

# *Rationalization in the Daily Practices of Modernization among the Hui Ethnic Group: a Case Study of Donglianhua Village in Dali*

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**Keywords:** Hui ethnic group, Muslim, Value rationality, Instrumental rationality, Modernization

**Abstract:** The exploration of “rationalization” in the context of modernity has long been a subject of interest and inquiry. To contribute to this discourse, this study undertook a comprehensive investigation and research in Donglianhua Village, located in Yongjian Town, Weishan County, Dali Prefecture, Yunnan Province. The objective was to delve into the religious, economic, and social aspects of the Muslim community in the village, particularly in light of the ongoing process of modernization. Drawing inspiration from Max Weber's concept of “rationalization,” the study aims to shed light on how the Hui Muslim ethnic group in Donglianhua Village intricately weaves together both “value rationality” and “instrumental rationality” in their daily practices. By doing so, it challenges the oversimplified dichotomy of rationality proposed by Weber and presents a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play. This research critically examines the ways in which the Hui Muslim community negotiates their religious beliefs, economic pursuits, and social interactions within the changing landscape of modernity.

## **1. Introduction**

The study highlights a gap in the academic discourse concerning the modernization of Hui Muslims, which primarily focuses on macro-level discussions while neglecting the intrinsic driving forces and rational choices in their daily life practices. Drawing upon Max Weber's framework, the paper investigates the interplay between value and instrumental rationality and explores how Hui Muslims adapt their lives to preserve Islamic traditions during the modernization process.

The unique traditional settlement, architecture, cultural spaces, and festival customs of Dong Lianhua Village have attracted much attention from the outside world. However, under the influence of Islamic teachings and discipline, Hui Muslims often consider ethical and moral values alongside the pursuit of interests, making it difficult to completely abandon value rationality<sup>[1]</sup>. The author of this study employed participant observation and interview methods to analyze and discuss the interplay and adaptation of “value rationality” and “instrumental rationality” among the Hui Muslim community in the process of modernization. The analysis focuses on the religious, economic, and social aspects of life in Donglianhua Village.

## 2. Rational Practices in Religious Life

As a pure Hui Muslim village, every aspect of social life in Donglianhua Village is closely related to their Islamic faith. Particularly, the villagers' daily routines and time schedules are heavily influenced by the five daily prayer times.

Ma Wensen, the current Imam in Donglianhua Village, has been working for several years, handling various tasks related to the mosque, including managing the premises, organizing funerals, and arranging drivers, while receiving partial payment from the mosque committee. From this case, it can be observed that the Imam's personal life achieves a harmonious integration of livelihood and the willingness to serve the villagers and fellow Muslims. The boundaries between “instrumental rationality” and “value rationality” in his daily life practices are blurred. The Imam's typicality lies in his residence and work in the spiritual and cultural core space of the entire village - the mosque. His daily life of twenty-four hours is governed by the call to prayer times and this particular location. The fixed religious time and space have established a stable framework for his life, within which his “instrumental rationality” can only operate.

Furthermore, Donglianhua village maintains Jingtang education, a mosque-based religious education system, where students learn basic scriptures and religious knowledge under the guidance of the Imam, with attendance affecting their monthly rewards. Here, we can observe that the Jingtang education's teacher, the “Wusuo,” possesses a similar “rationalized” nature as the Imam, fulfilling both the duty of spreading the faith and satisfying economic needs through teaching. Even children are influenced by the ingrained “value rationality” that subconsciously drives them to attend Quran classes at the mosque. However, at the same time, they are also drawn to the distribution of pocket money, revealing the early signs of “instrumental rationality” in their early stages of life.

The students of religious education, especially the young people in Dong Lianhua Village, earnestly study religious knowledge and Arabic language. On the one hand, they are influenced by the Islamic beliefs that surround them from an early age, satisfying the collective and individual pursuit of faith. On the other hand, they have aspirations for personal development, such as gaining advantages for further education, studying abroad, or finding employment. Participating in religious education at the mosque combines both value rationality and instrumental rationality as driving forces. Moreover, this behavior is not individualistic; the religious space reinforces the moral norms within the modern community, and participating in worship and receiving religious education has become an established collective habit.

