Performing Differences: Negotiating a Muslim Minority’s Space in China

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

Beginning with the introduction of a staged performance from the 2012 Chinese Spring Festival Gala, this thesis will apply the theory of “performance” to address how a Chinese Muslim minority, known as “Hui people,” perform their “Huiness” in the midst of the Chinese majority. In other words, how do people from Hui communities perform their communal characteristics folklorically and by doing so differentiate themselves from the majority “Han” Chinese. Alternatively, this thesis will also interrogate what folk ideas the Han tend to draw on to mark out difference between themselves and the Hui. This paper intends to answer a question, how does the performance of difference become a dynamic for negotiating spaces within a society shared by both Hui and majority Chinese people, keeping in mind that the boundary is always blurred. In Chapter One, I will unpack two of my own personal experience narratives and an ethnographic account of my own, to try to arrive at a multilayered understanding of how a Hui attribute – abstinence from pork – that is foregrounded both by the Huizu and the Han majority plays a role, positive or negative, in majority Chinese people’s understanding of Huiness and their daily interactions with Hui people. In Chapter Two, I turn to an object, the “pitcher” that appeared in the staged performance from the Spring Festival Gala to show that even if it is drawn upon as a performative tool in daily life as on stage, the meanings it conveys are far more complex than a simplified sign of Hui.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father.
Acknowledgement

First I would offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Professor Sabra Webber, without whom this thesis would never have been completed. Professor Webber is my mentor, who led me into the world of folklore research; she is also the one who helped me in theory, terminology and English language in my thesis writing. Professor Webber is always glad to read my thesis and share her opinions, and supported me in my writing with her patience and knowledge while allowing me the space of working in my own way.

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Performing Differences: Negotiating a Muslim Minority’s space in China

As suggested in the title, this thesis will address how a Chinese Muslim minority, known as “Hui people,” perform their “Huiness” in the midst of the Chinese majority, the Han people. In other words, how do people from Hui communities perform their communal characteristics folklorically and by doing so differentiate themselves from the majority “Han” Chinese. Alternatively, what folk ideas (units of world view) the Han tend to draw on to mark out difference between themselves and this “other,” the Hui. This paper intends to answer a question, how does the performance of difference become a dynamic for negotiating spaces within a society shared by both Hui and majority Chinese people, keeping in mind that the boundary is always blurred.

Introduction –

As one Hui ethnologist put it to me, “We Hui don’t sing, we don’t dance, but we’re still ethnic!” — Dru Gladney
Before we get into any analysis, I will bring a stage performance to my readers from the 2012 Chinese Spring Festival Gala (Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui in Chinese) as a starting point for our ethnic journey: ¹

On January twenty second, 2012, at 8:00 pm, the annual Spring Festival Gala started its live-telecast by Chinese Central Television and some provincial TV stations to billions of television sets all over China. Comedic banter,³ magic shows and singing and dancing… all sorts of performances were broadcast to entertain the assumed audience within and outside China.

As the Spring Festival is such a harmonious and enjoyable event, everyone should celebrate it and be happy; minority people must not be excluded. As a result, exhibiting ethnic diversity in this celebration has become “traditional.” If desired, one can always find at least one such show, usually featuring singing and dancing, in every year’s Spring Festival Gala. Dancers or singers (or both) dressed in Disneyfied minority costumes perform in order to amuse the “studio audience, who appeared to be largely members of the Han majority” (Gladney 1994:96).

The 2012 Gala went on. At around 00:01 January twenty third, 2012, right after the New Year Bell Ringing Ritual that is a tradition in this Gala, a dancing show was on: Beauty in the Chinese Style.⁴ This spectacle, a typical singing and dancing portion of Galas, lasted in 2012 for about 3 minutes 52 seconds. The tune was quite joyful and quick.

¹ The description followed is based on the video shown on TV, which is available on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIJWZLgo32E&feature=channel [2012-4-11]
² “Spring” according to the Chinese calendar, begins officially somewhere in the second half of January or early February.
³ “Xiang sheng” in Chinese, also translated as crosstalk. This performance is mainly presented by two people, a main talker and a helper, standing on the stage exchanging jokes to entertain people.
⁴ English versions of all items of the 2012 Spring Festival Gala can be found at: http://english.cntv.cn/special/2012springfestival/live/index.shtml [2012-4-11]
In the first scene we could see dancers wearing the colorful, though somewhat too shiny and stereotypical, minority costumes happily jumping around on stage with their arms swinging; the dancers were on screen for about 23 seconds. After that the camera switched to the singers. At 1:04 dancers came into sight again and this time with the leading dancers being featured one by one. Sadly enough, since the segment lacked an introduction, it was a little bit difficult for me to tell exactly who is representing which minority, but I could still identify some by means of their costumes. At around 1:47 of the performance, after a young Mongolian woman’s solo, a maiden dressed in blue and wearing a hijab surrounded by a bunch of other hijabed maidens rushed out from the background, each one of them carrying a golden pitcher on her head. Their dance lasted for about 12 seconds and was abruptly interrupted by a group of Tibetan boys swinging their long sleeves. After that a seemingly Uygur gentleman and a lady wearing a southern minority costume appeared on stage. At about 3:06 the camera position switched and this time some twenty small children wearing different ethnic costumes came in sight. Later on when the show was approaching its end, the camera shot from above, so we could count the people dancing or just standing on stage – about 60 to 80 children and adults. So there is reason for me to assume, albeit with no definitive evidence, that for each of the fifty-five officially recognized Chinese Minorities, there was a representative on stage. The camera panned over the audience members several times, as they were politely clapping to the beat, wearing nice “normal clothes,” adults and children: for instances from 1:28 to 1:31 and from 3:12 to 3:13. [end show]
The hijabed pitcher-on-head maidens in this show were representing the ethnic minority that I am planning to study in this research, the “Hui.”

Dru Gladney (1994:95) described a similar though not as detailed scene in the gala of the Spring Festival of 1991 in which minority people danced and sung greetings of the New Year in their own languages, and he actually pointed out Hui people in a footnote:

“Although the Hui do not possess their own separate language and are known for eschewing the ‘songs and dances’ by which many minorities are iconographically represented in China (see Gladney1991:21-30), in this program they sing and dance like the rest of the performers. Instead of detailed lyrics from a traditional New Year’s folksong (of which there are none), the Hui sing their traditional Arabic greeting A'salam Alei Cum (peace be with you), over and over. The Chinese subtitles translated this formulaic greeting as ‘Pengyou Nihao’ (Friend, hello).”

My readers must have been confused by my self-contradictory statements: if Hui people eschew the songs and dances, why are they found on stage singing and dancing?

I argue that despite “celebrating diversity,” another function of this sort of event is actually to perform minority differences on stage, stereotypically and arbitrarily marking minority groups one by one. And indeed this performed distinction is arbitrary. As Edward Said (2004:54) observed, the “imaginative geography of the ‘our land – barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction.”

Through government-sanctioned performance on such shows, all minority people are

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5 During the writing of this thesis, I found out that the main director of the 2012 Gala Ms. Ha Wen is an alleged “Hui” person. I think this phenomenon is interesting and worth noticing and I feel obliged to inform my readers. But as I am only using this show as an introduction to my thesis and this nuance could not be studied without interviewing Ms. Ha
indiscriminately marked as “good at singing and dancing (neng ge shan wu in Chinese, a “good” label pasted on minorities)” even those people, like Hui, who are not especially fond of singing and dancing. Noteworthy here is that the performers dancing and singing on stage are not even necessarily really from minorities; it is entirely possible in any particular performance that some are from the majority Han people but wear colorful costumes and perform (or appropriate for one evening) the differences of minorities on stage. In other words, not only minority people are marked in general by means of a handful of performers’ staging, there is even a possibility that those minorities are represented by non-minority people. Thus we can understand such staged “performances” as a powerful dynamic differentiating minorities in many superficial ways.

The highlighted characteristics of Hui minority on stage were: hijab, pitcher and Arabic language. Nevertheless, these attributes differentiating Hui people from other people are suspect: the “ethnicity” of Hui people or their “Huiness” is actually not always evident in the world beyond the stage. In daily life, as stated earlier and also in Gladney’s footnote, Hui people do not particularly sing and dance more than majority Chinese people; they do not always exhibit exoticism or difference by singing and dancing as minority people are expected to. Rather, Hui live dispersed in different regions of China and the differences among them “are far wider than their distinctions from the non-Hui among whom they live” (Gladney 2003:152). Some Hui females do not wear hijab, not everyone uses pitchers today and not every Hui person knows Arabic greetings. In other words, the Hui do not fulfill the special “singing-dancing throng” requirement to render

Wen and knowing more about the producing of this gala (which is not the focus of this thesis), I will not further discuss it here. Anyway, in a state sanctioned gala, even if the director has her/his own opinions, s/he may not have the freedom to present them in the show.
This confused Gladney (1991:98) when he first commenced his fieldwork in China. He writes, “As one Hui ethnologist put it to me, ‘We Hui don’t sing, we don’t dance, but we’re still ethnic!’ How was I to find, let alone describe in classical ethnographic fashion, this people who supposedly lacked any special cultural characteristics?”

However, after his impressive fieldwork led in the late 1980s in mainly four Chinese communities of whom the residents are considered mostly Hui, Gladney found an answer to his own question: he found that the Hui in those communities defined themselves by shared Muslimness, genealogical descent, traditions such as the pork taboo, and/or ethnic endogamy. Other scholars as well offer other possible criteria for the identification of Hui.7

These endeavors successfully broke the mystery of collective “ethnic” identity imposed on the Hui, offering an opportunity for subsequent scholars to think and rethink different ways of expressing or representing Hui as a group differing from other peoples living in China while simultaneously avoiding arbitrarily rendering them homogeneous. 8

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6 Other minorities do not necessarily fulfill this image either, but my focus is the Hui.

7 For instance Maris Gillette (2000:30, 52, 83) mentioned the interesting role played by residential area and Islamicized time table in expressing oneself as Hui, which is not limited in Xi’an, where Gillette did her fieldwork, but is not uncommon in other Chinese Hui communities. Governmental labeling and political concerns also play an indispensable role in deciding who should be considered as Hui, and defining how non-Hui are to understand Hui people. For detailed analyses, see Harrell 1995; Gladney 1991 & 2004; Lipman 1997 and Gillette 2000.

8 A problem is also brought by this questioning. As scholars think that Hui are not homogeneous, some of them questioned the legitimacy of using the meaning-loaded name “Hui” to address this group of people. Scholars as Lipman (1997) and Gladney (1991) have suggested that the term “Hui” is too ambiguous and offered constructive alternatives of the term such as “Sinophone Muslims” and “Muslim Chinese.” I will however stay with this term in my research. Because first, these alternatives are themselves problematic, as not all Sinophone Muslims/Muslim Chinese are Hui, they could be Han people converted to Islam or people from other Muslim minorities; second, the name “Hui” has been the local term used to identify this group of people since an indefinable timeframe and now the term Hui is accepted with some caveats by both the people inside this group and outside of it. For unmarked Chinese people, or the Han people, no matter they celebrate Hui or not, they have endowed this term with rich layers of meaning so that merely the mention of it is visceral and inspiring multiple sentiments, positive and negative. Hui people’s image as a whole could always convey a to-some-extent heterogenic meaning in daily life. As Lipman observed, Hui are “strangers” in their own homeland (1997:215, 226), or an Other within (Bauman and Briggs 2003). Albeit “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (Simone Weil 1987,
In my thesis, therefore, I would view this “identification” process from another perspective: that of performance as defined by certain linguistic anthropologists and folklorists.

