

Article

# A Centrally Peripheral Publisher: The Fostering of the Hui Literary Field in Post-Mao China

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## Abstract

In recent decades, Chinese literary studies has shifted away from center–periphery models, favoring frameworks that emphasize multiplicity and decentralization. While this turn has opened space for new perspectives, it risks overlooking persistent hierarchies that continue to shape literary careers, where certain publishers remain more central to an author’s advancement than others. This essay reconsiders the center–periphery framework through an analysis of *Huizu wenxue*, a literary journal published in Changji, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Despite its geographic distance from China’s dominant literary hubs, *Huizu wenxue* has long served as a key platform for Hui literature. Drawing on interviews, as well as textual and paratextual analysis, I demonstrate how the journal functions both as a launchpad for emerging Hui authors and as an institutional anchor for a nationwide Hui literary community. Through dedicated columns that showcase new Hui talent and events that foster professional networks, *Huizu wenxue* has, since its inception, continually played a central role in shaping Hui literary production and supporting authors’ careers. Because it operates from the margins of the People’s Republic of China’s yet wields significant influence within Hui literary circles, I argue that *Huizu wenxue* is best understood as a “peripheral center.”

**Keywords:** *minzu wenxue*; Chinese ethnic minority literature; Hui literature; *Huizu wenxue*



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## 1. Introduction

In July 2015, over lunch at a bustling halal restaurant in central Beijing, I asked Shi Yanwei (b. 1985) how his literary career had begun. He adjusted his glasses, took a sip of water, and began. As a teenager, he had submitted a short essay based on a trip to Sanya to the journal *Huizu wenxue*, which, to his surprise, was accepted for publication (Y. Shi 2003). Soon afterwards he published his first short story (Y. Shi 2004). He recalled, with a touch of emotion, the moment an editor called his home. The editor was astonished that someone so young could write with such polish and depth. Only after speaking at length with Shi’s parents—who had little formal education—did the editor believe the work was truly Shi’s. That moment marked the beginning of Shi’s literary career. A similar case is that of another author named Shi, Shi Shuqing, who recalls his debut with these words:

The first short story I published in *Huizu wenxue* was in 1989, when I was a student at the Guyuan Teachers College... Fifteen years have passed since that first story. During this time, I must have published in *Huizu wenxue* at least thirty pieces... At times, I ... think about *Huizu wenxue* as my space for freedom. I also think about Li Ming, at the time an editor, and now editor in chief of the journal.

He had edited that first story of mine... Our relation was that of student-mentor and, through time, it has matured into that of brothers [*xiongdi*]. (S. Shi 2004, p. 37)

Like Shi Yanwei, Shi Shuqing also speaks of *Huizu wenxue* with affection, referring to it as “my space for freedom” and expressing gratitude to its editor, Li Ming. These budding authors ventured into the realm of literature through *Huizu wenxue*, a journal published in Changji, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. These are not isolated cases; many now-established Hui authors took their first steps in the literary field thanks to *Huizu wenxue*.<sup>1</sup>

Although the journal is neither nationally prominent nor geographically close to their home regions—Haiyuan in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Shi Shuqing’s hometown) and Harbin in Heilongjiang Province (Shi Yanwei’s)—its appeal lay in a different kind of proximity: its emphasis on Hui identity.<sup>2</sup> *Huizu wenxue*, previously published under the title *Bogeda* (1979–1984) and then *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* (1985–2000), has from its inception aimed to “promote the development Hui literature” (Yanhui Wang 1996, p. 95). Both Shi Yanwei and Shi Shuqing are members of the Hui ethnic group, one of the officially recognized *shaoshu minzu* (the so-called “ethnic minorities”) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Hui communities, however, are found across the majority of the Chinese territory, including in major metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai. How do these authors’ decisions to publish in a journal located on the geographic and institutional margins challenge conventional assumptions about literary prestige and centrality in contemporary Chinese literature?

No scholarly work has examined Changji as a site of literary production. Since the Communists came to power in 1949, Chinese literary studies has largely focused on the literary scenes in Beijing and Shanghai. This focus stems in part from the political and economic prominence of these cities, which positioned them as natural centers for literary institutions and public ceremonies celebrating literary figures.<sup>3</sup> Their accessibility—especially to foreign scholars—has further reinforced their central status within scholarly literary studies. The privileged role of literary institutions in Beijing and Shanghai reflects a broader political, social, and cultural framework grounded in a center–periphery dichotomy, in which those at the center enjoy greater prestige than those on the margins.