## 3. Rational Practices in Economic Life

Donglianhua Village experienced a transition from traditional agriculture to a diverse range of livelihoods, including cash crop cultivation and engagement in industries like agriculture, catering, handicrafts, and transportation. This shift reflects the villagers' adaptation to modernization. The village's historical association with the caravan trade highlights how Hui Muslims in the community reconcile value rationality and instrumental rationality. The Ma family compound is a notable case study in understanding this balancing act.

Ma Yan, the eldest daughter-in-law of Mr. Ma Wendou, operates a shop on the south side of the courtyard, selling handicrafts, clothing, and a small number of antiques and amber products. She also works as a tour guide for the courtyard. One day, when the author was chatting with Ma Yan in the southern courtyard, several tourists from Guangdong entered the shop. After Ma Yan briefly introduced the courtyard, the tourists focused on the amber products. A couple bought two pieces of blood amber. Ma Yan assured them that the goods were sourced from Thailand and Myanmar by her uncles and that she would not deceive them. She also mentioned her family background and asked the customers to promote her business on social media. She then continued to guide the tourists to

other attractions in her role as a tour guide.

In the case of Ma Yan's sales process, she not only earns her own livelihood but also promotes the historical and cultural significance of the Ma family courtyard and Donglianhua Village through her shop and role as a tour guide. As a member of the Ma family and a tour guide for the courtyard, her life is respectable and structured. It is known that her spouse is often away, so during the day, she runs the shop alone, takes care of her in-laws at home in the evenings, and occasionally goes to the town or Xiaguan for errands. Every day, when it's time for prayers, Ma Yan closes the shop door and worships in her own room. After finishing the prayers, she reopens the door and continues with sales. In this way, she ensures her daily income, adheres to religious rules, and promotes the reputation of her family. Her intrinsic value rationality and instrumental rationality are perfectly harmonized. In contrast to the previous case within the mosque, this case highlights the Ma family courtyard as a traditional historical and cultural space, portraying a certain pattern of individual and collective value rationality for the villagers. When reflecting on the glorious era of the Ma caravan, they always have strong nostalgic and reverential feelings, making it difficult for the villagers to escape the shadow of the Ma caravan's history in their practical instrumental rationality.

In Donglianhua Village, some villagers offer non-commercial accommodation to tourists and visitors. During a visit to Ma Ruji's courtyard, the author purchased an entrance ticket and inquired about religious education in the village. As a Hui ethnic, the author was exempted from tuition fees and offered a place to stay. Through the assistance of a local girl, the author found accommodation at a discounted rate of 60 yuan per day, reflecting the hospitality extended to fellow Hui individuals.

This case also demonstrates that the villagers of Donglianhua have dual purposes when engaging in transactions with outsiders. By accepting the stay of outsiders in their village and involving them in religious education, they not only increase their income through accommodation fees but also attract more people to learn about Islamic knowledge and promote their religion. In specific transactions, the villagers differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim brethren, indicating that their religious beliefs deeply influence their values. They automatically adjust the elements of instrumental rationality or value rationality in their behavior, depending on the situation.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### **4. Rational Practices in Social Life**

Under the influence of various factors of modernization, the number of people from Donglianhua Village working outside has been increasing year by year. Both internal and external population movements have been growing due to the development of tourism. The evolving traditional marriage system and changing ideologies have silently impacted the social life of the village.

In the past, interethnic marriages, especially between Hui and Han ethnic groups, were rare in Donglianhua Village. However, with increased mobility and exposure to other regions, young people now have more options for finding marriage partners from different villages and ethnic backgrounds. While interethnic marriages remain a minority, they are gradually becoming more accepted within the framework of Islamic teachings. The story of a Han Chinese man marrying a Hui woman in the village and converting to Islam exemplifies this trend. Similarly, a successful interethnic marriage between a Yi ethnic man and a Hui woman highlights how initial resistance can be overcome, leading to a harmonious and happy relationship.