To analyze performance, this research will draw on the notion of performance defined by Dell Hymes as “an attribute of any behavior, if the doer accepts or has imputed to him responsibility for being evaluated in regard to it” (Hymes 1973 in Goffman 1974:124n). This notion has been developed by Erving Goffman, Richard Bauman, Dennis Tedlock and other scholars in order to interpret phenomena in the fields of social behaviors and expressive culture. Bauman (2002:93) pointed out that “Notions of performance—as communicative practice, as an artful way of speaking—were becoming increasingly salient as conceptual and empirical frames of reference and as grounds for the intellectual rapprochement between linguistic anthropology and folklore … ” (emphasis added). And “Goffman had begun to study the organization of conduct, including talk, in face-to-face interaction with methods that were both anthropological and influenced by social psychology” (Keating 2001:286).

Albeit perfunctory, the stage-performed differences are actually “good to think” (in the Lévi-Straussian sense) and this restricted notion of performance did provide me an excellent initial point from which to launch research on Hui performance in everyday life.9 Juxtaposing the performance on stage with Hui practice of expressive culture within everyday life, I came to understand the performative dimension of Hui ethnicity and how Hui performance is and is not essentially Hui.

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All performances are to a certain extent communicative by definition because they, if performed well, “mean” in important and multi-layered ways for the performer who hopes then to persuade an audience to share or at least acknowledge his or her perspective. Similarly, any communication may be designed to be performative in terms of artfully fulfilling social functions, such as exhibiting friendlessness and sociability, offensiveness or hostility aesthetically. This duality has been well addressed by scholars as Goffman (1959) and Bauman (1984, 2002).  

Besides, performance does not merely provide a means of communicative interaction; it is likewise a place from which social structure and “realities” are expected to emerge. In the staged event, minority people are portrayed as attractive, joyful, active and enthusiastic with all their colorful costumes and “their” small children showing up. Although these attributes are not at all necessarily passive, they portray minorities as feminine, sexually attractive, child-like, closer to nature, and pre-modern compared to the unmarked, majority Chinese people sitting in the audience (Harrell 1995, Gladney 1994). The distinction between the exotic costumes of the performers and the sophisticated dress of audience members suggests this, as does the emphasis on rural maidens going to fetch water with their pitchers and in their peasant costumes. By constantly performing these attributes on stage, stereotypes are created, reified and become rooted in people’s minds if they do not know well any minority Chinese. Unlike stage performance, real face-to-

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10 Goffman writes, “A ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (1959:15); while Bauman (1984:11) added, “performance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication” (emphasis original), and as cited above, “Notions of performance—as communicative practice, as an artful way of speaking—were becoming increasingly salient as conceptual and empirical frames of reference and as grounds for the intellectual rapprochement between linguistic anthropology and folklore … ” (Bauman 2002:93).

11 As I said, these people are not necessarily really from minorities so the children standing on stage are not necessarily from minorities.
face interaction necessarily happens in a space more related to people’s quotidian lives. Performance both in its restricted and broad definitions has the potential to create social realities and negotiate spaces of different social groups, in my case to construct and deconstruct the space of Hui people in the quotidian setting, where they have the opportunity to negotiate agency expressively.

In this thesis, therefore, I will plunge from the stage of Spring Festival Gala and dive into the sea of folklore or expressive culture to see how Huiness is “performed” in everyday life. I try to consider as many aspects as possible, such that my selected data allow me to analyze the performances of Hui people’s differences done by both majority Chinese people and Hui people themselves. In Chapter One, I will unpack and interrogate two of my personal experience narratives and an ethnographic account of my own, to try to arrive at a multilayered understanding of how a Hui attribute – abstinence from pork – that is foregrounded both by the Huizu and the Han majority plays a role, positive or negative, in majority Chinese people’s understanding of Huiness and their daily interactions with Hui people. Pork abstinence does not manifest on stage, of course, but as described earlier, the pitcher does. Therefore in Chapter Two, I turn to the very same “pitcher” that appeared in the staged performance to show that even if it is drawn upon as a performative tool in daily life as on stage, the meanings it conveys are far more complex than a simplified sign of Hui.

The concept of performance, restricted or broad, thus provides me a new lens through which one example of the Hui people’s self-expression and imposed-identification – that have been studied by many scholars as a central feature of their “ethnic” attributes – can be revisited and re-read. Being put into the framework of “performance,” I suggest,
identifying and analyzing certain events on the borderlands of Huiness and Han-ness as expressive culture allows for new insights into the motivations and sociocultural meanings of these events and situated negotiations between Hui and Han of shared cultural spaces. My research can thus converse with previous work done on how Hui people’s “identities” are constructed. In other words, to study performance could enrich our knowledge about why and how Hui people are “different” from majority Han Chinese people; how they are marked or mark themselves by the performance of their differences; and how their spaces are negotiated in places they share with majority Chinese people. By doing so, however, I do not intend to draw any generalized conclusion that would risk rendering the Hui homogeneous, create a new grand narrative for them. Rather, I would just focus on my own data and offer some of the ways how Huiness is presented in these data.

Nonetheless, by applying the framework of performance, I do expect to contribute a new angle to how students of folklore/expressive culture use performance to rejuvenate the old topic of “differentiating” and “othering,” and how “performance” itself could be complicated and contextualized.

In summary, performance in its broader notion is not only the way some Hui people’s differences are unintentionally conveyed, but also the way these differences are intentionally constructed or manipulated in social life, in order to negotiate the “boundary” of different spaces occupied by Hui and majority Chinese. In other words, in most conditions, what is the “Truth” with a capital “T” is not important, but how to creatively negotiate a social reality is. As Keating (2001:194) argues, “A main tenet of ethnographers of communication is of course that language practices [and, I would add
other practices as well] are not only culturally specific, but a central locus for the creation and transmission of culture.” (For relevant analysis see also Bauman 1984:43.)

At the end of this introduction, I would like to foreground a disturbing but inescapable issue: objectivity. Positioning of researchers in the group in question has always been a phantom lingering in fieldworkers’ nightmares. In this research specifically, I have to confess, that to question the author’s detachment or even neutrality is justified. As aforementioned, most of my data are related to personal experiences; and myself is from the group being analyzed, the Hui people. It seems that there is no way to circumvent subjectivity. So what can I do?

Instead of obsessing about a nonexistent objectivity, I would elaborate and make use of my subjectivity. By elaborating I mean that I acknowledge that I am not an outsider watching these performances taking place but a performer, and sometimes even a key performer, a dynamic making things happen. In this case, I would not only analyze myself as a participant in some of the data where I am present, but also mention my thoughts or even feelings in these events, so that my readers might “go backstage” with me and “see what lies behind the finished performance” (Powdermaker 1966:15 in Reed-Danahay 2007:413). Secondly, by informing my readers of my attachment to the group being studied, I want to be open to any critiques of my work to help me see what an insider may not easily notice, and I want my readers to have their own ideas about to what extent my research might be “biased” by my emotions.

More specifically, in Chapter One when analyzing my personal experiences as data, one problem that I should address is the “me” in any of these experiences. The “me” in
the events that happened can only be represented by the “me” in my narrative based on my memories, and when I analyze these narratives, another “me” speaking as an analyzer is embedded in this thesis. How can I cope with these layers of self with the consciousness that the remembered event is unresuscitatable while still vividly discernible in my “fictionalized” memorial narrative and analysis?

I argue that although some of my narratives are “cultural representation based on memory and emotional attachment” (Mullen 2000: 210), the fact that these narratives are not “accurate” accounts does not lower their value of being analyzed as data. In fact, as these memories have been reflected for many times in my mind and complicated by my subjectivity, they can provide more complex and thorough accounts, not of the events that “really” happened, but of the emotions, consciousness and my existence as a participant in these events. And these elements are the ones that are pushing me not to eschew analyzing my own role as a participant in these events, but to treat the “me” as one participant-informant, try to elaborate the subjectivity, recall all the details that could influence the outcome of the events rather than to look back in the history at an unrecoverable younger self while still appreciating all the subjective opinions it then may bear. After all, what is “Truth” is not my concern, but to learn how people use what they believe or even what they do not necessarily believe to construct a social truth/space is my purpose.

By analyzing “a description in terms of the emotional content of an experience” (Krieger 1991:50-1 in Reed-Danahay 2007:412-3), I hope to reiterate the notion that “personal, autobiographical modes of writing are vital for knowledge production in the social sciences” (ibid 2007:412). My readers can thus have their own judgment on the
influence of all the emotional elements – such as ire and desperation – and the narrative based on my memories some of which are from more than 15 years ago, on my analysis.
Chapter 1: The Pork Thing, Personal Experience Stories from the Past

In this chapter I intend to share three experiences from my childhood. All the three pieces are related to the Hui people’s, as Muslims, presumed abstinence from eating pork. There are two reasons for me to single out the pork taboo in Hui experience. First, meat is theorized to be a kind of food that “bears more symbolic meaning than other foods” (Gillette 2000:116). Certainly, the very act of abstention from a certain kind of meat, say pork, tends to be a topic of conversation both for those who abstain and those who eat this meat, as Fabre-Vassas (1997:5) pointed out in the introduction to The Singular Beast. The pork taboo, is part of an ethnographical territory that has been studied and debated frequently “by historians of religion and anthropologists: that of understanding prohibitions, in particular alimentary prohibitions.” Second, in China in particular, “not eating pork” is one of the most foregrounded external practices marking a difference because pork is the main meat dish for most majority Chinese people or the Han people. Thus, many of the Hui people’s tensions with Han people revolve around this “pork thing.” I will venture to say that pork thing really is the most foregrounded feature of Hui people for Han, and in many Hui people’s own understandings of being a Hui.12 As Dru Gladney (2004:112) observed, “during my three years of field research in China, the

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12 For other “marked” peoples, the foremost marker of Hui-ness can be different. For instance, for Uyghur people, another Muslim “minority” living within the boundary of China, the Hui’s most central attribute or image is that they are tricksters crossing boundaries between the marked and unmarked groups. “Some Uyghur people think that a Hui could just take off his white hat (a symbolic costume of a Hui male) to become a Han.” – folklorist Elise Anderson specializing in the field of Uyghur study told me during the 2012 IU-OSU folklore conference.
primary distinction noted between the two peoples was pork avoidance. … Many Chinese stories ridicule the Muslims for their Islamic customs, which seem strange to the Chinese, particularly the pork taboo.” And he further noticed that the pork taboo is the primary distinction noted between Hui and Han, and these “not always kind” stories tend to explain Hui’s abstaining from pork by concurring to Sir James Frazer’s definition of taboo, assuming that they don’t eat pork “out of filial respect for their ancestors” (ibid 113).