Postcolonial theorists have demonstrated how traditional Western literary canons (the perceived center) often marginalized or misrepresented the voices of the colonized (the literary periphery).<sup>4</sup> This critique has led to the adoption of analytical frameworks that move beyond national borders. In the PRC, this critical shift has intensified scholarly scrutiny of the state’s official classification system, which posits China as a “unified multiethnic country” composed of a Han majority and 55 *shaoshu minzu* (a term officially translated as “ethnic minorities”).<sup>5</sup> Amidst this critical re-evaluation of national literary frameworks, the literary production of the ethnic minorities is increasingly analyzed through the Sinophone framework (Shih 2007, p. 33). This approach challenges the center-periphery paradigm inherent in the PRC’s state-centric view, instead highlighting diverse Sinitic-language cultures and communities that operate on the margins of ‘China’ and ‘Chineseness,’ thereby decentralizing the dominant narrative and acknowledging varied literary voices.

Studies informed by the Sinophone framework have shed new insights on questions of literary content, style, and other linguistic aspects.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, this and other approaches that move beyond the nation-state framework have had a collateral effect: obscuring the institutional and structural apparatus that underpins the production of ethnic minority literatures in the PRC.

Taking a cue from Shi Yanwei and Shi Shuqing’s entry into the literary world, this paper shifts the focus from a close reading of literary texts in Chinese languages to an analysis of the role of the journal *Huizu wenxue* as a literary institution. The very existence

of the journal is predicated on the symbolic capital afforded by the state's recognition of the Hui as an official ethnic category. Had the Hui not been recognized as one of the PRC's official ethnic minorities in 1954, there would be no journal dedicated to Hui literature, just as there is no journal of Tuvan literature, Waxiang literature, and the literatures of other unrecognized ethnic groups.

To highlight the structural dynamics underlying the production of minority literatures in the PRC, it is necessary to acknowledge the center–periphery dichotomy. The relationship between the central state and its peripheries, as I will highlight in the article, is neither strictly binary nor unilateral. Instead, it is multipolar. To support this claim, I examine the multiple ways in which the journal *Huizu wenxue* is simultaneously marginal—both geographically and symbolically within the broader Chinese literary sphere—and central for nationwide Hui authors. Despite its relative geographic and symbolic marginalization, this publisher has continuously played a pivotal role in the field of Hui literature. It has elevated specific authors and their works, fostering the emergence of a nationwide Hui literary community and acting as a center from which authors accrue symbolic and economic capital. Due to its peripherality yet undeniable significance to most Hui authors, I suggest that *Huizu wenxue* is best described by the oxymoron “peripheral center.” By closely examining Changji as a pivotal hub for the publication, promotion, and evaluation of Hui literature, this essay recuperates the concepts of center and periphery, arguing that simply discarding them overlooks the ground-level structures that shape the production of ethnic minority literatures in the PRC.

To support this claim, the first section delves into the evolution of the journal *Huizu wenxue*, emphasizing its strategic shift from a focus on local literature to becoming a national advocate for Hui literature. This transformation significantly contributes to the literary trajectories of notable Hui authors, as evidenced in the ensuing two sections. Section two delves into the role of the “Window on Hui Authors” section in shaping the Hui literary community, fostering alliances between senior and junior authors, and contributing to the emergence and recognition of new talents. Lastly, the third section concentrates on the journal's organized events, which provided platforms for Hui authors to convene and set the foundation for a Hui literary community.

