dialogue. The novel documents various Islamic practices, including greetings, prayer, marriage customs and funerary rites, thereby distinguishing Hui traditions from those of the Han majority. These religious practices function as important markers of communal identity and cultural continuity within a predominantly Han social environment. At the same time, the narrative subtly reveals the social

marginalization and cultural tensions experienced by Hui Muslims within broader Chinese society.

A relevant previous study on *A Muslim Funeral* was conducted by Chen L. (2015), which primarily focuses on the tragic dimension of the novel. The study is largely centered on narrative tragedy and character analysis, with limited attention to broader questions of cultural reception and religion.

Another relevant previous study was conducted by Ouyang (2014) in “The Qur’an and Identity in Contemporary Chinese Fiction,” which examines how the Qur’an shapes Muslim identity in Chinese literary works, particularly among the Hui Muslim community. Focusing on works by Huo Da (*Funeral of a Muslim*) and Zhang Chengzhi (*A History of the Soul*), the study explores how the Qur’an is imagined and embodied in literary texts, showing that identity can be constructed through engagement with sacred texts and broader Islamic traditions, including global Islamic history. However, the study mainly focuses on the Qur’an as a textual and symbolic source of identity, and therefore remains limited in explaining how Hui ethnic identity is represented in the novel through everyday experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts.

Relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how Islamic religious practices themselves are represented within the narrative and how these practices contribute to the construction of Hui Muslim identity in the text. This gap suggests the need for a more focused literary analysis of religious representation in the novel.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research question: How are Islamic religious practices and Hui Muslim identity represented in Huo Da’s *Funeral of a Muslim*? By applying qualitative literary analysis through close reading of selected narrative passages and dialogues, this research aims to examine how Islamic rituals and cultural expressions are depicted in the novel and how they contribute to the literary representation of Hui Muslim life in contemporary Chinese fiction.

METHOD

This study uses Qualitative Literary analysis based on close reading as a method. Qualitative methodology fits well with this study as it discusses meanings, representational and pattern

interpretations within texts rather than counting or measuring variables numerically. John W. Creswell (2013) explains that qualitative research aims to uncover the construction of meanings within social and cultural contexts. In the field of literature, qualitative analysis gives the scholars a tool to closely study the depiction of themes, values and cultural identities through the elements of story structure, language and character portrayal.

The primary data for this study are drawn from the English translation of Huo Da's (2009) novel *Funeral of a Muslim*, published under the title *Jade King* by Foreign Languages Press. The data consist of selected narrative passages, paragraphs and dialogues that depict Islamic practices, religious rituals and communal interactions within the Hui Muslim community. These textual elements are treated as literary representations rather than ethnographic or theological documentation. The selection of textual citations was conducted through purposive sampling, which allows researchers to deliberately select data segments that are most relevant to the research objectives. As explained by Johnny Saldaña (2016), purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative textual analysis to focus on data that best illustrate the phenomenon being studied. In this research, passages were selected based on their explicit depiction of Islamic religious practices such as greetings, ablution, prayer, marriage customs and funerary rituals, as well as moments that reflect the cultural identity and social interactions of the Hui Muslim community.

The data analysis process was conducted through several stages of qualitative textual examination. First, the novel was read comprehensively in order to gain a general understanding of its narrative structure, historical background and cultural context. During subsequent readings, passages that contain references to Islamic beliefs, ritual practices and expressions of Hui Muslim identity were carefully identified and extracted as units of analysis. These passages were then categorized according to the types of religious practices they represent, such as daily rituals, social customs and ceremonies. Through the method of close reading, each selected passage was examined in detail to analyze narrative language, symbolism and descriptive patterns that reveal how Islamic religious practices are embedded within the story. Close reading allows researchers to interpret subtle textual meanings by paying careful attention to linguistic choices, narrative emphasis, and contextual implications within the literary text (Barry, 2009).