All the conversations reported here in situational context are translated from Chinese to English; as it is impossible for me to recall every detail in the events and every word that the participants used, these are memory pieces as they have emerged after fifteen or so years of thinking about and recounting the incidents.

*Experience I: Your ancestors are pigs!*

*Setting:* On the schoolyard of my elementary school.

*Participants:* Three elementary school children, including one from the Han majority (10 or 11 years old), two from the Hui (me, about 10 years old; an acquaintance of about 10 or 11 years old).

*Scene:* When I was about 10 years old, there was once a quarrel between one of my Han classmates and me.¹³ The quarrel didn’t start out to be about pork; it was another issue that had nothing to do with pork, religion, or “ethnicity,” but then for some reason it escalated to pork. I, however, have forgotten what the trigger was. Conflict in words

¹³ As I remember this event took place when I was in the fourth or fifth year of elementary school, I went to school when I was 6, so I was about 10 years old then. I consulted my mother about this event, and she said although she cannot be very sure when the event happened, as that was the only fight I had in elementary school and the fight was a little bit “ethnic,” she could still recall the story I told her when I got home.
elevated to conflict in body; my classmate was taller than me, so he clutched my neck so I couldn’t reach him, then he said: “Do you know why the Hui people do not eat pork? Because your ancestors are pigs!” I was so angry that I tried to kick him. Dramatically, another Hui student in my class passed by, and I yelled to him, “He said the Hui people’s ancestors are pigs, help me to beat him up!” The classmate fighting with me turned to the Hui passer-by and said, “No, I just mean his (meaning my) ancestors are pigs, not yours.” Then that Hui passer-by nodded and left! I was desperate and I yelled: “We are all Hui people! My ancestors are yours!” But he wouldn’t listen to me. I have forgotten when the fight ended or how.

Experience II: That is not true.

Setting: In the change room of a natatorium.

Participants: Three teenage boys, including me (about 14 years old), another two boys whom I did not know, but they were most likely Han Chinese.

Scene: During the summer vacation when I was about 14 years old, I attended swimming lessons.\(^\text{14}\) One day, after the lesson ended, I was changing clothes in the changing room of the natatorium, when I happened to overhear a dialogue between two boys changing beside me. Boy A: “Do you know why the Hui people (\textit{Huimin} in Chinese) do not eat pork?” Boy B: “No. Why?” Boy A: “Their ancestors are pigs!” Boy B: “Really?!” I intervened in the dialogue at this point: “That is not true.” The two boys turned to gaze at me. Me: “The Hui people do not eat pork because they think pigs are dirty. We have it in the Qur’an.” The two boys still gazed at me and seemed to be confused. Me: “I am a Hui

\(^\text{14}\) I attended the swimming lessons in my second year of middle school, when I was 14 years old.
person (Huimin)." I then stepped back to go on putting on my clothes. The two boys exchanged a look and run quickly out in their poolside slippers, without changing into street shoes.

Experience III: It is all clean.

Setting: In my parents’ apartment.15

Participants: My mother, a Hui, and Aunt Yang, or Grandma Wu, both Han.

Scene: Actually this experience is not just one piece, but something that could be called a recurrent theme in the relationship between my family and two of our neighbors, Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu.16 Both of them are Han, but they are aware that my parents and I are Hui Muslims or at least we define ourselves as Hui Muslims with the caveat that criteria for identifying either a Hui or a Muslim are open to negotiation. Here I merely describe one occasion that I could recall most vividly and briefly mention the other, similar, relevant experiences.

When I was an undergraduate student studying in Beijing, I went home during a vacation. One day I was idling around and someone knocked on the door. My mother answered the door, and there was Aunt Yang bringing us some food, some stuffed wheat cakes baked in a pan (bing, in Chinese). My mother and Aunt Yang greeted each other and talked for a while in the doorway, and Aunt Yang said, “Here are some baked wheat

15 In China, most “non-rural” people do not have their own independent houses but live in apartments, so the notion of “neighborhood” in China is not the same as that of American society: the Chinese one is more interactive and public no matter whether one appreciates the intimacy of living in close quarters or not. A building normally includes many households. My parents live in an apartment on the third floor of an old 6-story building, and each story contains 4 households. Aunt Yang lives nearby, on the same floor as we do and Grandma Wu lives on the fifth floor. Our apartment is a poorly designed 750 square feet apartment with three rooms in a line, plus one bathroom and one kitchen. We use the middle room as living/meeting room and my parents and I occupy the other two rooms as bedrooms. There is a very narrow doorway connecting the living/bedrooms area and the bathroom/kitchen area.

16 In Chinese speaking societies it is courtesy to address even unrelated people using kinship terms according to their ages.
cakes I made stuffed with kidney beans, and I scrubbed the pan before I cooked, it is all clean (dou shi jiejing de in Chinese).”

Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu are both talented cooks who always generously share their food with us, and as I recall, all the food was vegetarian. Sometimes they tell my mother that they have scrubbed their pans or pots or even cleaned them with boiling water before cooking, and sometimes they don’t. For both sides however (my family and our neighbor), the disclaimer became a redundancy after awhile because we trust them and assume that they must have cleaned their cooking utensils well beforehand.

Analysis:

I will analyze each event on its own first and then try to see if they relate differently or more complexly when put into conversation one with the others. In analyzing these personal experiences, I will apply the Hymesian model of “components of speech” (Hymes 1972: 59; Keating 2001:290) i.e. “the concern with describing setting (time and place, physical circumstances) and scene (psychological setting), purpose (functions and goals), speech styles and genres, and participants (including speaker, addressee, hearer, addressee), as well as the interrelationships among them” (Keating 2001:290) represented as a whole by the “SPEAKING” mnemonic code word. Though not every piece of the data being analyzed need to pertain to every or any single aspect in the model, and not every important (to me) dimension of the narratives is spoken, still these elements present a reasonable way to think about a storied event as performance. I will also adopt the notion of keying of events introduced by Hymes and developed by Goffman and Bauman (Goffman 1974; Bauman 1984).
I would like to argue that the context “created jointly by the participants” (Briggs 1986:25) has critical influence on the development of the whole speech event and in the creation of boundary and space. By comparing these experiences, I would further suggest that the way by which certain text is performed is crucial in eliciting different reactions and interactions from addressee or hearer, and that responses of these addressees or audience members during the performance altered its outcome.

In E(I), the setting was on the schoolyard of an elementary school, a public space for a small community: school children and teachers/staff. As I cannot recall the presence of any adult then, it was probably after school or during the free time of physical education course: those are both times when children are running around participating in all kinds of activities while adults became temporarily invisible, and only at these times could children express their “other sides,” real but always muted by disciplines.

The participants of this event were only the three of us: I, the other Hui student, and the Han student who was having a fight with me. As he was actually bullying me, I will get my revenge 20 years too late by referring to him as the Bully. The other Hui student will be called the Passerby. At first, as I recall, no one uttered one word, maybe it was because of the fight, during a fight there was really not so many opportunity to “speak.” After a while, however, Bully managed to get the better of me, he clutched my neck so that I could not move, and then he jeered, “your ancestors are pigs.”

What can we learn from this performance? What is the way the message is conveyed (see Bauman 1984:11-13)? Two observations should be made: First of all, Bully chose to utter the insult intentionally for a specific situation: when winning the fight. Secondly,
Bully used the insult more because he “enjoyed” it than he needed it since he was already winning. To further articulate, Bully had known for a long time that I am a Hui, and he knew the folk belief that “Hui do not eat pork because their ancestors are pigs” but until that day he did not ask me for confirmation or mention it to me. Either he took it for real, or he knew that it is offensive, I do not know. But at the moment he said that, his “purpose” was definitely to use it as an offense. As he had already had the upper hand in a physical conflict, the insult could only help him with one more thing: to get mental upper hand as a bonus. If he had not insulted me, the whole event could be considered as a normal fight between two children, but once the insult is brought up, a re-evaluation is required. Physical violence practiced on me thus became a justification and a context of his final insult. To put it another way, his utterance of insult, or, the “speech act” thus found a powerful conveyer, the physical violence. In other words, Bully consciously constituted his “schema corporel” in the performance (Hanks 1996:254). He inscribed on the event a particular body schema that helped us understand the performance as “this is not play.” By using a violent and offensive way to deliver the information to me, by his tones, twisted face and actions, in one word the “paralinguistic features,” Bully made sure that I could not mis-key his performance as annoying but playful make-believe, (Goffman 1974:45, 311) or an exchange of trivial knowledge as the two boys in E(II) were doing, or a confirmation of untenable reason about Hui people’s abstinence from pork… no, at the time when he uttered the speech, the ordinary “fight” between two school children was seasoned by ethnic discrimination or even became itself. He elevated

17 When I was in elementary school in the afternoon the school forcibly sold snacks to the students. For Han students the snack would be all kinds of ham and a piece of steam bread, but for Hui students the ham will be switched to “fish ham.” So at the very beginning of school, a teacher would ask his/her class who are Hui people. And the “ethnicity” is thus marked. So all the students in one class know who are “different.”
up the difference between us by his performative gesture of clutching my neck and the verbal insult: your ancestors are pigs, but ours are not, I have the upper hand but you don’t. I was thus marked as from the swinelike people, a people differ from his group. The boundary between us was, at that very moment, about to be inevitably established, and the swine-space vs. human-space was about to be distinguished, but…

A dramatic scene suddenly changed everything: Passerby passed by. He was not a participant of the former speech event in which Bully was the addressor and I was the addressee, Passerby was not even a hearer, or an over-hearer. Roles of participants changed for the first time during the whole fighting event, at the moment Passerby appeared, because I endeavored to co-opt him from a carefree school child to a participant of an “ethnicity” related speech event or even a fight.

“He said Hui people’s ancestors are pigs, help me to beat him up!” Now I was the addressor and speaker and Passerby was the addressee, and former addressor Bully became a hearer. Though I was irritated by Bully’s word, I have no intention of magnifying or embellishing my motivation of calling for help to the extent of defending my own people or religion. I was expecting a helping hand because I could do nothing to punish Bully for bullying me and insulting me, more practically, I wanted to get rid of the neck-clutching hand. I kicked him two or three times, but that did not hurt him enough to let go my neck. Therefore, I believe that Passerby read our gestural language well, and he understood my message: at first glance I thought he was about to throw himself on Bully to help me. Nonetheless… “No, I just mean his (addressing me) ancestors are pigs, not yours,” said Bully the Trickster.
Before any actual reaction could be observed from my addressee Passerby, the roles of participants changed for the second time: hearer Bully hijacked my speech and became an addressor again, but his addressee was dubious this time. He was definitely addressing Passerby in order to appease him, but he could have addressed me at the same time as a warning that we were not settled up.

In either case, however, Bully keyed the whole performance (Goffman 1979:45, 159): he mocked-up the “ethnic discrimination” as an ordinary fight between two school children. He decided to direct the insult only to me, the person who was really having some “issue” with him rather than to Hui people. Instead of being a miniature of “interethnic conflict” as what Passerby and I firstly understood, the issue became “personal” all of a sudden. Bully wittily reframed his former argument and replaced “Hui people” with “his” (i.e. the author’s) ancestors only thus successfully re-drawing the boundary between Hui and Han peoples, which had almost been fixed before the involvement of Passerby. Somehow, and somewhat illogically, the space of swinedom was restrained within my family, without being expanded to include all the Hui people.