## 2. Constructing the Hui Literary Community and Fostering New Talents

In the late 1970s, the journal currently titled *Huizu wenxue* began to publish new (never before published) texts by Hui authors. The journal began publication under the title *Bogeda* on 1 July 1979, with the stated mission of “propagating the clarion call among the people of all ethnic groups to march forward to the four modernizations” (*Bogeda Bianji Bu* 1979, p. 4). This initiative was part of the broader opening-up of the PRC under Deng Xiaoping and marked the beginning of the cultural “thaw” that extended across all domains, including ethnic minority literatures. In this first stage, discussion about Hui literature began in the pages of the journal through critical pieces (*pinglun*) examining characteristics of Hui literary works in broad terms or in relation to a specific author.<sup>7</sup> At the time, however, the journal was not marked as an exclusively Hui literary forum. In 1985, five years following its initial establishment, the journal underwent a significant transformation, being renamed as *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* (*Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*) with the explicit aim of “making Hui literature flourish and develop” (*Bogeda Bianji Bu* 1984a, p. 3). Eventually, in the year 2000, the journal adopted its current title, *Huizu wenxue*. A rationale for this most recent change in title is provided in the editorial note that introduces volume 115 as a way “not only to expand the territorial scope of the journal but also to celebrate the journal's direction in the last twenty years” (*Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 2000, p. 1). The three successive title changes of the journal mirror its evolving geographical scope and its simul-

taneous establishment of a distinctive niche, which, over the course of four decades, has systematically broadened its thematic purview from a focus on local literature to regional Hui literature, and ultimately culminating in a focus on national Hui literature.

A survey analysis of the tables of contents within the journal reaffirms its gradual shift towards a focus on Hui literature. When examining the ratio between works attributed to Hui and those belonging to non-Hui authors within the journal, it clearly appears that texts by Hui authors have increased through the period covered by the variations in the journal's titles. A quantitative examination of the inaugural issue for each of the three titles illustrates this point. In the first volume of *Bogeda* (1979), out of a total of thirty-four texts published, only three are attributed to Hui authors. In *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*, volume 23 (1985), where the number of published texts remains at thirty-four, eighteen of them are authored by individuals from the Hui community. Subsequently, in *Huizu wenxue*, volume 115 (2000), out of the twenty-one texts featured, an even larger proportion of twelve is contributed by Hui authors. These examples emphasize a substantial shift, with the ratio of Hui literary texts growing from 8.8% in the earliest period to 52.9% and ultimately reaching 57.1% of the texts published within a given volume.

While the majority of the authors published are indeed of Hui ethnicity, it is worth noting that non-Hui authors are also featured both in *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* and in *Huizu wenxue*. Their inclusion can be linked to their affiliation with Xinjiang province, as these non-Hui authors often hail from the region or have lived within its borders. This aligns with the journal's initial focus on the local, as evidenced by its early title, *Bogeda*, named after Bogeda Peak, a mountain in the Tianshan range in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Furthermore, non-Hui authors featured in the journal frequently delve into topics related to Hui culture and traditions. This collective inclusion of works authored by Hui individuals and works that explore Hui themes highlights the parallel evolution between the journal's title changes and the ongoing editorial efforts aimed at carving out a niche within the field of ethnic minority literature.

This strategic positioning is not only reflected in the journal's title changes but is also evident through the slogan featured on the journal's cover, which reads, "China's sole literary journal centered on the 'Hui.'" This slogan, with minor variations in word order and the inclusion or omission of the word "literary" (*wenxue*), has consistently adorned the front cover of every issue since issue 117 (2001). Furthermore, this same slogan is used in promotional materials published in other literary journals, such as *Ethnic Literature* (*Minzue wenxue*) (Minzu Wenxue Bianji Bu 2015). Clearly, the emphasis on Hui literature has evolved into a distinctive branding strategy for the journal within the Chinese literary field to attract Hui authors nationwide.

Most contemporary authors who have attained canonical status through literary histories on the subject of Hui literature (Yang and He 1994; Yang 2014) have contributed to *Huizu wenxue* at some juncture in their careers. This pattern is exemplified by notable authors like Zhang Chengzhi (b. 1948), the aforementioned Shi Shuqing (b. 1969), and Ma Jinlian (b. 1982). To support this claim, I sketch how the literary careers of these three authors, each hailing from different generations, intersect with the journal *Huizu wenxue*.