The interpretation of findings in this study is conducted through narrative analysis, a method that examines how stories are structured and how meaning is conveyed through language, characterization and plot development. Narrative analysis enables the researcher to explore how Huo Da represents Islamic religious practices and Hui Muslim identity within the flow of the story, paying attention to narrative techniques such as point of view, dialogue, description and sequencing of events. Narrative analysis thus provides a structured technique for connecting textual representation with broader cultural and social meaning, showing how the novel articulates Hui Muslim identity in contemporary Chinese literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Muslim Funeral tells the story of three generations of a Chinese Muslim family, following a non-linear timeline that spans from the turbulent years of the Japanese invasion and World War II to the present day. This tragic novel is marked by various conflicts between the characters, including the love stories of a father and his lover, a son and his beloved, and a daughter and her romantic interest. Written by Huo Da, a Chinese Muslim author, the novel is set within Beijing's Muslim community.

The story begins with the character Tuloyedin, an elderly man preparing to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca, accompanied by a young boy called Ibrahim (Han Ziqi). They stop at the home of a jade artisan, called Rare Gem Studio in Beijing, owned by Liang Yiqing, who has two daughters, Jade Girl and Little Jade. After accidentally breaking a jade bowl, Ibrahim decides to stay at their house, marking the beginning of a series of conflicts in the story. Later, Ibrahim, who is also known as Han Ziqi, marries Jade Girl (Mrs.Han). They have two children: Han Tianxing and Moon Girl.

This discussion will examine how Islamic religious practices are represented in *Funeral of a Muslim* by Huo Da and how these representations reflect the lived religious experiences of Hui Muslim communities in China. Through a range of characters and narrative episodes, the novel integrates Islamic rituals into the storyline, enabling an analysis of how these practices reflect and shape Hui Muslim identity within the text.

Islamic greeting

In Islam, spreading greetings is one of the rights that Muslims have towards one another. This is especially evident when Muslims meet, as they are required to exchange greetings as a form of mutual respect. In the early part of this novel, there is an explanation regarding the greeting, which is portrayed through the scene where Tuoleyedin visits Liang Yiqing's house.

这时，那老者朝他微微躬身，右手抚胸，道了一声：“按赛俩目而来坤！”梁亦清一惊，慌忙答礼，也是右手抚胸，微微躬身：“吾而来坤闷赛俩目！”他们说的是什么？对于穆斯林来说，这是完全不必翻译的，前者是：“求真主赐给您安宁！”后者是：“求真主也赐安宁给您！”这是穆斯林见面时的相互祝福，表示具有共同的血统和信仰。这是全世界穆斯林的共同语言，无论他们走到天涯还是海角，都能凭借这熟悉的声音找到自己的同胞。

Zhè shí, nà lǎo zhè cháo tā wēi wēi gōng shēn, yòu shǒu fǔ xiōng, dào le yī shēng: “Àn sài liǎ mù ér lái kūn!” Liáng Yìqīng yī jīng, huāng máng dá lǐ, yě shì yòu shǒu fǔ xiōng, wēi wēi gōng shēn: “Wú ér lái kūn mèn sài liǎ mù!” Tāmen shuō de shì shénme? Duì yú mù sī lín lái shuō, zhè shì wánquán bù bì fānyì de, qián zhè shì: “Qiú Zhēnzhǔ cì gěi nín ānning!” Hòu zhè shì: “Qiú Zhēnzhǔ yě cì ānning gěi nín!” Zhè shì mùsīlín jiànmiàn shí de xiānghù zhùfú, biǎoshì jù yǒu gòngtóng de xuètǒng hé xìnyǎng. Zhè shì quán shìjiè mù sī lín de gòngtóng yǔyán, wúlùn tāmen zǒu dào tiānyá háishì hǎijiǎo, dōu néng píngjiè zhè shúxī de shēngyīn zhāodào zìjǐ de tóngbāo.