The motivation or end of Bully’s speech was not difficult to be detected. He was trying to circumvent a situation that Chinese people call “being assailed from front and rear” and he managed to achieve the goal.

In this newly emerged speech act i.e. the transformation of swinedom, as he had already decided to lie, Bully could have simply denied that he had ever uttered the insult, but he chose an insinuation to stay with his insult. He was gambling his fortune. There is a saying among Hui people that “All Hui under Heaven are one family” (tian xia Huihui shi yijia, translated by Gladney, in 1991:415). If Bully confessed that he was calling my
ancestors pigs, that was a reason good enough for some Hui people to get involved because we share the same ancestors, and that was what I felt at that time, especially when I saw that Passerby nodded his approval of Bully’s quibble.

“We are all Hui people! My ancestors are yours!” I yelled, in vain. Passerby turned out to be only a passerby. At this moment the roles of participants changed for one last time (the third time). I was trying to restore the former keying of Bully’s performance to elevate it to a discrimination against minority people, but my addressee Passerby did not follow my interpretation.

My “difference” was articulated by Bully’s activities. The process of differentiation was not merely a speech “your ancestors are pigs,” it is completed by the whole performance, the way the message was conveyed. As mentioned above, the fight did not start about ethnicity, but it ends with it—or maybe not. The discrimination was not necessary in the fight, but it found its way into this event. What is the reason? When in a peaceful or normal situation, Bully and I were classmates, only once every day when the snack was delivered would I be marked temporarily as “other” (see footnote 17). My difference was unarticulated, yet ever existent. The fight thus became a situation for this kind of differentiating speech to emerge. In an extreme, violent scene, I was pushed to be called different. Physical violation was justified by my difference: if “you” are not part of “us,” there would be plenty of reasons to beat you. A counter-ethnic space was carved out of publicly shared multiethnic space. Bully was, intentionally or unintentionally, marking his space as an unmarked person and highlighting my space as some place belonging to pigs. More accurately put, he was trying to do so, because later he was forced urgently to negotiate his space to welcome Passerby, although reluctantly. People, even children,
manipulate spaces to include whom they accept and exile whom they do not celebrate. For me as a Hui student it is especially true, because I am almost invisible, my space thus becomes permeable, my appearance bearable. But as I said, Hui people are always waiting to be pushed to the frontier, to be differentiated. Therefore, once the situation changes, a conflict arises, no matter whether it is a tension over “ethnicity” or not, the result may be a singling out “ethnic” difference.

In E(I), the fight was in the schoolyard of an elementary school; this mini society included every element, or rather, germ of every element of adult society, so it is important to recognize that hints of all the ugly prejudices and scabrous encounters could be found in there, no matter how trivial they might seem. Children themselves, such as Bully, may not be aware that they were doing was “discrimination,” but I am sure that Bully was aware of the fact that “pig” is not a good thing to call people’s ancestors, even for Han people. Besides, resonating with Goldstein’s (1971) notion of “inactive tradition bearer,” Bully had the folk belief in his repertory, but saved it to *that* very moment when he found a proper time and audience i.e. fighting with a Hui person (me). This situation activated that part of his repertoire, and changed the belief from a text to a performed piece of folklore in a context created by both of us. I have to reiterate here that it was the performance rather than the mere utterance of that folk belief which infuriated me, if the information was conveyed in other ways, I might not have felt offended to such an extent. Experience II offered a different sort of performance of this folk belief.

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18 Pigs, together with dogs, are deemed as a dirty, indolent, greedy... in one word, disgusting animals in Chinese culture. There is a Chinese idiom to distain or condemn a person: “*zhu gou bu ru*” means, literally, “worse than pigs and dogs.”

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The setting of E(II) was in the shared big changing room of a natatorium, a public space where private (such as taking off and changing clothes) and semi-private (such as talking between acquaintances) occurred. This setting meant that on the one hand, any conversation happened between any people, if loud enough, could be overheard by other people, in other words, the audience for a conversation is not fixed, so it is less possible that these conversations would touch topics sensitive or offensive to other people; on the other hand, out of the consideration of privacy, courtesy and avoidance of trouble, people always take care of their own business rather than unnecessarily getting involved in a conversation not directly addressed to them. Besides, that was a summer vacation swimming course for children, so most people in that changing room were teenagers and some smaller kids. I was minding my own business in the changing room then, changing into street clothes, when I overheard the conversation about “Hui people’s ancestors are pigs so they do not eat pork.” Boy A addressing Boy B was trying to explain the reason for the Hui people’s pork avoidance. One difference between E(II) and E(I) is that, in E(II) Boy A did not use that piece of folk belief directly as insulting. I didn’t believe that he was making an ethnic joke or intentionally insulting Hui people because of the way he performed the folk belief. He did not use a joking tone when he was telling the belief, and there was no obvious Hui person around. Additionally, his final reaction (running away from me) confirmed my assumption that he was not the kind of person to boldly confront other people. Moreover, the pig ancestor topic was not a long discussion; I believe that the two boys’ purpose of conversation was just to exchange some trivial knowledge to show friendliness and Boy A happened to have this piece of folklore in his mind.
That was why I suggested at the end of analyzing E(I) that the framing of a speech event alters how a performance is received. In contrast to my ire in E(I), this time although I did feel offended, I felt as well a strong impulse to educate those two boys A and B. As a result, given the fact that I do feel embarrassed about talking to strangers half naked, I obeyed my impulse to speak up.

Roles of participants in this speech event changed at the point I intervened, and the basic rules and atmosphere of this conversation thus changed correspondingly. One moment it was a happy conversation between two teenaged acquaintances that perhaps were just getting to know each other and enjoying their newly established friendship, but after my interference the atmosphere became oppressive. My intervention was not expected by any means. I, as the other children who were not part of that conversation in the changing room, was supposed to keep silent, put on my street clothes and leave: in one word, dis-attend. It seems that even the theorist mentor does not encourage my intervention: in his study of differences “between actual face to face interaction and that kind of interaction when staged as part of a play,” Goffman (1974:143) pointed out that “In actual face-to-face talk between two persons who have a settled relation to each other, …if a conversation between the two is occurring in the immediate presence of others who are not participants, then these others are likely to be disattending much of what is occurring between the pair, providing only that the two are “behaving natural,” that is, unfurtively and in accordance with the setting” (emphasis added). The original two participants were behaving naturally; they were actually performing a natural conversation, fulfilling a responsibility between acquaintances – being social. Their conversation was in accordance with the setting, and as stated above, they might not be
aware of the sensitivity of their topic to some, or they did not believe that they would be so unlucky that their talking about Hui people might be overheard by a Hui, but things happen.

I stepped forward to stop this irresponsible transmission of a made up rumor insulting my ethnic group – at least I thought I did so at that time, but I really doubt the effectiveness of my education now. The addresser changed then in the speech event: the former addressee became the new addressor: the performance became mine; the whole event became a multilayered performance. Instead of being an ordinary listener, I was behaving as an “active hearer.” I then performed another speech act seriously, because my purpose was “to stop the rumor.” The two boys A and B were confused, and as addressees, their reaction was non-verbal. The silent and confused gaze from boys A and B was read by me as an invitation to further explanation. As I had nothing to add about the reason for Hui people’s pork taboo, I continued to explain the source of my knowledge, i.e. my status of being a Hui myself. “I am a Hui person,” I said.

Still no verbal reaction. I stepped back to continue putting on my outfit. The atmosphere was embarrassing; I don’t know what I was anticipating then, but now when I recall the experience, I think maybe I was looking forward to an apology for misunderstanding people like me. I saw that Boys A and B exchanged a look, and they quickly withdrew from my sight in their pool slippers. I have no definite answer to the question of why they ran away from me, but I would suggest that their hastened departure after my abrupt intrusion into their conversation and their learning that I was a Hui person pertains to another stereotype of Hui people.
Historically, violence as a stereotype has been applied to Muslims living in China and continuously referred to in all kinds of discourses since the Ming Dynasty, and this tradition had been passed down (for instance, see Lipman 1997:55, 99, 104; Gladney 1991: 21-2). The Hui people, as part of the posterity of the Muslims living in China, inherited this tag of being violent from their ancestors. A vivid instance was offered in Gladney’s research: since the time of the Yuan Dynasty, the Oxen Street in Beijing has been known as a Hui gathering place “where Han rarely dared to walk alone” (1991:175). As the purpose of this article is not to review the whole violence history of Hui people, I think this short paragraph is enough to make a point clear, that the stereotype of Hui people’s being violent is not new. And as this point serves as a background for some of my other arguments, it will become elaborated by analyses and instances used in other sections of this article.

In fact, in my interruption I was being a bit “violent.” As aforementioned, the two boys were acting naturally and in a space as a changing room where most people (including me and the two boys) were half naked so to interrupt any conversation could arouse a sense of violating privacy more easily than in other settings where people are fully dressed. Besides, as I was upset and eager to “teach” these two boys, I was not being so polite; my reader must have noticed that I didn’t say anything like “excuse me” when I was trying to interrupt the conversation, but rather just violently cut off their conversation. Therefore, even though I was not so irritated and my tone – at least sounded to me – was an “education is education” tone without any offensive language; even though after I got no reaction from them, I stepped back and attended to my own business; and even though my physical appearance is not aggressive at all since I am only
about 5.5 inches and less than 121 pounds now, still I intruded into their natural conversation. My being aggressive might possibly have reinforced another existing stereotype in the boys’ mind – that Hui people are violent. If my musings are correct and the two boys had that stereotype in mind, the whole story becomes more interesting. As my readers have noticed, in the second speech event after my intervention there was a lack of verbal reaction from the audience or addressees. However, they did help create meaning out of my speech. In his analysis of epic singing, Foley (1991:11) recognized Hymes’s analysis on the importance of a “referential system” in Native American storytelling and went on to say that “The referential system supporting a traditional version or text is such that: what impinges, as distinguished from what is denoted explicitly, is enormously greater than our literary training would lead us to expect.” Of course Foley and Hymes were addressing orality as a performance genre, I argue that any “performance,” such as E(II), could bear referential meanings as well. Thus, the term “Hui,” could carry the conventional connotation of “violent” here. Therefore, even though Boys A and B did not give any verbal feedback to my utterance, it could be assumed that they have the stereotype that a Hui might turn violent and dangerous. Within this context, my mildly aggressive act of interjecting my monologue combined with their stereotype of Hui propensity for violence might explain their running away; they were relating a previously gained knowledge to the current situation, and made a reasonable decision. Here I would venture to expand Briggs’s (1986:14) argument on oral history interviews that all speech events “produce a dialogue between past and present” (emphasis original), such as in E(II) where not all of the “dialogue” is actually vocalized.
The boys’ non-verbal reaction as well requires addressing. Boys A and B might be frightened, but they did not exhibit an attitude of acceptance, that is why I said I doubt the effectiveness of my educating. Silence creates space as utterance does. Silence is a resistance, a gesture to show distance and uncooperativeness in this experience. By not reacting verbally to my speech, the boys were actually reacting in another way. They might not be intentionally “disattending,” but their performing silence could be a gesture of saying, “no thanks, we are fine and don’t want to be educated.” And their withdrawal, so obvious a flight, was marking the boundary between us, my space was thus transformed within part of the public changing room from an assumed Han space to an invasive Hui territory from which two presumed Han were routed. Although at that moment among all the little kids in that room, only the three of us were aware of a kind of difference or scission, the hiatus between two groups (Hui and Han) was unconsciously and to some extent ironically highlighted by my effort to remove the misunderstanding and mend the rift, which required, in the beginning, invasion of the two youths’ space. My progressive behavior ended up being schismogenetic, which was beyond of my expectation. However, progressive changes of behavioral patterns according to different contexts do bring progressive results which are integrative for two different groups, as I will show in E(III).