Zhang Chengzhi, a native of Beijing and arguably China's most renowned Hui Muslim author, received widespread acclaim in the early 1980s for his work. His story, "Why Herdsmen Sing 'Mother'" (*Qishou weishenme gechang muqin*) (Zhang 1980), earned him the prestigious First Best Short Stories Award (*Di yi quanguo youxiu duanpian xiaoshuo jiang*) in 1978 and the First Edition of the Junma Literary Awards in 1981. During the same year, his novella, "Aleike's Soccer" (*Aleike zuqiu*) (Zhang [1980] 2015), was also recognized at the Junma Literary Awards. These accolades solidified Zhang's prominent position in the Chinese literary scene before *Bogeda* shifted its focus to Hui literature. In fact, Zhang's first

publication in *Bogeda* dates back to 1982 (Zhang 1982, pp. 10–12, 16) at a time when he was already an established literary figure. Over the years, Zhang has contributed twenty-one texts to *Huizu wenxue*, averaging about one publication every other year as of volume 245 in 2019. Zhang's involvement with the journal extends beyond his written works; in 1984, he participated in the *Huizu wenxue* Creation Forum organized by *Bogeda* (*Huizu wenxue chuanguo zuotahui*; *Bogeda Bianji Bu* 1984b, p. 93). This enduring relationship was officially acknowledged in 2014 when Zhang received the Special Award during the First *Huizu wenxue* Prize ceremony (*Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 2014, p. 3).

Shi Shuqing is the second author examined in this section. As indicated by the epigraph that opens this essay, his literary career began in 1989 with a publication in *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*. Subsequently, Shi's literary works received significant acclaim, earning him prestigious awards: two Junma Literary Awards—first in 1997 for his collection *Bitter Soil* (*Ku tu*), and again in 2007 for *Dog Days* (*Fu tian*)<sup>8</sup>—as well as the esteemed Lu Xun Literary Prize (*Lu Xun wenxue jiang*) in 2000 for his short story “Knife in Clear Water” (*Qingshui li de daozi*).<sup>9</sup> Throughout his career, Shi Shuqing has maintained a steady presence in *Huizu wenxue*, with a total of forty-seven publications to date. Among his notable contributions, his short story “Collecting Songs” (*Caifeng*) won the *Huizu wenxue* Prize in 2014 (*Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 2014, p. 3).

Ma Jinlian is part of the younger generation of Hui authors. Like Shi Shuqing, she comes from the southern part of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, specifically from Xiji. Her notable position in both the Hui and broader Chinese literary field is underscored by the prestigious literary awards she has garnered, including the 2016 Junma Literary Awards for her work “Long River” (*Changhe*; *Jinlian Ma* 2014) and the 2018 Lu Xun Literary Prize for “Soup and Pickled Vegetables from 1987” (*1987 nian de jiangshui he suancai*; *Jinlian Ma* 2016). Following her first contribution to *Huizu wenxue* in 2005 (*Jinlian Ma* 2005, pp. 4–9), Ma has since contributed a total of thirty-five published pieces to the journal. One of her short stories, titled “Elders” (*Lao nian tuan*), received a nomination for the 2016 *Huizu wenxue* Prize (*Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 2016, p. 3). This nomination, coupled with the substantial number of her works featured in *Huizu wenxue*, serves as compelling evidence of her strong professional affiliation with the journal.

The literary trajectories of the authors under consideration—Zhang, Shi, and Ma—illustrate how *Huizu wenxue* has featured writers at various stages of their careers. Zhang, already an eminent literary figure, became associated with the journal with the stated goal of contributing to the development of Hui literature (*Yanhui Wang* 1996, p. 95). In contrast, Shi and Ma, both at earlier stages in their literary paths, found in the journal a platform from which to launch their careers. These examples highlight the journal's role as a powerful centripetal force, capable of attracting Hui authors from across the country, regardless of age, status, or prominence within the broader Chinese literary field. By featuring the work of both established and emerging writers, *Huizu wenxue* not only serves as a platform for the publication of Hui literature but also actively contributes to the development of a Hui literary community. This occurs both through dedicated sections within the journal and through the organization of in-person events designed to facilitate networking and collaboration. The following two sections examine each of these dimensions in turn.