At this moment the elderly bowed slightly and laying his right hand on the chest, said, 'An salam allakun!'. The surprised Liang hurriedly responded to the greeting, also putting his hand on the chest, making as light bow and uttering, "Wu allakuman salam!". What were they saying? For Muslims, no translation is needed. The first of the remarks means "May Allah bless you with peace!", and the second, "May Allah bless you with peace also!" There are expressions of blessing between Muslims when meeting each other to show they are of one race and faith. These are greetings used by Muslims around the world so that wherever they happen to be, they can always identify each other by the familiar words. (p.25)

This scene is depicted in the first chapter, when Tuoleyedin visits Liang Yiqing's home to rest. Upon his arrival, Tuoleyedin utters an Islamic greeting, which is rendered phonetically using Chinese characters. The use of salam as a greeting signifies not only religious observance but also communal identity among Hui Muslims. By rendering the greeting phonetically in Chinese characters and immediately explaining its meaning, the narrative acknowledges the linguistic and cultural hybridity of Hui Muslim life, Islamic practices are preserved, yet expressed through the Chinese language. This reflects the lived reality of Hui Muslims, who are culturally and linguistically integrated into Chinese

society while maintaining distinct religious traditions.

Ablution

When Tuoleyedin is received into Liang Yiqing's household and permitted to perform wudu before prayer, the narrative offers a detailed depiction of the rituals of ablution and tayammum, highlighting their religious significance within the story.

当下，梁亦清安排客人在“水房”洗浴，称为“大净”，是礼拜之前所必须进行的准备。吐罗耶定和易卜拉欣常年跋涉，四处流浪，常常在旅途中找不到水，便只好“代净”了：用手摸一摸地上的土，凭着信仰模拟洗浴的动作摸脸、搓手。这一次“大净”，把小易卜拉欣的汗污泥垢连同旅途的疲劳都消除了。

Dāng xià, Liáng Yìqīng ānpái kèrén zài “shuǐ fáng” xǐyù, chēng wéi “dà jìng”, shì lǐbài zhī qián suǒ bìxū jìnxíng de zhǔnbèi. Tǔluóyēdìng hé Yì Bùlāxīn chángnián báshè, sìchù liúlàng, chángcháng zài lǚtú zhōng zhǎo bú dào shuǐ, biàn zhǐhǎo “dài jìng” le: yòng shǒu mō yī mō dì shàng de tǔ, píngzhe xìnyǎng mōnǐ xǐyù de dòngzuò mō liǎn, cuō shǒu. Zhè yī cì “dà jìng”, bǎ xiǎo Yì Bùlāxīn de hàn wū ní gòu liántóng lǚtú de pí láo dōu xiāochú le.

For the moment, Liang arranged for the visitors to bathe in the 'water room'. The ghusl, or thorough ablution, is a required ritual before worshipping Allah. When they were unable to find any water during their years of roving, Tuoleyedin and Ibrahim often had to resort to 'token ablution', first running their hands over the dirt on the ground and then rubbing their faces and hands in simulation of bathing, in devout Muslim fashion. Through taking 'thorough ablution', here, the two travellers cleansed themselves of the filth as well as the fatigue accumulated in the course of their long journey. (p.33)

Furthermore, the narration of Tuoleyedin and Ibrahim performing tayammum during their journey, due to the absence of water, demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic practice in response to environmental constraints. By explicitly naming these practices and providing their Chinese equivalents (wudu as 大净 dà jìng and tayammum as 代净 dài jìng), the novel makes Islamic ritual intelligible to Chinese readers while preserving its religious specificity. This narrative strategy not only educates readers about Islamic ritual but also reflects the lived experience of Hui Muslims, whose religious observance often requires flexibility in unfamiliar or resource-limited settings.

In Chapter 4, the character Jade Girl, or Mrs. Han, is described as preparing to perform the Fajr prayer. The narrative provides a detailed description of the ablution in that scene.

她并不惊动在西间卧室睡眠未醒的丈夫，自己轻轻地起身，到卧室东边的“水房”去... 这洗浴是神圣的，它意味着清除自身的罪恶。人是有罪的，由于种种欲望的驱使而获罪。而真主是赦罪的。韩太太仔仔细细地清洗着自己那洁白细腻的面颜，连发际、耳后、脖根都不容许有任何污垢残留。

Tā bìng bù jīngdòng zài xī jiān wòshì shuimían wèi xīng de zhàngfu, zìjǐ qīngqīng de qīshēn, dào wòshì dōngbiān de "shuǐ fáng" qù... Zhè xǐyù shì shénshèng de, tā yìwèizhe qīngchú zìshēn de zuì'è. Rén shì yǒu zuì de, yóuyú zhōngzhōng yùwàng de qūshǐ ér huò zuì. Èr Zhēnzhǔ shì shèzuì de. Hān Tàitai zǐzì xìxì de qīngxǐ zhe zìjǐ nà jiébai xìni de miànyán, lián fàjì, ěr hòu, bó gēn dōu bù róngxǔ yǒu rēnhé wūgòu cánliú.