E(III) is much less tense – although not free of tension as I will manifest – than the other two personal experiences I have narrated. Participants in E(III) are endeavoring to establish a sort of harmony, or, following Bateson’s (2000:68) notion of symmetrical or
complementary differentiations of behavior patterns, making progressive changes to their behavior patterns in reaction to behaviors of people in a different group. 19

The setting of E(III) is my family apartment. Ours is the only Hui household in that building but we have been living there for 22 years without any ethnicity-related conflict with our neighbors. Nonetheless, our difference always acts as a background in the interaction between neighbors, but no more than that. Ordinarily our difference is not foregrounded and neighbors, especially with our presence, do not talk about it too much. The reason of our ethnicity’s low presence in our daily interaction may be that after living with us for a long period, our Han neighbors realized that we are normal people like them, and there is no necessity to touch on this topic at all.

However, when it comes to food, this difference inevitably is highlighted. As mentioned, “not eating pork” is one of the most noticed indicators of being a Hui person. At the same time, food gifting is a most commonly used way of showing friendliness and sociability in many human societies. Thence if the food is from a Han person to a Hui person, its legitimacy is in question. For, if the food is cooked in a Han household, it is almost undoubtedly haram: its ingredients are suspect, especially that meat might be pork; even if it is acceptable meat such as beef, lamb and chicken, these animals may not be ritually slaughtered; even if the food is vegetarian, the utensils used during cooking were almost always used to cook haram food and unfortunately contaminated by it, … in brief, food from Han people may not be trustworthy. However, there is still one more gap to be

19 According to Bateson (2000:67), “Our first task is to study the relationships obtaining between groups of individuals with differentiated behavior patterns, and later to consider what light these relationships throw upon what are more usually called ‘contacts.’”
filled before we can bridge “cleanness” and the Muslim foodways/self-expression.\textsuperscript{20} The reason why people, Hui people in particular, Muslims in China in general, and even some unmarked Chinese People like Aunt Yang would address halal food as “clean” is to a great extent due to the Chinese adjective for Islamic and Halal: \textit{qing zhen}. This adjective consists of two Chinese characters, the first one \textit{qing} means, literally, “clean, clear, transparent, etc.;” while the second one \textit{zhen} means literally “true, real, clear, etc.” Therefore, the Chinese adjective for Islamic and Halal is related to the idea of “cleanness.” E(III) is based on this whole set of assumptions.\textsuperscript{21}

For me, Aunt Yang’s visits are always related to food. Every time she came, she would follow a routine or pattern of behaviors (a small performance of polite behavior). When she came to our apartment, she would stand in the narrow doorway, and my mother would as well routinely react to her behavior i.e. asking Aunt Yang to really come in, have a sit and chat, and maybe offering a cup of tea. Normally these activities are part of courtesy and could be considered as mere greetings, so Aunt Yang seldom came farther in than the doorway. I would show up, if being at home, and “address her” meaning address her by “Aunt Yang” or simply “Aunt” as a kind of greeting, and sometimes my father would show up and say hello as well. After that I would resume my business, or she would ask me several questions such as how are your studies going. Normally our conversation (between Aunt Yang and my family) was not so impressive.

\textsuperscript{20} This is a vague concept; one will find that it is even indefinable, because the reading of this foodways/identification meaning of a pitcher-sign relies on the fact that who are the interpreters of the sign, in other words, who are the “participants” of a performance.

\textsuperscript{21} Actually Hui people’s notions of the haram-ness of food differ. According to my experience, interview with Akhund Wang Guanming and also Gladney’s book (1991), although Hui people who do care about halal food (for there are people whose ID cards say “Hui” but behave as Han Chinese and do not care anything related to Hui) all agree that “purely” halal food is definitely the best choice, if there were no “purely” halal food available, some people think that as long as the food contains no pork, it is acceptable; some people think that if the food contains no meat but only fish and/or vegetables, it is acceptable; and some other people think any food if it is not one hundred percent halal, it is not edible.
for me to memorize, but one special sentence or a pattern of performance is constantly repeated in her food gifting visits: to claim the food as “clean (jiejing in Chinese).”

At first consideration, this expression may be confusing if no referentiality is present. Why the claim to offer “clean” food? Why would people ever gift “unclean” food? Recalling the earlier discussion on the relationship between cleanness and halal food, this confusion can be properly addressed. What “clean” bears in this context is not the word’s literal meaning, but a figurative meaning (Bauman 1984). Cleanness here does not mean not contaminated by dirt, but not “contaminated” by pork, or any haram-ness in general.

Differentiating notions of “cleanness” in interethnic food gifting (Han vs. Hui in this case) is a hybrid of Bateson’s (2000:68) symmetrical differentiation and complementary differentiation; the former means groups are sharing “the same aspirations and the same behavior patterns, but are differentiated in the orientation of these patterns.” While the latter means “the behavior and aspirations of the members of the two groups are fundamentally different” (ibid). Bateson (2000:70) himself likewise admitted the possible combination of these two categories of behavioral patterns in real inter group communication: “It is possible that, actually, no healthy equilibrated relationship between two groups is either purely symmetrical or purely complementary, but that very relationship contains elements of the other type.” Hui and Han people share the same living space and the differences between their behavior patterns, as cited from Gladney, are in fact less obvious than those among Hui people living in different areas, and to some extent they share the same aspirations and behavior. Apparently, however, as long

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22 The relationship between Hui foodways, “halal” and “cleanness” will likewise be addressed in next chapter.
As halal food is still a concern of some Hui households (like mine), their aspiration and behavior would be different from those of unmarked Han people, albeit not so “fundamentally.”

As a result, the notion of cleanness changes when being used to address different people. Cleanness could mere mean “not dirty” when used within either group (Hui and Han); it could mean “not containing pork” when used among Hui people; nonetheless, when used between two groups, its meaning changed to “no pork and no dirt” and especially focuses on “no pork” for that it is presumed that no one would ever gift unhygienic food to show sociability. Moreover, due to the possible dispute over the way in which animals were slaughtered, the food gifted by Aunt Yang (and Grandma Wu) is not merely “pork free,” but it never contains any animal protein; it is always vegetarian. Thus Aunt Yang’s use of “cleanness” in E(III) does not mean that she thinks of the food she was cooking and eating everyday as insanitary but the food she was gifting to us as “clean;” she was only adjusting her behavior and language, using the notion of cleanness which differs from its daily use to persuade my mother that the food is edible/halal for us. Her specifying the stuff in the wheaten cakes (“stuffed with kidney beans”) is to assure my mother that although you cannot see the inside of the cakes, their hidden inside is just smashed and seasoned beans, so don’t worry.

Next sentence of Aunt Yang’s claim is even more interesting. She said: “I scrubbed the pan before I cooked, …” I would argue that this “scrubbing” is not a normal “scrubbing” but a ceremonial one. The meaning of scrubbing a pan is closely related to the meaning of “cleanness.” Just as “clean” does not mean “hygienic” in this context but means “not polluted by pork,” the scrubbing activity of Aunt Yang is to scrub the residue
of “pork” (or other non-halal food) off the pan. This residue does not necessarily exist; it could be an imaginary remainder of last cooking of pork that exists only in the memory of the cook. By scrubbing the pan however, this imaginary residue was made real, and the boundary between real and imagined cleanness blurred. During the scrubbing, the activity of cleaning pots and pans could actually be keyed as a process of “Islamizing” the cooking area, or at least the pans. A halal space was carved out from a Han household, even it is only as big as a pan.23 At the same time, when the cakes were brought into our apartment, placed on the table, a Han or unmarked Chinese space was left and celebrated by Hui people (my family).

As the setting of E(III) is in my parents’ apartment, a private space; besides, as we have abstinence and the food gifting’s end is us, it is “we” who have the right to set the rules, and we decide what kind of food is acceptable in our space. Aunt Yang’s performance confirmed this spatial domination. Her standing in the narrow doorway, her claim or disclaimer, her scrubbing the pan before cooking those cakes… all that context showed her willingness to create a space for “us” or “our” food in her household temporarily and to change her behavioral patterns to demonstrate respect for our ethnic/religious differences, and her unwillingness to violate our space. In response, we carved out a space for her modified foodways in our apartment to show our appreciation and thankfulness.

To compare my three accounts, firstly, “differences” are performed by both peoples, Hui and majority Chinese. In E(I) for instance, Bully highlighted the difference between

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23 The idea “pot as space” is from my supervisor Professor Sabra Webber during our discussion.
us; In E(II), I stepped in to articulate my own difference after the boys performed Hui’s difference, and in E(III) our neighbors performed Hui’s difference by differentiating the food gifted to my family. Secondly, during each performance, the participants’ different ways of conveying messages created different contexts and thus could result in different reactions from other participants. As Briggs (1986:25) observed: “… along with nonverbal components, they are the very stuff of which the context is constructed,” and “Contexts are interpretive frames that are constructed by the participants in the course of the discourse” (ibid 12). To be specific, different performance of the same text “Hui people do not eat pork because their ancestors are pigs” could be keyed differently. In E(I) the way of Bully’s utterance decided that he was insulting another participant i.e. me, and using the folk belief although he did not necessarily confess to its truthfulness. In E(II), however, Boys A and B were using the belief as a way of being social, and its usage has nothing to do with me as they were not aware that I am a Hui. Thence my reactions to their speeches differ.

Moreover, even in one performance, participants perceive the same event differently. Differences in understanding one speech event or performance, however, do not mean that some of the participants were “mis” understanding. Mannheim and Tedlock (1995:13) wrote that the interpretation of the event by the participants is influenced by: formal linguistic devices they use, the structure of the performance as a certain kind of social event, the social positions of participants and the specificity of participants. For instance, in E(I), Passerby understood Bully’s insult as personal but not “ethnic,” because he had not fully participated in the previous events; he was only a passerby; he himself might not have wanted to risk his relation with Bully; nonetheless, because of different
contextual knowledge gained from previous dialogues and actions, for me it was an ethnic and personal insult. In E(II), the two boys were exchanging trivial knowledge and being social, but because of my social position, for me their performance was a misinterpretation of “my people” and could be an insult.

