

Between Mecca And Beijing Modernization And Consumption Among Urban Chinese Muslims By Maris Gillette 2002 06 25

Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption Among Urban Chinese Muslims (2002) - A Retrospective

Maris Gillette's 2002 study, "Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption Among Urban Chinese Muslims," offers a compelling snapshot of a rapidly changing social landscape. This insightful work explores the complex interplay between Islamic faith, modernization, and consumer behavior within China's burgeoning urban Muslim communities. Twenty years later, its findings remain relevant, prompting further examination of how religious identity navigates the pressures and opportunities of economic growth. This article will delve into the key themes of Gillette's research, examining the challenges and contradictions faced by urban Chinese Muslims in the context of globalization and economic development. We will consider topics like **Islamic identity in China**, **consumption patterns of Muslim Chinese**, **modernity and religious practice**, and the **influence of globalization on religious life**.

The Shifting Sands of Islamic Identity in Urban China

Gillette's research provides a nuanced understanding of how urban Chinese Muslims negotiate their religious identity within a rapidly modernizing society. The study highlights the diverse expressions of Islam found across different urban centers, revealing a spectrum of practice ranging from strictly observant to those who integrate their faith more loosely into their daily lives. This wasn't simply a binary; Gillette expertly demonstrated a complex interplay between maintaining traditional Islamic practices, adapting to modern Chinese culture, and navigating

the often-conflicting demands of both. The study emphasizes that "Islamic identity" in this context is not monolithic, but rather a dynamic and evolving concept shaped by individual experiences, social networks, and economic realities. The rise of consumerism, for instance, presented both opportunities and challenges for religious expression.

Consumption and the Construction of Islamic Identity

A central focus of Gillette's work is the relationship between consumption and the construction of Islamic identity. The study reveals how consumer choices – from clothing and food to media and leisure activities – become significant markers of religious affiliation and social distinction. **Halal consumption** emerged as a crucial aspect, with urban Chinese Muslims seeking out halal-certified products while also navigating the complexities of availability and price. This often led to creative adaptations, demonstrating the ways in which individuals reconciled their religious obligations with the realities of the marketplace. This demonstrates the interplay between **religious practice and consumer choices** in a rapidly changing market.

Modernity, Tradition, and the Negotiation of Faith

Gillette's research expertly explores the tension between traditional religious practices and the influences of modernity. The study examines the ways in which urban Chinese Muslims adapt traditional religious rituals and beliefs to fit within the context of modern urban life. This included adapting traditional practices to the constraints of modern urban living, showcasing the dynamic nature of religious practice in the face of globalization and economic change. The impact of media, technology, and global Islamic networks is also examined, revealing how these factors contribute to both the preservation and transformation of religious beliefs and practices. The concept of **modernization and religious practice** becomes a key element within this intricate process.

The Influence of Globalization and Transnational Islamic Networks

Globalization significantly impacts the lives of urban Chinese Muslims, influencing everything from religious education to consumer choices. Gillette's study meticulously explores the role of transnational Islamic networks in shaping the religious landscape of urban China. These networks, facilitated by the internet and increased travel, provide access to global Islamic discourse and resources, potentially strengthening religious identity but also presenting challenges to local interpretations and practices. This highlights the complex relationship between

globalization on religious life within the Chinese context.

Conclusion: A Lasting Legacy

Gillette's "Between Mecca and Beijing" remains a vital contribution to the understanding of urban Chinese Muslims. The study's enduring value lies in its insightful portrayal of the complexities of religious identity, consumer behavior, and the negotiation of tradition and modernity in a rapidly changing social and economic environment. The work serves as a compelling reminder of the dynamic interplay between faith, culture, and global forces shaping the lived experiences of religious communities in a rapidly changing world. By highlighting the agency of individual Muslims in adapting to changing circumstances, the study transcends simple analyses of cultural conflict, revealing instead a rich tapestry of nuanced religious practices and adaptation strategies.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1: What is the significance of Gillette's study in the context of religious studies?

A1: Gillette's work is significant because it provides a nuanced and empirically rich understanding of religious practice in a specific context, going beyond broad theoretical frameworks to ground analysis in the lived experiences of urban Chinese Muslims. It contributes to broader conversations on globalization, religious identity formation, and the complex relationship between religious belief and consumer culture. It challenges assumptions of homogeneity within religious communities and highlights the diversity of individual practices.

Q2: How does Gillette's work address the issue of modernization and tradition?

A2: The study doesn't present a simplistic dichotomy of modernization versus tradition. Instead, it demonstrates the complex ways in which urban Chinese Muslims actively negotiate and synthesize traditional Islamic practices with the pressures and opportunities of a modernizing society. It highlights adaptation and innovation rather than a simple rejection or adoption of Western influences.

Q3: What role does consumption play in Gillette's analysis?

A3: Consumption is not presented as simply a secular activity; rather, Gillette argues that consumer choices become significant markers of religious identity and social distinction for urban Chinese Muslims. The pursuit of halal products, for instance, is not just an economic decision, but a form of religious expression and social solidarity.

Q4: How does the study incorporate the impact of globalization?