Without waking her husband who slept in the room at the western end of their apartment, she got up quietly and went into the 'water-room', adjoining her bedroom to the east... The ablution is hallowed. It is meant to cleanse one of one's sins. Very meticulously Mrs Han proceeded to wash her face, making sure that no dirt remained at the hair line, behind the ears or on the neck. (p.133)

This narrative highlights the representation of Islamic ritual embodied by Mrs. Han through her performance of ablution prior to prayer. The depiction of *wudu* illustrates not only personal devotion but also the integration of Islamic practices into the routines of everyday life. Mrs. Han's actions thus reflect the lived experience of Hui Muslim women, for whom religious observance is practiced quietly yet consistently.

Prayer

Salat (prayer) is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam and constitutes a compulsory religious obligation to be performed five times daily. According to Hidayat (2017), Islamic rituals play a central role in constructing Muslim identity through embodied practices rather than merely doctrinal belief. In this sense, the presence of prayer in the Funeral of a Muslim reflects how Hui Muslim identity is performed and expressed in everyday life, while remaining diverse and dynamically negotiated. This is further supported by previous studies, which suggest that the ability of Hui Muslims to observe regular prayer is increasingly shaped by social and occupational constraints. Younger and working Hui Muslims, in particular, often face difficulties in maintaining daily prayers due to time limitations and workplace demands, as a result, regular prayer may be deprioritized or even neglected (Nara, 2024).

Although Liang is identified as a Muslim, he often neglects the obligation of *salat* because of his work. In contrast, his wife and daughter consistently perform their daily prayers. This contrast highlights differing levels of religious commitment within the

family: while Mrs. Han and Jade Girl firmly uphold Islamic values in their everyday lives, Liang frequently overlooks his religious duties due to his busy work schedule. When Tuoleyedin, a devout Muslim and a descendant of Saihai (Sheikh), visits Liang's household, Liang experiences a sense of shame regarding his neglect of prayer.

按照规定，穆斯林一天须做五次礼拜：日出前的晨礼（榜答），午后的晌礼（撒什尼），太阳平西时的哺礼（底盖尔），日落黑定前的昏礼（沙目），夜间的宵礼（虎伏滩）。梁亦清由于常年埋头于玉作，对这个至关重要的拜功常常荒疏，还不如妻子白氏和女儿璧儿每天坚持，这次见了筛海的后代，自然觉得惭愧，因此也就格外虔诚。

Ànzhào guīdìng, mùsīlín yī tiān xū zuò wǔ cì lǐbài: rìchū qián de chén lǐ (bǎng dá), wǔhòu de shǎng lǐ (piě shén ní), tàiyáng píng xī shí de bǔ lǐ (dǐ gài ěr), rìluò hēi dìng qián de hūn lǐ (shā mù), yèjiān de xiāo lǐ (hūfūtān). Liáng Yìqīng yóuyú chángnián máitóu yú yú zuò, duì zhège zhìguān zhōngyào de bài gōng chángcháng huāngshū, hái búrú qīzi bái shì hé nǚ'ér bì'ér měitiān jiānchí, zhè cì jiàn le shāihǎi de hòudài, zìrán juéde cánguài, yīncǐ yě jiù géwài qiánchéng.