### 3. Shaping the Hui Literary Community

Authors willing to participate in the Hui literary sphere find in *Huizu wenxue* an ideal platform for showcasing their works and cultivating professional relationships. Since the late 1970s, long before telephone communication and the Internet had become part of daily experience, the journal served as a space for critical essays and ad hoc sections (*zhanlan*) that gave visibility to Hui literary authors and their works. Essays published in *Bogeda*

(1979–1985), for example, illustrate an emerging debate among authors about what characterizes or should characterize Hui literature.<sup>10</sup>

When the journal assumed the name *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*, the section Window on Hui Authors (*Huizu zuojia zhi chuang*) was introduced with the stated objective of providing readers with a “systematic understanding of contemporary Hui authors’ literary achievements” (*Xinjiang Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 1985, p. 120). The ensuing discussion highlights three authors featured in Window on Hui Authors, illustrating how this section fosters a dialogue within the Hui literary community.

To set the stage for the discussion, some background on the Window on Hui Authors is necessary. Since its inception in volume 23 (1985), the section has maintained a remarkable degree of structural consistency. Typically, each installment introduces a single author, though on rare occasions, two authors are featured in the same issue. The section comprises three key components: first, a succinct biographical note and photograph of the featured author; second, one or more of the author’s literary works; and third, an essay in which the author reflects on literary creation and the meaning of Hui literature. Most installments conclude with an evaluative essay by a more established Hui author, offering a critical assessment of the featured writer’s oeuvre. This typical structure is exemplified in the section’s inaugural installment on poet Ma Ruilin, which concludes with an essay by Hui literary authority Peilun Li (1985, pp. 65–69).

Li’s essay offers two noteworthy aspects. First, Li delves into a comprehensive examination of Ma Ruilin’s literary production, offering insights and commentary on over a dozen of Ma’s poems (Peilun Li 1985, p. 65). While three of these poems are reproduced in the volume (vol. 185), the other twelve are not included in that volume. Moreover, Li demonstrates a broader awareness of Ma’s body of work by citing Ma’s initial collection of poems titled “River” (*He*), published in 1949. Secondly, Li proceeds to contextualize Ma’s work within the broader landscape of contemporary poets, positively claiming that “There are only a few Hui poets, and among them Ma Ruilin has a unique style” (Peilun Li 1985, p. 69). It is improbable that Li was familiar with Ma’s work when composing the essay, as Ma had limited recognition in the field at that time. A more plausible scenario is that Li received works by Ma through the journal’s editorial board. Although, given the absence of public records, this is only an educated guess, it is nonetheless evident that Li utilized Window on Hui Authors not only to acquaint himself with Ma’s work but also to introduce Ma, a junior Hui author, to a wider audience. This exemplifies the journal’s role as a platform for introducing new figures in the field of Hui literature.

Window on Hui Authors also provides a milieu for these new authors to take positions within the field, as illustrated by the case of the author featured in volume 190, Shi Yanwei (b. 1985) (*Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu* 2013, p. 45). In the essay concluding the section, Shi claims: “In my youth, reading Mr. Zhang Chengzhi’s essays made me aware of the significance of literature for an ethnic group [*minzu*]” (Y. Shi 2013, p. 45). By articulating his admiration for Zhang Chengzhi within the pages of this prominent Hui literary journal, Shi tactically positions himself as a protégé of this celebrated author. An analysis of sources beyond the context of *Huizu wenxue* attests to Zhang’s support for Shi. The book cover of Shi’s first volume of collected essays, *Facing the Living Water* (*Mianchao huo shui*), sports Zhang’s calligraphy, written specifically for this occasion (Y. Shi 2011). In the case of Shi, Window on Hui Authors serves as a platform to publicly showcase the vertical alliance between a junior and a senior Hui literary author, thus exemplifying the function of the journal in weaving alliances within an ethnic literary community.

Additional evidence of the instrumental role played by the Window on Hui Authors section in nurturing the emergence of the Hui literary community is provided by the reflections of one of its participants, Hui author Shi Ge:

Thanks to the editorial board [of *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*] for creating Window on Hui Authors. This section has given me the precious opportunity to know numerous good mentors and friends who make their living through writing, and to listen to diverse opinions on literary writings [*chuangzuo tan*]. I have benefited a great deal from all of them ... I believe that *Huizu wenxue* has only recently sprouted... [I]n recent years, when a series of works directly based on the lives of the Hui people were published—such as “Cut the Thread”, “Mom,” “Friends,” “Mountain Pass,” “Fidgeting,” “Yellow Mud Hut,” “Grandpa,” and others—it is inevitable that they became popular among Hui readers. A Han friend told me that reading these works he has come to a better understanding and appreciation of the Hui people. (G. Shi 1988, p. 10)