The girl in this case can be said to have found a marriage partner through traditional means, but not for the traditional reason of "should marry a Muslim." In a religiously devout environment like Donglianhua Village, it was a challenging decision for the parents to actively suggest their daughter marry a non-Muslim. However, for the sake of their daughter, this family insisted on their choice, and the outcome proved that their decision was correct. This event triggered some reflections among villagers on the issue of their children's marriages.

This incident overturned the stereotypical impression that most people have regarding the traditional expectation for Hui ethnic children to marry within their own ethnicity. It demonstrates that, when weighing individual happiness against religious loyalty, the value rationality and instrumental rationality of Muslims are not an either-or choice. Like the parents in the case, modern Muslims can form their own families by holding a conversion ceremony for their partners. Due to the strict dietary restrictions Muslims adhere to, they face more dilemmas in the process of modernization, and the issues to negotiate in interethnic marriages are more complex. Therefore, their “rational” practices are more typical compared to other ethnic groups.

In addition, the population mobility resulting from various factors of modernization has had a profound impact on people's values in terms of interpersonal interactions. I interviewed a local resident of Donglianhua Village named Zhang Bing, who frequently travels for work, mainly involved in selling cars. He has returned home now because he has hired people to build his own house<sup>[3]</sup>. His current plan is to live in the house after it is completed and gradually explore any potential business opportunities. He also wants to take advantage of the opportunity to develop tourism in Donglianhua Village, but his main intention is to leave something for himself rather than focusing solely on profits.

Zhang Bing, through his experiences of working away from home and meeting people from various backgrounds, has undergone a significant transformation in his outlook on life. He now seeks a peaceful and meaningful existence, realizing that the constant struggle for material gain is exhausting and ultimately empty. Zhang Bing believes that leaving a lasting impact in the world is essential. He contemplates the transience of personal remembrance after death and emphasizes the importance of leaving something behind. He envisions conducting valuable research or creating a memorable space, like the courtyard he currently admires, as ways to leave a meaningful legacy.

This case is a typical reflection of how population mobility has led people to adopt very modern or even postmodern values. They place greater emphasis on external communication and the construction and maintenance of interpersonal networks than before. The purpose of engaging in business or other livelihoods is no longer solely about making money. There is an increased demand for personal values and spiritual fulfillment, which differs from the requirements of traditional religious beliefs. It represents the perfect combination of instrumental rationality and value rationality. Furthermore, the historical memories embodied in the Ma Family Courtyard inspire and drive the people of Donglianhua Village to explore and work hard, just like their ancestors. They are motivated to avoid being closed off and self-sufficient in a solitary agricultural lifestyle. The historical experiences of the Ma caravan ancestors have, albeit invisibly, provided a paradigm of experience for the “rational” development of modern villagers.

## **5. Integration of “Value Rationality” and “Instrumental Rationality” in Dong Lianhua Village**

Weber proposed two types of social behavior, instrumental rationality and value rationality, based on the intrinsic worth and meaningfulness of human actions. However, the investigation revealed that the behavior of the villagers in Dong Lianhua Village defies easy categorization into Weber's two types of rationality.

From the perspective of instrumental rationality, earning a living is the foundation for sustaining life. Whether it's running a restaurant or engaging in transportation, doing business or working is the main livelihood for most villagers. However, the steadfast Islamic faith in the hearts of the Hui Muslims compels them to consider value rationality. They navigate this by setting boundaries for themselves or striving to create conditions that allow them to adhere to religious rules, even in the presence of external influences.

Based on the investigation and analysis conducted by the author, it has been found that the

villagers are able to flexibly apply Islamic teachings to find some space for openness in religious, economic, and social aspects of their lives. This enables the daily life practices of the “Jemat” (Muslim community) to harmoniously develop amidst various hidden conflicts and contradictions<sup>[4]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

In summarize, the study challenges the strict categorization of behavioral activities into Weber's categories of rationality. Hui Muslims in Donglianhua Village navigate the modernization process by integrating value and instrumental rationality in their daily life practices. The interplay between these forms of rationality underscores the limitations of Weber's dichotomy, highlighting the complexity and adaptability of individuals in preserving Islamic traditions while pursuing economic development.

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