As prescribed, Muslims perform salat five times a day: early morning before sunrise (Salat al-Subh), in the afternoon (Salat al-Zuhr), at sunset (Salat al'Asr), at dusk right after sunset (Salat al-Maghrib) and at night (Salat al'lsha). As he was busy plying his craft throughout the year, Liang often neglected these all-important rites, unlike his wife and daughters, who performed them every day without fail. Now that he had made the acquaintance of a descendant of Saihai, he could not help but feel shame. To amend his earlier negligence, he was extra devout in performing the salat before daybreak the next day. (p.33)

The narrative in the novel also aligns with the observation that local Muslim women rarely attend mosques for prayer, as “women usually pray at home” (Zhang, 2019). The following passage further illustrates this practice by depicting Jade Girl as having performed *salat* in her home, since the age of nine and never missing a single prayer.

这是她从九岁开始就每日必做的晨课，以后就从未间断，无论是家业兴旺的鼎盛时期，还是遭逢变故的艰难岁月。随着年岁的增长，她越来越笃信万能的真主，那是指引她的人生之路的唯一的神，在肃穆的祈祷中，她感受到“一心敬主”的宁静与深远。

Zhè shì tā cóng jiǔ suì kāishǐ jiù měi rì bì zuò de chén kè, yǐhòu jiù cóng wèi jiànduàn, wúlùn shì jiā yè xīngwàng de dǐngshèng shíqī, háishì zāoféng biàngù de jiānnán suìyuè. Suízhe nián suì de zēngzhǎng, tā yuè lái yuè dùxìn wánnéng de zhēnzhǔ, nà shì zhǐyǐn tā de rénsēng zhī lù de wéiyī de shén, zài sùmù de qídǎo zhōng, tā gǎnshòu dào "yīxīn jìng zhǔ" dì níngjìng yǔ shēnyuǎn.

Ever since the age of nine she had been performing this ritual every morning without a single lapse, whether the family was at its peak of fortune or hit by hard times. With the passage of time she had become an increasingly devout follower of Allah the Almighty, who was the one and only god to guide her in life. In her solemn and reverent prayers, she found tranquillity and profundity as experienced only by those wholly dedicated to Allah. (p.134)

Based on the narrative above, Huo Da provides a detailed depiction of Jade Girl or Mrs. Han, performing the ritual of prayer. Through this portrayal, the novel not only constructs Jade Girl as a devout Muslim woman but also implicitly introduces readers, particularly non-Muslim audiences, to the everyday practice of Islamic prayer. In this sense, *salat* in the novel serves as a narrative medium through which Islam and its ritual practices are represented within the Chinese context.

Wedding

In the novel, weddings and funerals function as the narrative nexus linking two interwoven storylines in Huo Da's melodrama. These rituals underscore the idea that marriage is not merely an individual choice but a collective affair governed by religious tradition, which is essential for the survival of the Hui as a distinct community. As Ouyang (2014) notes, the depiction of weddings and funerals in this novel connects two intertwined narratives across two generations, using the symbolic imagery of jade and the moon to portray love, tragedy and the unequal relationship between Hui and Han in different historical periods.

In Chapter 10, the wedding ceremony of Han Tianxing and Shu Yan is described in detail, foregrounding Islamic marital rituals. The *ahong* (imam) solemnly presides over the ceremony, requiring both the bride and groom to verbally express their consent in Arabic. Following the exchange of vows, the *ākhūnd* records the marriage by issuing a marriage certificate (*yi-zha-bu*). The bride formally declares, "I give permission" (*danda*), and the groom responds, "I accept" (*gai-bi-erhtu*). The ceremony concludes with communal prayers and congratulations, expressed through the words *ubārik* or *mubāarak*, symbolizing collective recognition and blessing of the marriage

This detailed narration, punctuated by the use of Hui speech and accompanied by explanations of both the similarities and differences between Hui and Han customs, strategically inserts Hui religious history into the broader narrative of Chinese history. At the same time, it marks the Hui as a distinct religious

community with its own ritual system and moral boundaries.

Notably, marriage in the novel is portrayed not as a private matter of individual desire, but as an institution that involves and is regulated by, the entire community. Endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's own ethnic or religious group, functions as a mechanism to preserve cultural identity and reinforce communal boundaries (Rose, 2025). In this sense, marriage becomes an important site for the construction and maintenance of identity. In *Funeral of a Muslim*, this is reflected in the insistence on endogamous marriage, particularly in the forced union between Han Tianxing and a Hui Muslim woman. The character of Mrs. Han, who actively seeks to preserve Islamic boundaries through marital regulation, embodies the community's anxiety over cultural survival and religious assimilation, as reflected in the following dialogue.