Shi expresses gratitude to the editorial board of *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* for creating Window on Hui Authors, a section that, according to him, has been instrumental in connecting with colleagues and, in turn, in benefiting from such interactions. Moreover, in the quoted passage, Shi lists seven recognized works within the Hui literary corpus, without stating that they are authored by Zhang Chengzhi, Ma Ruifang, and Bai Lian. All these authors had been introduced in Window on Hui Authors by the time of Shi’s writing, and three of the cited works originally appeared in *Bogeda* and *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*.<sup>11</sup> Shi’s omission of the authors’ names indicates a readership already acquainted with the journal and its contributors, further underscoring its role in shaping a Hui literary community. In summary, Window on Hui Authors stands as a key tool employed by *Huizu wenxue* to showcase Hui authors, both junior and senior, and the interconnections among them, thus facilitating the creation of a literary community. This textual platform is complemented by in-person events, which are examined in the next section.

#### 4. Facilitating Networking Opportunities

Since its establishment, *Huizu wenxue* has organized eight writing groups (*chuangzuo zuotanhui*) that, according to the editorial board, aim at “creating a vibrant space where Hui authors can share their unique voices, experiences, and artistic creations” and “providing a forum where authors can engage in meaningful literary dialogue, celebrate their shared heritage, and inspire one another to produce extraordinary works that resonate with readers and, most importantly, preserve the rich tapestry of Hui literary culture” (Yong Wang 2014, p. 11). As the statement suggests, these carefully orchestrated events and initiatives reflect the journal’s commitment to nurturing a Hui literary community, driven by a sense of cultural preservation and artistic excellence.

Writing groups serve as an opportunity to convene Hui authors at the headquarters of *Huizu wenxue* in Changji. The already mentioned 1984 writing group was succeeded by the First *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group (Shou jie *Huizu wenxue* bihui) held in August 1985, an event that spanned twenty-two days during which participants engaged in various literary activities:

More than twenty Hui writers, poets, critics, and young authors from seven provinces and from our region attended the meeting. During this time, they went to Miqan to collect folk songs, they toured mountains and lakes, they admired the scenery of Turpan, they assisted the Kazakh Aken Music and Singing Festival [*Aken tanchanghui*], and they composed poems and essays in great abundance. They also discussed how to make Hui literary creativity flourish, how to improve the quality of literary works, and how to increase the number of Hui authors. (Chi 1985, p. 75)

The quote elucidates the manner in which literary events orchestrated by *Huizu wenxue* contribute to the formation of a Hui authorial community. These events serve as a forum wherein writers, poets, and critics hailing from various regions converge. Within this context, participants engage in discussions pertaining to literary creativity and, on a broader scale, the cultivation of interpersonal bonds through participation in cultural and experiential activities.

Five black and white photographs from the first writing group are featured on the inner back cover of *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* volume 27. Among these images, one depicts a group of authors engaged in friendly discussions while seated inside a Kazak yurt, where they spent the night. Wang Yanhui, although not visible in the photographs, was one of the Hui authors who took part in this event. Approximately ten years later, Wang offered a retrospective recollection of his experience at the writing group:

To this day, 1985 for me is still the most important year... Thanks to my providential elder brother of mine Chengzhi... I boarded the train in a trip that lasted four days and four nights. The purpose was to attend the First *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group... In the beginning, I was filled with a new sense of self-esteem and pride. Then, I threw myself into religious life. Through sincere exchanges with genuine Hui people, I gradually deepened my understanding of our ethnic group's history and culture. It is from these experiences that I truly began to cherish the reputation of being a "Hui author" and the mission attached to it. I should, once again, thank all my colleagues at *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue*, for their special care and for setting high expectations. (Yanhui Wang 1996, p. 95)

Apparently, Zhang Chengzhi persuaded Wang to undertake the lengthy journey, spanning "four days and four nights," to reach Changji. This experience marked a profound turning point in Wang's life, leading him to wholeheartedly embrace the identity of a Hui author. While a skeptical reader might interpret Wang's claim as an attempt to establish a public connection to the renowned literary figure Zhang and to appease the journal, Wang has remained true to his word. His commitment to promoting Hui literature is attested by his significant contributions, encompassing a total of fourteen works published in *Huizu wenxue* over the span of twenty-one years.