To compare E(I) E(II) as a group and E(III), I would return to an aforementioned assumption that though E(III) is not as tense as the other two experiences analyzed in this chapter, there is still a tension in this event that must be dealt with. I argue that the tension in E(III) is not articulated but silenced, not aggravated but relieved. For that as long as two groups of people are still differentiated in some regard, there is a tension between them during contact. In E(I) and E(II), the tension was aggravated because some participants such as Bully and the two boys A and B in these events were showing a schismogenetic behavioral pattern in reaction to Hui’s abstinence from pork. Within their own group, if someone refuses to eat something, it is normal to consider the activity as a personal preference but people seldom relate it to forefathers and “totemic prestation” (Gladney 2003:116). I personally know some people do not eat beef or lamb but only eat pork and chicken, but I don’t know any secret rumor that their ancestors were close relatives of cows or goats. Another instance, some people in China eat dogs, but I didn’t hear them calling those who do not eat dogs “descendants of dogs.” Whereas when it comes to another group, the pork taboo is related to insulting beliefs that this group of people feels a filial piety to that animal. In E(III), on the contrary, the tension between two groups is released because in reaction to our group’s activity, Aunt Yang (and Grandma Wu) changed their behavioral or language pattern in a progressive way: instead of sticking with their own understanding of what should be clean and edible food and
regarding Hui’s pork avoidance as weird or needing explanation, they use the same judgment on what is clean food as Hui people use when communicating with a Hui person (my mother). As a result, although the difference still lingers in the background and acts as a context of their conversation, it is not singled out as a way of discrimination, but respected or even celebrated as “diversity.” In that case the tension is lessened. Of course, as discussed in analysis of E(II), sometimes progressive effort from one participant could unexpectedly result to schismogenetic results and further differentiate two groups.

Concerning spatial negotiation – physical, non-physical or both – between two groups of people in this chapter, I suggest that although spaces could be intentionally carved out by some activities, it is really difficult to draw a clear boundary between spaces occupied by different groups of people. I will illustrate this argument in two steps.

First, according to Edward Said, there is a “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’” (2004:54). In other words, the self-identification of one group of people depends on the othering of other groups of people. In this chapter, Bully and boys A and B tried to draw a boundary between their and my spaces by performing our distinctions. Of course, there are differences between these two sorts of boundary drawing: in E(I) Bully performed the difference in a violent way and as he got the better of me, he was consciously manipulating the boundary to his advantage. For the boys in E(II), carving out our and their spaces was not their main concern when Boy A was performing the folk belief, but after my intervention or marking myself as a Hui, their flight from me was actually a conscious activity of drawing a boundary. But this time, thanks to existence of
a violent stereotype, I was holding an “upper hand” so that the boys withdrew physically from my “space” in the changing room, but, sadly, I don’t know whether they still keep swinedom as Hui space in their thoughts.

With these in mind, I will argue that although In E(I) and E(II) Hui and unmarked Chinese spaces, especially imaginary ones, were pushed by some participants (Bully and Boys A and B) to be separated, in fact the separation or disjunction of Hui and non-Hui spaces could never be observed. In other words, Hui and unmarked Chinese people do not “occupy ‘naturally’ discontinuous spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:33). In E(I) Bully had to put Passerby in a vague marginal area i.e. to address his ancestors as pigs when fighting with me while secretly negotiated Passerby out of the swinedom in order to avoid another combatant; and in E(II) when the boys didn’t know that I was a Hui, we were actually sharing the same physical space, whereas after our conversation, a breach appeared. Needless to say that in China, generally all the Hui and unmarked people are actually to some extent sharing the same space. Merging spaces in E(III) is even more obvious; as mentioned above, the Hui and unmarked Chinese spaces, both physical and imaginary ones, were actually consciously merged and became a yin-yang symbol: they could be observed within each other and finally met what Bateson called a healthy equilibrium – the ritualized food-sharing transcending while not ignoring, and perhaps even appreciating, difference.

In this chapter I mainly presented how majority Chinese people highlight Hui people’s difference in both schismogenetic and progressive ways by either performing the insulting folk belief or showing respect for Hui’s pork taboo in food gifting. And I argue that Hui people are pushed to be differentiated by these performances but their spaces
constructed in the process of performance are negotiable because the Hui and Han (Majority Chinese) spaces are always intertwined to some extent and sometimes people intentionally manipulate the boundary of spaces to include or exclude certain subjects.

In the next chapter I will introduce some ways by which Hui people themselves perform their differences and try to find out how they negotiate their own space boundaries and how the intertwined spaces presented in this chapter influence Hui people’s space construction.
Chapter 2 Pitcherdom, Water Testing Vendors

In the stage performance described at the beginning of this article, the young ladies from Hui (or rather, dressed as Hui) came out with pitchers on their heads. Pitcher-on-head-girl is such a ubiquitous romantic image that the audience easily conjures up images such as Rebecca and Eliezer painted by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, or any of hundreds of similar representations of exotic village maidens carrying pitchers to draw water from the well. Of course Chinese audience members do not have to be familiar with the theme of “Rebecca at the well” to find the scene exotic and “Hui” girls rural and close to nature: as aforementioned, exhibiting “ethnic diversity” is one of the purposes of this dance, and that means performing exoticism in dress, music, and dance. I do not know any Hui people who carry anything on their heads these days, so that part of performance is suspect, to me, the pitcher on stage simply performs Hui’s “difference.”

In real Hui life, the pitcher is called a tang ping hu in Chinese.\(^{24}\) The three Chinese characters mean “hot water,” “pitcher” and “bottle” respectively, but as the shape of this “bottle” is more like a pitcher, I will refer to this tang ping hu as “pitcher” hereafter. This kind of pitcher is made of metal, wood or plastic,\(^{25}\) sometimes decorated by Arabic

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\(^{24}\) For what a pitcher now looks like, please refer to Picture 1.

\(^{25}\) According to Mr. Jin who sells Muslim daily necessities outside the Great South Mosque of Jinan (Jinan Qing Zhen Nan Da Si) on Eid I-Fitr, 2011-8-31: “when I was young, the pitchers were made from iron, but now, they are plastic.”
calligraphy, mostly Quranic Surahs. They are used by Chinese Muslims, especially the people of Hui for performing ablutions before prayer; the metal ones were likewise used to boil water to make tea, and people also use them as decorations as well.\(^{26}\) Another common usage of a pitcher, which is my focus in this chapter, is to use it as a sign to declare that the vendors are Muslim.\(^{27}\)

The pitcher sign is mostly hung in/outside a restaurant or on a vendor’s stall selling “fast” food, to tell people that the food is halal, following Muslim dietary rules. According to Bai (2009:81), “Due to the common use of Tang Ping Hu pitcher in Muslims’ religious life and daily life, it gradually became a special sign of “qing zhen.”\(^{28}\)

In towns or villages, most restaurants, food stalls, snack stands run by Hui people have pitchers drawn or carved on the board-signs or curtain-signs with Arabic scripts.” Akhund Wang Guanming of the Great South Mosque of Jinan City (Jinnan Qingzhen Nan Da Si) told me that in the past, Hui vendors used to carry beef, lamb or cakes on shoulder poles, and on one side of the pole, they would also hang a tang ping hu pitcher.

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\(^{26}\) The folk etymology of the name “tang ping hu” for the pitcher, according to Mr. Ma Xinci, Chairman of the Nan da si Mosque Management Committee, can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. He says that the pitcher was first invented by craftsmen of Tang Dynasty, and when it was transported through the Silk Route to the Western Area (xi yu in Chinese literally means “Western Area” in Chinese, but this word is especially used in ancient Chinese literature to refer to Near East and Central Asia, the area through which Islam was believed to have first arrived in China). The “xi yu ren” i.e. people of the West named it “tang ping,” meaning “pitcher from Tang (Dynasty),” and because the “People from the West” are Hui people’s forefathers, this name was inherited by the Hui. Gradually however, the character “tang” in “Tang Dynasty” changed into another phonetically similar character in Chinese: “tang” meaning “hot water,” and this is why this kind of pitcher is called “tang ping hu.”

\(^{27}\) To analyze a pitcher as a sign, I draw my support from semiotics, but this is not the main methodology of this research, so I put this part of clarification in footnote. “Each kind in its own particular way imitates, depicts, reflects that of which it is an iconic sign” is a definition given by Pelc (1986: 7), and according to Ransdell (1986: 52), a sign is “anything… which is that, if one responds to it properly, it will thereby reveal – disclose, make manifest, make apparent, make experientially present or available – something about something.” In short, a sign could be defined as something representing something else, no matter in which aspect or via which way: a sign is a representation. Thus, I venture to say that the pitcher could well fulfill the function of being a “sign.” Because the pitcher is always directly displayed or printed on hardboards to be hanged on the door of a Hui family’s households, outside a Muslim restaurant, or even on a vendor’s cart to clarify that the users’ are “Hui Muslims” or the food being sold is halal. This is to say, the purpose of having a pitcher or its picture shown is to make it represent Hui Muslims’ religious self-expression, foodways, or even themselves as a unity.

\(^{28}\) As aforementioned, Qing zhen means Islam or halal in Chinese.
In the past, people used real pitchers and sometimes they printed or drew the image of a pitcher on a piece of paper or aboard to show their “Huiness.” The board-sign has become more common in these days.\(^{29}\) To relate this usage to my main argument, the pitcher or pitcher-sign is used by Hui people to “perform” their differences, thus to negotiate a space for their halal foodways and thus for themselves as well.

Picture 1: a plastic pitcher being sold out side the Great South Mosque of Jinan. It is dyed golden to mimic a metal tincture. Photo: Zhao.

\(^{29}\) For how a pitcher board sign is used see Picture 2.
To analyze a sign in the framework of performance could be confusing, but following Goffman’s (1959:15) definition of performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants,” although the sign itself could not hardly fit into the frame of “performance,” it may have a performative potential, and the action of selling food under such a sign or showing a sign in the first place by no means falls out of the possibility of being analyzed as a “performance.” Besides, although the “sign” here could be seen as part of the “setting” in
Goffman’s sense (1959:22), it actively influenced the whole performance: only under this pitcher sign could the simple action of “selling” be related to “Hui” or “Muslims;” while without the semiotic meaning the sign conveys, the whole “selling food” event will become another performance which has nothing to do with Hui people’s difference. Therefore, I submit that the pitcher itself is foregrounded in performing Huiness, it influences the performance not as a setting passively serves the performers, but as a core object in a performance that could actually be considered as derived from this very object. In this chapter, we could see that the boundary between semiotics and performance merged at a certain point, when the sign is put or shown, i.e. when the addressor of the sign is trying to influence possible participants using the sign, which will be further introduced in paragraphs followed. Thus applying sociolinguistic framework such as performance and semiotics in order for the analysis of the representational and performative dimension of a folk object as a pitcher would be a possible and enjoyable attempt.