楚雁潮未免太天真了，他对伊斯兰教的一知半解毕竟太肤浅了仅仅是“尊重”就够了吗？尊重并不等于信仰，他那一句“不信任任何宗教”就足以使韩太太反感了！“不成，”韩太太面色不悦，“我们穆斯林不能跟‘卡斐尔’做亲！”

Chǔ Yàncháo wèimiǎn tài tiānzhēn le, tā duì Yīslán jiào de yī zhī bàn jiě bìng jìn tài fūqiǎn le, jīnjīn shì “zūnzhòng” jiù gòu le ma? Zūnzhòng bìng bù dèngyú xìnyǎng, tā nà yī jù “bù xìn rěnhé zōngjiào” jiù zúyǐ shǐ Hán Tàitai fǎngǎn le! “Bù chéng,” Hán Tàitai miànsè bù yuè, “wǒmen mùsīlín bùnéng gēn ‘kǎ fěi ěr’ zuò qīn!”

The young teacher was too naive; his smattering knowledge of Islam too superficial. Could "respect" be sufficient? To respect did not mean to believe. His declaration "I don't believe in any religion" was more than enough for Mrs Han. "Utterly impossible!" snapped Mrs Han, making no secret of her displeasure. "We Muslims cannot marry kafirs!" (p.446)

For instance, Mrs. Han confronts Mr. Chu, Moon Girl's teacher, a Chinese Han who is interested in marrying her daughter, by explicitly labeling him a *kāfir* (non-Muslim), thereby asserting religious boundaries that exclude him from the community. Mrs. Han also intervenes in her son's marital choice to prevent him from marrying a Han woman, whom she perceives as a religious outsider. Her actions, including deliberately creating misunderstandings to disrupt the relationship, demonstrate a rigid and strategic enforcement of religious norms. Through these narrative choices, the novel illustrates how Islamic marital rules, particularly the prohibition against marrying non-Muslims, are upheld as

mechanisms for maintaining communal identity within a multiethnic society.

Funeral

There are two funerals depicted in the novel and the funeral of Liang Yiqing in particular provides a detailed illustration of Muslim funerary practices as performed within the Hui community. Huo Da carefully narrates each stage of the burial process, offering readers a rare literary representation of how Islamic funeral rituals are conducted in the Chinese context. This is significant because such practices are seldom described in Chinese novels, especially with this level of ritual specificity.

梁亦清安卧在“埋体匣子”之中，圣洁的白布覆盖着他的全身，蒙蒙的细雨冲洗着亲人们的泪眼。阿訇面朝西方，站在亡人的身旁，为他祈祷，祝愿他一路平安早入天园。速葬、薄葬，是穆斯林的美德，伊斯兰教的葬礼是世界上各种族、各宗教中最简朴的葬礼，没有精美的棺木，没有华贵的寿衣，没有花里胡哨的纸车、纸轿、纸人、纸马，没有旗、锣、伞、扇的仪仗，没有吹吹打打的乐队，也没有漫天抛撒的纸钱……一心归主的穆斯林，不需要任何身外之物来粉饰自己。

Liáng Yìqīng ān wò zài “mái tǐ xiǎzi” zhī zhōng, shèngjié de báibù fùgài zhe tā de quǎnshēn, méngméng de xìyǔ chōngxí zhe qīnrénmen de lèiyǎn. Āhōng miàn cháo xīfāng, zhàn zài wáng rén de shēnpáng, wèi tā qídǎo, zhùyuàn tā yìlù píng’ān zǎo rù Tiānyuán.

