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- 1 THE SURVIVAL of Islam in China as a decidedly minority religion for more than one thousand years is, as the anthropologist Élisabeth Allès notes, astonishing. Even more remarkable is that Muslims have managed to sustain their religious practices and beliefs even in the interior of China. Muslims living along the northwestern frontiers and in the southeastern ports maintained relations with their co-religionists from Central Asia and from Persia and the Arab world respectively. The Muslims of Henan, the group that Dr Allès has studied, are part of the inland Hui, or Chinese Muslims, a community that persists as a distinct entity, despite occasional conflicts with its Han, or ethnic Chinese, neighbors over the centuries.
- 2 Currently numbering slightly less than a million people, or approximately one per cent of the total population in Henan, the Hui community has, depending on its location in the province, developed different relations with the Han. Dr Allès has chosen to conduct her research on three distinct Hui groups in Henan and their adaptations to the larger Han society. One is in a small but predominantly Hui region, another is a long established Hui community that is a minority in its locality, and the last is a more recent settlement of Muslims, which is also a minority in its area. Dr Allès concludes that the Hui in all three communities adhered to the tenets of their religion and shunned a syncretic adoption of other religious views. They distinguished the Islamic rites from the Chinese rituals they performed, and their identity as Muslims was not undermined because of an overlay of Chinese practices.
- 3 These themes are unexceptional; much more original is Dr Allès personal observations, particularly of women's mosques. Here she makes valuable contributions to knowledge of the Hui. A Henan gazetteer reveals that the province was the site for seventy-two women's mosques during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, but Dr Allès writes that these figures cannot be verified. She is more confident about statistics compiled in 1997,

which registered twenty-nine such mosques in the province, with seventeen of them in the important cities of Kaifeng and Zhengzhou. Most are smaller than the men's mosques, and their histories have not been reconstructed. Dr Allès attributes the establishment of women's mosques to the Yuan dynasty when, under the Mongols, women were relatively more prominent. Her descriptions of the buildings, the food, the finances, and the social functions of the mosques and the female *ahongs* are illuminating and insightful.

- 4 When Dr Allès focuses on her own observations and studies, her book offers reliable and instructive information. However, when she turns to the history of Islam in dynasties stretching back to the Tang and Yuan, she falters because she is not conversant with the most important primary and secondary sources (for example, Tazaka Kodo's monumental study, *Chugoku niokeru Kaikyo no denrai to sono guzu*, Tokyo, 1964, 2 vol.) and thus comes up with idiosyncratic interpretations and some errors. However, the conclusions based on her field work yield significant insights into and offer solid foundations for the study of the identities, beliefs, and practices of the Hui in Henan and of the Muslims in other provinces.

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