A4: Globalization is not viewed as a monolithic force, but rather as a set of interconnected influences shaping religious life in China. The study examines how global Islamic networks, access to information technology, and increased international travel impact religious beliefs, practices, and community structures. It also highlights how global consumer trends impact the availability and accessibility of halal goods.

Q5: What are the limitations of Gillette's study?

A5: As with any ethnographic study, the findings are specific to the time and context of the research. The study's focus on urban areas might limit the generalizability of its conclusions to rural populations. Furthermore, the passage of time since the study was conducted necessitates updated research to fully capture current trends in religious practice and consumption patterns among Chinese Muslims.

Q6: How has the study impacted subsequent research on Chinese Muslims?

A6: Gillette's work laid important groundwork for subsequent research on Chinese Muslims. It provided a methodological model for exploring the complexities of religious identity and consumerism, and it raised crucial questions about the interplay between global and local forces shaping religious communities. Subsequent scholars have built upon her findings, expanding on the themes she explored and adapting her methods to study other aspects of Muslim life in China.

Q7: What are some of the future implications of Gillette's findings?

A7: Gillette's work points to the need for continued research on the evolving religious landscape of urban China. Future studies could explore how technological advancements, economic transformations, and changing social attitudes impact the lives and beliefs of Chinese Muslims. Such research is vital for understanding the complex dynamics of religious identity and social change in a rapidly evolving global context.

Q8: Where can I find the original research paper by Maris Gillette?

A8: Unfortunately, locating the original 2002 paper online is challenging. Academic databases and university libraries are the best place to begin a search, utilizing keywords such as "Maris Gillette," "Chinese Muslims," "Islamic consumption," and "modernization." If access is restricted, contacting university libraries directly or reaching out to researchers in relevant fields may help.

Navigating the Crossroads: Modernity, Consumption, and Urban Chinese Muslims

Maris Gillette's 2002 paper, "Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims," offers a fascinating glimpse into a layered social landscape. This article will explore the key arguments presented in Gillette's work, providing a contemporary perspective on the shifting relationship between Islamic identity, economic development, and consumer culture among urban Chinese Muslims. The paper's significance is found in its ability to highlight the ways in which global forces interact with local traditions, shaping individual identities and communal being.

Gillette's study, primarily grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, meticulously documents the lived lives of urban Chinese Muslims, primarily in principal cities. The author skillfully analyzes the dilemma between adherence to Islamic principles and the attraction of modern consumerism. This is not presented as a simple binary dichotomy, but rather as a nuanced negotiation, where individuals strategically navigate their identities within the limitations of both religious and worldly contexts.

A central theme running throughout Gillette's work is the role of internationalization in shaping religious adherence. The impact of global Islamic networks, facilitated by modern communication technologies and increased movement, is evident in the adoption of certain Islamic practices and interpretations. However, Gillette furthermore highlights the significance of local contexts in shaping the manner in which these global influences are assimilated.

The paper pays particular attention to the influence of economic transformation on the lives of urban Chinese Muslims. The rise of a robust consumer market has presented both chances and challenges. Gillette argues that consumer goods are not simply things of consumption, but vehicles through which individuals express their identities and social affiliations. The choice of what to consume becomes a form of self-representation within the larger socio-cultural landscape.

The technique employed by Gillette is predominantly qualitative, relying heavily on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation. This immersive approach allows the author to provide detailed descriptions and interpretations of the complex processes shaping the realities of her research subjects. The findings gleaned from this qualitative work provide a valuable alternative to broader accounts of modernization and consumption.

Gillette's work presents crucial questions regarding the outlook of religious identity in an increasingly globalized world. The intertwining of global Islamic influences

and local communal practices demonstrates the dynamic nature of religious identity. The potential of individuals to negotiate their identities within varied contexts highlights the capacity of individuals to shape their own destinies within the boundaries of their social and religious environments.

In summary, Gillette's study offers a compelling and illuminating examination of the intricate interplay between modernization, consumption, and Islamic identity among urban Chinese Muslims. Her work highlights the significance of understanding religious adherence within their specific historical contexts and the changing nature of religious identity in an increasingly international world.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

- 1. What is the main argument of Gillette's paper?** Gillette's main argument is that urban Chinese Muslims navigate a complex relationship between Islamic identity and modern consumerism, strategically utilizing consumption to express identity within both religious and secular frameworks.
- 2. What methodology does Gillette use?** The study primarily uses qualitative methods, including ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation to understand the lived experiences of urban Chinese Muslims.
- 3. What is the significance of the study?** The study is significant because it offers a nuanced understanding of how global Islamic networks and local contexts interact to shape religious practice and identity in a rapidly changing urban environment.
- 4. What are the implications of Gillette's findings?** The findings highlight the fluidity of religious identity and the agency of individuals in shaping their own lives within complex social and religious contexts. They challenge simplistic narratives of modernization and religious adherence.
- 5. How can this research be applied today?** This research remains relevant today in understanding the experiences of Muslim communities navigating globalization, modernization, and consumer culture in diverse urban settings worldwide. It underscores the need for nuanced, context-specific approaches to studying religious identity and practice.

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