Sù zàng, bó zàng, shì mùsīlín de měidé, Yìsīlán jiào de zànglǐ shì shìjiè shàng gè zhōngzú, gè zōngjiào zhōng zuì jiǎnpǔ de zànglǐ, méiyǒu jīngměi de guānmù, méiyǒu huáguì de shòuyī, méiyǒu huālǐ húshào de zhǐ chē, zhǐ jiào, zhǐ rén, zhǐ mǎ, méiyǒu qí, luó, sǎn, shàn de yǐzhàng, méiyǒu chuīchuī dǎdǎ de yuèduì, yě méiyǒu màntiān pāosǎ de zhǐqián. Yìxīn guī zhǔ de mùsīlín, bù xūyào rènhe shēnwài zhī wù lái fěnsì zìjǐ.

Liang lay peacefully in state in his coffin, covered from head to foot with a hallowed white shroud. In the drizzling rain, his family stood tearfully beside him, facing west, while the ahong, censer in hand, walked three times around the coffin and then intoned four prayers.

A speedy and simple burial is considered a virtue of the Muslims. Among funeral rites of all races and religions in the world, none is simpler than the Islamic, in which there are no fanciful coffins, no extravagant burial clothes, no colourful paper carriages, sedan chairs, figures and horses; no processional banners, umbrellas and fans; no band, no paper money to scatter into the air and all around. Single-minded about returning to the fold of Allah, Muslims have no use for embellishments of any kind (p.149)

In this passage, Huo Da subtly highlights the contrast between Islamic funeral practices and traditional Chinese funerary customs. While many

traditional Chinese funerals involve ritual elements such as burning paper money, musical performances and other symbolic offerings for the deceased, the Muslim funeral in the novel is depicted as simple and solemn. The Hui Muslim community remains committed to Islamic principles, carrying out the burial according to Islamic rites without incorporating additional Chinese cultural practices such as paper burning.

This detailed portrayal is meaningful because it allows readers to see how Islamic funeral rituals are practiced within the Chinese context. This narrative is in line with Jonathan Lipman, who states that although intermarriage has made Hui Muslims physically similar to Han populations, their continued adherence to Islamic practices and shared historical memory enables them to maintain a distinct identity (Lipman, 2004). Thus, the absence of Chinese ritual elements in the funeral scene reflects an effort to preserve Islamic distinctiveness and reinforces Hui Muslim identity through religious practice. Thus, the absence of Chinese ritual elements in the funeral scene reflects an effort to maintain Islamic distinctiveness and reinforces Hui Muslim identity through religious practice.

The title of the novel “Funeral of a Muslim” also highlights the profound significance of funeral rituals within the narrative. As noted by Lee, the term “Huihui” (回回) is not merely a designation for Muslims in China, but also a symbolic expression of Islamic belief and identity. The character 回 (Huí), meaning “to return,” conveys the Islamic concept of death as a return to Allah, the source of life (Lee, 2018). In this sense, Hui Muslims may understand themselves as individuals who ultimately “return” to God through a life guided by religious principles.

At the same time, these funeral scenes do more than illustrate religious doctrine, they reveal how Islamic beliefs are embedded in the lived experiences of Hui Muslims. Through communal participation in burial rites, the novel highlights how identity is collectively affirmed and reproduced. This is also reflected in the final scene, where Teacher Chu, as a Han Chinese, can only observe Moon Girl’s funeral from a distance. Death, therefore, becomes a crucial moment in which individual life, religious belief and community identity converge.

Furthermore, the emphasis on “return” subtly reinforces the continuity between life and faith: just as Hui Muslims live according to Islamic principles,

they are ultimately brought back to God through death. In this way, the novel uses the theme of death not only to deepen its narrative impact, but also to articulate a broader representation of Hui Muslim identity as one grounded in both spiritual belief and communal practice. Through the lens of funerals, Huo Da foregrounds the central values of Islamic life, offering readers a deeper understanding of Hui cultural and religious identity while simultaneously enriching the novel's narrative impact.

CONCLUSION

Through this analysis, the novel can be understood as incorporating a range of Islamic rituals to represent the religious life of Hui Muslims. As Islamic rituals play a central role in constructing Muslim identity through embodied practices. This perspective is reflected in the novel's depiction of religious rituals, which offer insight or reflection into the lived experiences of Hui Muslims.