Similarly to Wang, Shi Shuqing also reflected on his participation in the Third *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group, held in September 1992, claiming that it "had a profound impact on me," and henceforth, "I have been paying attention to *Huizu wenxue*, to new Hui authors, and to the excellent works appearing in this journal. This is because we are all bound by the same cause" (S. Shi 2016, n.p.). This statement underscores Shi's perception of the Hui literary community as being united by the same goal, that of fostering Hui literary authors and their work.

While most of the writing groups were primarily intended to bring together Hui authors, the Eighth writing group was more specific in its purpose, as elucidated in the announcement featured in volume 186 of *Huizu wenxue*:

In order to make Hui literature flourish and develop, and more broadly to promote ethnic literature, in August 2012 we will hold the Eighth *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group. The meeting will focus on the literary creation of young and middle-aged authors, with the purpose of supporting and training new authors. During the writing group, experts and scholars will be invited to conduct literary creation seminars and discussions. In addition, there will be occasions to experience local folk cultures... Participants of the writing group are required to submit in advance at least two high-quality literary works (fiction or prose). During the

meeting, we will work on these texts together to further improve their quality. (Huizu Wenxue Bianji Bu 2012, p. 85)

The passage illustrates a strategy employed by *Huizu wenxue* to nurture emerging Hui literary talents. Participants in the writing group are required to submit two of their best works in advance, likely to enable all participants to read and analyze them beforehand. While the Eighth *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group is explicitly focused on supporting young Hui authors, the journal has a history of publishing and guiding newcomers in the field. The epigraph by Shi Shuqing at the beginning of this essay serves as evidence of the journal's commitment to this end. Another junior author trained by the journal is the Henanese A Hui, who attended two events, the Seventh Hui Authors and Scholars Writing Group and the Eighth *Huizu wenxue* Writing Group. During the talk at the former event, A stated, "I thank *Huizu wenxue* for training, encouraging, and sustaining me. *Huizu wenxue* is my mother on the road of literature. I will forever be grateful to you, stay on close terms, and love you. For this reason, I will strive to improve my skills and write numerous high-quality works" (Zhou 2010, p. 61). In this passage, the use of a familial metaphor enhances the personal and appreciative tone of A's gratitude towards *Huizu wenxue*, portraying it as a nurturing force in the writer's literary journey.

## 5. Conclusions

*Huizu wenxue* has been dedicated to the publication of original creative pieces by Hui writers, concurrently serving as a platform for the orchestration of national conferences. These conferences have facilitated the congregation of authors and scholars in Changji, thereby fostering the creation of a Hui literary community. The centrality of *Huizu wenxue* within the Chinese literary field does not mean, however, that Hui literature is a totally independent domain. On the contrary, the field of Hui literature is tied to China's political and economic centers in a twofold way: symbolically and politically.

On the symbolic level, the journal *Huizu wenxue* exists only because of the state's official recognition of the Hui as an ethnic minority group. As already indicated, no journal of unrecognized ethnic groups has been published in China. On the economic level, the producers of *Huizu wenxue* were—at least partially—supported by governmental funds. The documents available to me do not allow for a reconstruction of the complete financial operation of *Huizu wenxue*. Still, like most cultural organizations in China, the journal has, over the years, relied on state subsidies and benefited from state financial allocations. For instance, state support for *Huizu wenxue* is evident in the sponsorship provided by the Federation of Literary and Art Circles of the Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang (*Xinjiang Changji Huizu zizhizhou wenxue yishu jielian lianhehui*), as indicated in the journal's table of contents. Additionally, during the period from 2005 to 2013, the journal achieved noteworthy success by receiving five Xinjiang Journal Awards (*Xinjiang qikang jiang*), the highest award for a periodical in the region, thus benefiting from additional funding (Yong Wang 2014, p. 8). Last, in September of 2014, *Huizu wenxue* was bestowed with the title of "China's best journal" (*Zhongguo zui mei qikan*), a recognition granted to just one hundred journals nationwide (Yong Wang 2014, p. 8). These accolades underscore the journal's connections with national-level institutions, demonstrating its strong ties within the broader Chinese literary landscape.