*Pitcher and Halal food: does it have water or not?*

In Chapter 1 E(III), Aunt Yang said her food is “clean,” which I heard as “does not contain pork.” The connectedness will be fully elaborated in a pitcher sign marked space. I want to start with another story, one that was told by Akhund Wang Guanming (“W” hereafter) when we were having a chat in his office in the Islamic Religion Association of Jinan on 22nd, June 2011.
**Story: Does it have water or not?**

W: “Some Hui people love to test people’s knowledge; they deliberately test the vendors sometimes. When they see the vendors put out the pitcher, they would ask: ‘does it have water or not?’ on the occasion that the vendors place the pitcher [next to their stalls]. If the vendor says: ‘yes, it has water,’ s/he [the questioner] understands [Islam], but if the vendor says: ‘no, it does not,’ then s/he is a fake one [a fake Muslim].”

Me: “Well, then the pitcher here is a drawing on a board or…”

W: “Yes, a drawing on a board. ‘Having water’ here has another meaning, we Hui Muslims express the idea of ‘having finished the ablutions before prayer’ by saying ‘having water,’ and one who has not yet? Performed ablutions before prayer says s/he ‘does not have water.’ Thus, to ask whether the pitcher has water in it is to ask whether the food is clean.”

Me: “There are two meanings?”

W: “It is *double entendre.*”

Me: “Yes, a *double entendre.*”

**Analysis:**

In order to better understand this story, our first step is to “delineate the ethnosemiotic frameworks of participants in order to analyze the representational functioning of iconic signs” (Rosenstein 2003: 139). As I said, the dominant function of a pitcher is to clean the body before prayer, or to bring “physical cleanliness.” Moreover, there can be a more

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30 The Chinese word for “have” is “you.”
31 Akhund Wang used the Chinese term *shuangguan yu* which means literally “a word has two meanings.”
profound meaning conveyed by the pitcher: as the ablutions, no matter “غسل (ghasl)” or “وضوء (wuḍū’)” are done before prayer, they are religious ceremonies, thus they have another meaning of purification of one’s mind i.e., to bring “mental cleanness” or coming to prayer physically and mentally “cleansed.” Therefore, the pitcher’s dominant function is to bring cleanness, physical and mental. As the function gives birth to sign, one can reasonably infer from the dominant function of the pitcher that the pitcher-image can represent the idea of general “cleanness,” and the pitcher as an iconic sign has the feature of “representing by virtue of its intrinsic character (see Peirce’s notion of “icon,” in Deely 1986:31)” i.e. “cleanness.” But the intrinsic character isn’t decided until it is used to represent “halal food” by someone who is Muslim, it is assigned the cleanness meaning in its performance context. Besides, as stated in Chapter 1, the Chinese term for Islam and halal also bears a meaning of “cleanness,” therefore the connectedness between pitcher and cleanness is further justified.

With this in mind, I will go into the story told by Akhund Wang. As aforementioned, a pitcher is firstly and mainly used as a water receptacle, so it could literally “have water in it” and this is the first meaning in Akhund Wang’s narrative. By the water poured from it, the Hui Muslims make the “غسل (ghasl)” or “وضوء (wuḍū’)” before prayers, or “to have water on the body” in Hui people’s local term, and this is the “another meaning” in Akhund Wang’s narrative.

Again, we could read this story as a multilayered performance or interacting speech events. The first layer of performance is the hanging of pitcher sign. By so doing the vendors became the addressors in a performance or of a sign, and the other people became audience. The purposiveness or end of the vendors was doubtlessly notifying
their prospective customers i.e. Muslim people, or non-Muslim people who celebrate Hui foodways that “I have the food you may want.” However, troublemakers are everywhere. Like “me” “me” in E(II), in this story “some Hui people” are also active addressees/hearers, or more accurately, active watchers. Because in this performance they refuse to act as ordinary addressees who are supposed to recognize the sign and buy (or not buy) the food. Instead of reading the hanging-pitcher-sign performance as an invitation to “have some Hui food,” “some Hui people” nevertheless key the performance mischievously, as a test of the vendor’s religious knowledge. The first layer of performance thus provides them with a motivation and proper context in which to start the second layer of performance: to ask whether the pitcher has water in it or not. Roles of addressor and addressee are switched in the second layer of performance. As this synecdochic or part of whole question is actually shorthand for asking whether the vendors have performed their ablutions, are they familiar with “our” rules? For “some Hui people,” it may have been keyed as a test examining the vendors’ or the new addressees’ qualifications to use a Hui people’s sign.

However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, participants do not understand the same performance in the same way (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995). Therefore, if the vendors were not familiar with the double entendre, they would most probably read the question literally as “is there any water in this pitcher?” and thus inevitably key the question as a joke and think “how could a paper pitcher has water in it?!?” then deny the existence of water, and unfortunately, simultaneously deny their status of being a qualified Hui or Muslim in “some Hui people’s” eyes.
That is why I asked the “then the pitcher here is a drawing on a board or…” question, I wanted to make sure that the question of “does it have water” will not be mis-keyed due to a confusing situation: what if the vendor were using a real pitcher instead of a pitcher sign? In that case a vendor would probably *indeed* put some water in it for drinking or washing, even if s/he is not a Muslim, because the pitcher could be used as a water receptacle in the first place without any religious meanings; under this using-real-pitcher circumstance, when being asked “does it have water or not,” a non-Hui vendor could also respond “yes” without knowing the *double entendre*. Nevertheless, if the “pitcher” in Akhund Wang’s narrative was a paper one, the situation becomes more transparent: if someone does not know the “embedded meaning,” s/he could hardly think of answering “yes, it has water in it.”

Responses from the vendors could finalize the second layer of performance, and interestingly it is an open ended one. These answers are not just answering the question: “does it have water?” Moreover, vendors’ answers are suggesting their social positions of being or not being Muslims, or if being a Muslim, whether they practice Islam or not, as well. As Briggs (1986: 103) wrote: “The unifunctional utterance, one that accomplishes only one communicative function, is rare, at least in conversation. Statements nearly always relate to two or more features of the communicative situation, such as distinct interactional goals, at the same time.” To repeat, if the vendors’ answer was “having water,” they were actually saying that they are familiar with the *double entendre*, or they “understand,” as Akhund Wang put it; and if the vendors’ answer was “having no water,” they were “fake” Muslims, or they do not understand the religious meaning behind the pitcher sign, they are not qualified to sell Muslim food.
Worth noticing is that, “Hui people” who asked the question in the story, as Akhund Wang said, were “testing” the vendors. Thus it is possible that their purposiveness did not include “buying food” at all, although the setting is supposed to be about food. The event is thus not necessarily related to “food,” but to qualifications to sell food.

In fact, from the beginning i.e. showing the pitcher sign, the whole event could be understood as an activity beyond food, or where certain kinds of food are themselves synecdoches for Muslimness and thus a means of performing difference or creating space. When this sign is hanged or shown, the idea of difference becomes explicit and hard to ignore, and “it leads us to ask not merely what these forms mean, but what they do in a network of social relations…” (Mitchell 1994: 423, emphasis added).

As stated earlier, many Hui people do not live in exclusive communities but rather scattered among the unmarked Chinese people, meaning that Hui and non-Hui share the same public sphere. Although a pitcher and/or its picture can be seen in both public spaces and private households, it gains more meanings and can “do” more by being exhibited to a larger audience in public spaces. The pitcher-sign does not merely act as an utterance of special foodways, but becomes a claim of a transition of spaces.

Normally, if we do not consider the “fake Muslims” using “lying signs,” wherever the pitcher-sign is hanged up, it is manifesting a fact that the addressers of this pitcher-sign are from Hui ethnic group, and by “… viewing folklore forms as communicative means” (Bauman 1982:8), sign-readers can understand the massage conveyed by the sign, although different addressees could have different understandings. For the Hui Muslims,

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32 Even if there are some Hui communities, they are either surrounded by or adjacent to non-Muslim communities, and it is possible for non-Muslim Chinese people to enter the Muslim communities and eat in Muslim restaurants. The mingling of Hui people and non-Muslim Chinese people can be observed all around China, especially in Eastern and Southern areas.
to see a pitcher-sign may arouse their sense of belonging. Because pitcherdoms not only remind them their dreamed spiritual homeland, the Arabic-Islamic world that “served as symbolic anchors for dispersed people (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:39)”, but also offered Hui people concrete places where they can practice their own customs and constructed a temporary homeland in Other’s spaces. This “homeland,” though exists in spaces shared with majority Chinese people, is but “ours,” in this homeland space, majority Chinese are relatively rare, so they could be othered by the minority people, the Hui.

For sign readers from majority Chinese people, pitcher sign becomes “an early warning system” (Schwimmer 1986:366-7). We have to notice that this sign is not just simply declare someone’s “being ethnic,” but has its practical function: between two groups living together yet having different, even contradictory customs such as pork taboo vs. taking pork as a main meat dish, to know where is the line is necessary. We can borrow Schwimmer’s analysis on totem plants to say that the pitcher sign “… as icon of identity, goes beyond Sebeok’s notion of identity in one important respect. For identity, as regulatory mechanism, is more especially concerned with the protection of boundaries, with the disconnecting of spaces” (ibid 368, emphases added). To say a pitcher is a sign of Hui people’s self-expression but goes beyond “identity” concerned with boundary protection, because first of all, as aforementioned, it is impossible for two peoples to occupy disconnected spaces: they are always intertwined; secondly, to simply declare “identity” or “ethnicity” is not the purposiveness of the performance of hanging pitcher signs, the end of this activity is in fact to avoid possible trouble brought by different behavioral patterns adopted by different groups of people. Therefore, it is not correct to say that pitcher sign is declaring a space occupied by Hui people and a disconnection of
unmarked Chinese people’s own space, because the sign is presented in a public sphere, and the Hui and unmarked Chinese spaces are originally mixed. Rather, the sign is declaring a “contact zone” (Pratt 1991), and informing the non-Hui people that the codes of conduct in this space will change and they may have to differentiate their behavior patterns (Bateson 2000). For instance, if the non-Muslim Chinese people want to have food in a Muslim restaurant, they had better not bring pork product or carry pork with them, if they want to cross a community densely populated by Muslims, they would be very careful not to carry pork overtly.\(^{33}\) Breaking the rules, whether intentionally or not, would be considered as an offensive provocation or even an invitation of conflict.

In one word, the pitcher-sign can be used as a landmark, indicating the boundaries of the fictitious and relatively vague our space and other’s space. In a pitcherdom, the racial becomes the spatial, and the spatial becomes the racial (Pred 2000).

However, one should always keep Ferguson and Gupta (1997:36) in mind: we cannot simply “map culture onto places and peoples.” Therefore, I would further suggest that, the spatial and the racial are always negotiable. This negotiability is due to several reasons that I would present in following paragraphs.