However, the novel does not present an idealized or wholly normative image of Islam or its followers. Several characters act in ways that contradict Islamic moral principles, engaging in illicit relationships or making morally ambiguous decisions shaped by concerns over family honor and interactions with other ethnic groups. However, through this portrayal, the novel ultimately reveals Hui Muslim identity as dynamic and continuously negotiated.

The coexistence of religious practices and deviations from Islamic norms suggests that Hui identity is shaped not only by religious ideals, but also by identity negotiation and socio-political context, such as family expectations, community norms, state policies and ethnic background. This interpretation aligns with the theory proposed by Gladney, who argues that the construction of Hui identity is "a process of dialogical interaction between self-perceived notions of identity and sociopolitical contexts, often defined by the state".

The complexity of Huo Da's novel is what makes it so compelling. As one of the most influential minority novels to receive national recognition and wide commercial success in China, it occupies a significant position in contemporary Chinese literature. Rather than offering a simplified portrayal of Hui Muslim life, the novel presents a nuanced and human depiction of faith as something deeply intertwined with identity, family and survival.

Significantly, even Bing Xin, one of China's famous female writers, wrote an introduction to the novel and offered high praise for it. She stated that the novel has emotional depth, cultural richness and a sincere portrayal of Hui Muslim life, recognizing it as a meaningful contribution to contemporary Chinese literature. This recognition further affirms the novel's literary value and its importance as a bridge between cultures. In our view, the novel plays an important role in helping readers better understand Islam in China, particularly within the Hui community. The novel does more than represent a minority culture, it opens a space for dialogue about religion, ethnicity and belonging in Chinese society.

REFERENCES

- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (2nd ed.). Manchester University Press.
- Chen, L. (2015). *Tragic Color of History of a Chinese Muslim Family*. Information Science and Management Engineering. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0006026003520354>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Da, H. (2009). *The Jade King* (1st edition). Foreign Language Press.
- Dillon, M. (2015). *China's Muslim Hui community: Migration, settlement and sects* (9th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315027265>.
- Gladney, D. C. (2004). *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities and Other Subaltern Subjects*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Gladney, D. C. (2020). *Muslim Chinese: ethnic nationalism in the People's Republic* (Vol. 149). Brill.
- Goossaert, V., & Palmer, D. A. (2011). *The religious question in modern China*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage Publications.
- Hidayat, M. A. (2017). *Ibadat, the body and identity: Islamic rituals and the construction of Muslim identity*. *The Journal of Society and Media*, 1(2), 1–17.
- Huoda. (2022). *Musilin de zangli* [Funeral of a Muslim]. Beijing: Beijing shi yue wenyi chubanshe.

- Lee, Y. L. E. (2018). Genealogical explorations of “Hui 回” identity and secularity: Social-historical studies on identification of Muslims in late and post-imperial China. Master’s thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Lipman, J. (2004). *White Cakes, Oil Cakes, and Common Blood: The Hui in Contemporary China*. Governing China’s Multiethnic Frontiers. Ed. Rossabi, Morris. University of Washington Press.
- Lipman, J. (2011). *Familiar strangers: a history of Muslims in Northwest China*. University of Washington Press. Chicago.
- Nara, M. (2024). Caring for piety: Doing Muslim among Hui people in contemporary China. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 13(2), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2025.2555077>.
- Ouyang, W.-c. (2014). The Qur’an and identity in contemporary Chinese fiction. *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 16(3), 62–83. Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2014.0166>.
- Rose, S. (2025). Endogamy and religious boundaries in a transnational context—The case of Knanaya Christians in North America. *Religions*, 16(10), 1242. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101242>.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Wenjiang, Y. (2006). Huizu xingcheng de lishi renlei xue jiedu [A Historical-Anthropological Interpretation of The Formation of the Hui Ethnic Group], *Minzu Yanjiu*, 2006(4), 45–55.
- Zhang, B. (2019), Negotiating Muslim and Hui Identities: Mosques, Policies, the Entanglement of Religion and Ethnicity, *The Gallatin Research Journal*. <https://wp.nyu.edu/compass/2019/12/08/negotiating-muslim-and-hui-identities-mosques-policies-the-entanglement-of-religion-and-ethnicity/>.