The peripheral yet central position of *Huizu wenxue* becomes evident only when the analytical focus expands from close readings of literary texts to encompass the institutional context in which such texts take shape. Adopting such an analytical framework allows us to bring into focus the lived experience of being a Hui author in post-Mao China. For this reason, recuperating such out-of-fashion concepts, I characterize *Huizu wenxue* as a 'peripheral center,' a seemingly paradoxical designation that underscores its prominent role

within the Hui literary sphere while simultaneously highlighting its marginalized position within the broader Chinese national landscape.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Among the Hui authors who launched their literary careers in *Huizu wenxue* are: B. Ma (2004, pp. 40–45); Jiajing Ma (2002, p. 41); L. Ma (1983, pp. 3–8); Z. Ma (1986, pp. 25–28); Qian Sun (1986, p. 45); and Xinzhe Yao (1985, pp. 72–73).
- <sup>2</sup> I use “Hui identity” as a working term to encompass several contested notions in Chinese literary circles—such as “Hui characteristics” (*Huizu tezheng*) and “Hui style” (*Huizu fengge*). Authors, scholars, and critics disagree on their definitions, usage, and scope. Sometimes these terms appear loosely applied; other times they serve as prompts for enumerating themes, settings, or language features associated with Hui literature. No comprehensive study has yet examined how the notion of “Hui identity” appears in literary criticism. My preliminary survey suggests that most participants in the Chinese literary field hold that each ethnic minority’s literature—including Hui literature—should possess a distinctive set of characteristics, but they do not agree on what that distinctiveness entails.
- <sup>3</sup> The memorialization of Lu Xun—the canonical “father” of modern Chinese literature—is deeply intertwined with the metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai. Notable events include his funeral in Shanghai in 1936 and the subsequent inauguration of the Lu Xun museum in 1951, later expanded with a larger memorial hall in 1956. See (Denton 2014, p. 182). In Beijing, a Lu Xun residence was made accessible to the public in 1949, with a dedicated museum following suit in 1956. Another tribute to Lu Xun is the renaming of China’s Central Literary Research Institute to Lu Xun Literary Institute in 1984. See (Leung 2017, p. 357).
- <sup>4</sup> See for instance (Said 1978; Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1988)
- <sup>5</sup> For an in-depth study of how PRC authorities classified its population into a Han majority and 55 ethnic minorities, see Thomas S. Mullaney (2011).
- <sup>6</sup> For example, utilizing the framework of the Sinophone, Alison Groppe (2013) has drawn attention to literary production in Chinese languages in Malaysia.
- <sup>7</sup> For an example of an essay about Hui literature published in *Bogeda*, see Wusimani (1980).
- <sup>8</sup> For the list of all the awards conferred during the Junma Literary Awards, see the official website of the CWA (2020). URL (accessed 20 January 2021): [www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2020/0825/c405648-31836334.html](http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2020/0825/c405648-31836334.html)
- <sup>9</sup> For the list of all the awards conferred during the Lu Xun Literary Prize, see the official website of the CWA (2018). URL (accessed 20 January 2021): [www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2018/0811/c405646-30223204.html](http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2018/0811/c405646-30223204.html).
- <sup>10</sup> For the first essay published in the journal debating the scope and meaning of Hui literature, see Wusimani (1980).
- <sup>11</sup> The three texts published in *Xinjiang Huizu wenxue* and *Bogeda* are Bai Lian’s “Mom” (Bai 1979, pp. 7–14) and “Mountain Pass” (Bai 1985, pp. 12–15), and Zhang Chengzhi’s “Fidgeting” (Zhang 1982, pp. 10–12, 16). The other four texts appeared in different journals. Bai Lian’s “Cut the Thread” (Bai 1964, pp. 28–35) and “Friends” (Bai 1981, pp. 72–77) were respectively published in *Xinjiang Literature* (*Xinjiang wenxue*) and in *Ethnic Literature* (*Minzu wenxue*). Zhang Chengzhi’s “Yellow Mud Hut” (Zhang 1985, pp. 1–41) was published in *Harvest* (*Shuohuo*) and Ma Ruifang’s “Grandpa” (R. Ma 1981, pp. 56–60) in *Shandong Literature* (*Shandong wenxue*).

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