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\(^{33}\) Two points need to be clarified here. One, the very issue of non-Muslim’s eating in Muslim restaurants is difficult to observe. In most regions of East China, Muslim restaurants welcome non-Muslim customers, but in some places in the North West, a non-Muslim cannot even enter a Muslim restaurant or can only enter it accompanied by a Muslim friend. But the way people tell a person is Muslim or not is just by costume and language, but as I said, some Muslims can greet in Arabic, and some cannot; some Muslim women wear hijabs and some don’t; and for Muslim men there are no common costumes, although some of them would wear small white scull caps as a “Hui” costume. Nonetheless, according to my experience, if non-Muslims know Arabic greetings, they can successfully “steal” into a Muslim restaurant with these greetings, so no one can promise that non-Muslims haven’t entered a Muslim restaurant ever. Moreover, in some places in Southern China, a non-Muslim can even carry pork into a Muslim restaurant, which is intolerable in most Chinese Muslim residences (Gladney 2004). Two, to carry pork “overtly” may sound weird to some people who purchase meat sliced and packed in a bag, but in China, meat can be bought directly from the butchers, so the meat one buys may not be well packed. Besides, some people would buy body parts of pigs, which cannot be hidden very well. There are lots of interesting stories and personal experiences pertain to overt carrying pork or even eating pork in Muslim communities and restaurants, hopefully I could touch on them in another article.
First of all, a lot of vendors did not have settled stalls in the past, they were peddlers carrying goods on shoulder poles or in wheeled pushcart-stalls. Therefore wherever they peddled, the pitcher sign followed them and the boarder of a pitcherdom moved with them as well. The space of Hui thus became physically negotiable and movable.

Secondly, it is interesting to see that some Hui people do not only perform differences to “others” from different groups such as the majority Han people, but likewise perform differences to part of “us,” the Hui vendors. These Hui people do not approve the space created by the vendors’ pitcher signs, or their approval is based on something else, is conditional. That is to say, the differences performed by Hui people are at different levels and they are used to address different groups. In order to create a halal space in a shared public sphere, what one Hui person, such as a vendor, has to do is to hang a pitcher sign. Never the less, in order to further distinguish “real” and “fake” Hui people/Muslims, more meaningful or complicated performance is required, and apparently not every Hui person could perform it, and not every Hui person could understand the performance: to be qualified, one has to be at least familiar with the *double entendre*. Therefore, if we could say that the first layer of performance in the story, i.e. hanging the pitcher sign is a spatial negotiation between different groups of people such as Hui people and majority Han people, the second layer of performance i.e. the *double entendre*, is more a spatial negotiation within the Hui group itself. It is also interesting to think about the purposiveness of these two layers of performance. Although they were both undertaken by Hui people themselves about their own space, layer one was trying to construct a space for Hui/halal food in particular or Hui people in general, while layer two was actually trying to question the legitimacy of the existing space or even deconstruct it. Hui
people do not necessarily always celebrate the existence of Hui spaces, or suspicious Hui spaces, they could negotiate the boundary of their own spaces as well.

Thirdly, in order to thoroughly understand the negotiability of space, we have to consider some “abnormal” situations i.e. “lying signs.” As we saw in the dance described in the Introduction, “pitcher” has become a well-recognized “sign” representing Hui people such that even some majority Chinese people could read it; and everyone could perform Huiness, not merely Hui people themselves. A mosque member of my hometown Mr. Yang He once told me that some Hui vendors used to ask a professional storyteller Ma Heyi to draw a pitcher sign consists of four Chinese characters “qing zhen jiao men” meaning “Islamic Religion” because although this storyteller was a Han, he drew this sign beautifully. Therefore, the performance of that double entendre in a way supported the idea of intertwined spaces. “Some Hui people” were aware that signs can lie, and they didn’t feel secure about the alleged Hui space. They performed the double entendre in order to test the realness of a space created by the pitcher sign, because the meaning of the double entendre, not as the representational relation of the sign, is a more interior knowledge and by asking “does it have water,” “some Hui people” asserted that they may possess a higher rank in knowledge status: they didn’t merely know that the sign of a pitcher means “Hui/halal food,” more than that, they are familiar with the usage of a pitcher as a water receptacle for wash before prayer, which some Han people may not know. Nonetheless, there is still a possibility that a non-Hui vendor could possess all the required knowledge to pass the test, perform Huiness in the restricted notion of

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34 To see what a “pitcher sign consists of four Chinese characters” may look like, please see Picture 3, which is drawn by me following Mr. Yang He’s description.
performance perfectly, then the *double entendre* would not function ideally, and the “performers” could continue performing their “fake” Huiness to their own advantages.

Picture 3: a pitcher sign consists of Chinese characters drawn by the author following Mr. Yang He’s description
On the other hand, I would argue that the *double entendre* is a sort of local knowledge rather than real religious knowledge. So if the vendor being tested *was* a religious Muslim but from other regions where the *double entendre* was not used, the *double entendre* would still work, but in a different way: it would become a test of “are you from the circle in which this *double entendre* is used” rather than a test of “are you a real Hui Muslim,” but as the result would be the same, i.e. the vendor being tested would not give a “satisfactory” answer, misunderstandings may occur. “Some Hui people” might key the failure in performing the positive answer to the question as a failure to show the vendor’s Huiness, while the vendor him/herself actually just failed to show “localness.” Under this circumstance, the spatial would become the local rather than the racial.

My other trivial but as interesting finding is, “some Hui people” who were testing the vendors did not use other means such as the most commonly used greeting “*as-salām ‘aleikum*” that was even performed on stage as a “traditional new year greeting” according to Gladney’s description, or just ask the vendors to prove their Huiness by showing some knowledge related to Islam. Although I do not know the exact reasons for that, I find this worth thinking, and I would suggest some possible explanations in the paragraph followed.

Above all, as aforementioned, the second layer of performance was motivated by the first layer. In other words, hanging pitcher contextualized the using of the *double entendre*: given the pitcher sign was hanging at the vendors’ stalls, “some Hui people” would naturally use a pitcher-related *double entendre* to test the vendors.
Secondly, not every Hui person understands Arabic, so using the pitcher-related *double entendre* guaranteed that even if the vendor being tested does not understand Arabic, as long as s/he knows about the *double entendre*, s/he could pass the test.

Additionally, the *double entendre* is not an aggressive way of checking people’s identification. On the one hand, it could be seen as a good intentioned joke bears religious meanings, it is less possible to irritate the vendors than directly asking them to prove their Huiness, but on the other hand, although it is playful, it could still be powerful and suggesting a possible “aftermath” of the failure in the test. The story didn’t tell us what happened if some vendors failed the test, but I think maybe they would be denied the use of a pitcher sign anymore.

After looking at how Hui people themselves perform their differences via pitcher sign and a *double entendre* related to it, I argue that they use the pitcher as a sign representing a space of halal food and Huiness the boundary of which is always negotiable. A pitcherdom has tentative borders not only because some vendors who used the pitcher sign were always moving, but as well because the performers’ qualification could be suspicious: they may not have enough religious knowledge, or they may not even be Hui Muslims.
Conclusion:

Although the selected data cannot be seen as “representative” or “major” ways by which Hui’s characteristics are encountered, and/or reacted to, they offer a possible entrance to the complexity of performing Huiness, and the complexity of “performance” as a category of analysis.

After viewing these performances of difference, I argue that under most circumstances Hui people’s ethnicity is not itself a relatively stable and universal identity but rather that the term “ethnicity” is loaded and needs to be dislocated. There is no essence of Hui’s ethnicity, which could be singled out to represent all the Hui people as a homogeneous group. Rather, Hui people’s “identification” has always been and will still be an on-going process, a continuous construction and de-construction in certain social settings. In my thesis, we could see “sharedness,” “pork abstinence,” “halalness/cleanliness of food,” “signs and local knowledge related to these signs” and so forth behave as some ways for a person to identify him/herself as a Hui; when being called one of the posterity of pigs, I expected another Hui person (Passerby) to “share” the sense of shame and ire because I assume that we have “shared” ancestry; when gifting meals, Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu singled out cleanliness as a way to connect via shared values with my mother; when being hung up, the pitcher sign created a Hui space. However, all these “identifications” are subject to challenges: Passerby didn’t share my feelings or refused to do so; halalness
of the food was just taken at the word of Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu’s, whether the food was really halal, or even cooked in a scrubbed pot, remains a question, and the local knowledge concerning a sign can never be a definite criterion to judge a space’s being Hui or not.

That is why in this research, Hui people’s difference itself is not what is being addressed; rather, how to perform it, and perform it to whose advantage is. In other words, performance is not an effect, but a cause. For instance, Bully performed my difference, the pork taboo, in order to insult me at the very moment of fighting, but before that he got along with me without any trouble despite my not eating pork. However, the results of performing or singling out difference need not necessarily be schismogenetic as shown in E(I) and E(II), but could be progressive. Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu reiterate our difference (not eating pork) every time when gifting food, but their purpose is not to relate us to pig ancestors but to express respect for our food taboo and to show their friendliness.

Spaces are negotiated, manipulated and thus ceaselessly changed during the process of performance; they are not only created by performance, but might be deconstructed by it as well. For example, in E(I), Bully deconstructed the negative space he had just created for Hui people in order to avoid unexpected fighting; I deconstructed the swinedom built by the two boys in the changing room; and Aunt Yang and Grandma Wu merged the imaginary boundary between Hui and majority Chinese living in the same neighborhood.

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35 After our fight I didn’t befriend him anymore.
Relevantly, the “deconstructors” of Hui spaces are not necessarily non-Hui; Hui people themselves as well deconstruct their own space as do “some Hui people” in the story from Akhund Wang. Here, the Hui people questioned the reliability of Hui space claimed by vendors, and tested the vendors’ Huiness.

Moreover, looking at all the performances being studied in this thesis as a whole, one could find that “settings” were far from passive objects and backgrounds providing places and times for performances to take place, rather, they influenced the performance in an active way. In E(I), if the settings had been supervised by adults, such as parents or school teachers, Bully and I might still have had a fight, but the fight may not have been elevated to insulting related to “ethnicity.” In E(II), if the two boys were in a Hui community, even the setting could more easily have reminded Boy A of the small belief about Hui’s pork taboo than the actual setting, the changing room, but I doubt that he would have dared to even whisper his interpretation of the custom to his companion Boy B. In E(III), as stated above, the setting (our household) really changed our neighbors’ behavior patterns. In the story told by Akhund Wang, the pitcher sign as a setting actually made the whole performance possible.

Besides, by analyzing the performance of Huiness, I submit that every performance is multifaceted and its multi-faceted nature could be unpacked from different angles. First, different audience members key the same event differently, as demonstrated in E(I), E(II) and the reading of a pitcher sign. As a result, their reactions to the same performance differ. Second, no performance is a single once-and-for-all piece. A performance has always already sowed the seeds of new performances once completed. Any performance will be, even after it is literarily “over,” (although when a performance is over is also
sometimes subject to debate) revisited and reread by different audiences for different reasons in different time and contexts, and every revisiting and rereading is another new performance inspired by the “original” one. The story told to me by Akhund Wang is itself a perfect “performance” and it actually formed the third layer of performance of that related story, and my analysis formed another layer... and so on, whether oral or written. Third, roles of participants in performances ever change and the addressee’s status, or the answer to the question, “What is happening here?” are open to challenge by his/her addressees, unexpected hearers or over-hearers, even if they were acting normally. For example, in E(II) Boy A was interrupted by an active over-hearer, me, and in the story told by Akhund Wang, the vendors’ became addressees because of “some Hui people’s” willingness to test their religious knowledge.

Finally, to return to the question of socially constructed “truth,” I submit that these performed differences are actually “Différence” which could “be said to designate a constitutive, productive, and originary causality, the process of scission and division which would produce or constitute different things or differences” (Derrida 1982:9).
References:


