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The First Ancestors of Hui Muslims

Adan and Haowa First Version

Place: Yinchuan, Ningxia

Narrator: Told in a mosque, by the Ahong Wang Fuchen

Recorder: Xie Rong (Hui), 1980¹

It is said that long, long ago, the earth was wrapped in total darkness. There were no flowers yet, no songbirds, no humankind, or other living beings. Then suddenly, one day, a rumbling noise was heard, a red light flashed between heaven and earth. And from this red light slowly came forth a man and a woman. The man was Adan (Adam) and the woman was Haowa (Hawwa, Eve).

Adan formerly was one of Allah's angels (*tienxian*) and Haowa was a female angel. One day these two were walking together, some-

¹Xie Rong (1932–1984) was a Hui scholar of Ningxia Hui folk literature. His role as a cadre occasionally inspired him to create brand-new “Hui stories,” dedicated by him to the noble cause of nation building. We have included in this publication only a few stories which we are reasonably sure he obtained from Hui narrators. We alert the reader that stories by this recorder include also “Duoer Tea,” “The North Pagoda,” “Nuha and Suoli,” “A Small Wooden Bowl,” “Yaya and the Golden Sparrow,” “Yimamu Questions a Stone,” “Yimamu Examines a Corpse,” “Yimamu Questions a Hen,” “The Donkey Knows Its Way,” and “Pushing the Millstone.” How can the authors justify the risk that one or the other of these stories may mostly be Xie Rong's fabrication? Well, in that case, a broad-minded reader can still discern what kind of ideology it was that affected China and “Hui” intellectuals during the 1970s and 1980s.

where among deep rosy clouds, near the heavenly fruit orchard. From a hundred steps away they smelled a wonderful fragrance, and they became intoxicated by that scent. They crossed the rainbow bridge and came to a garden in which trees stood laden with deep red and bright yellow fruits. These fruits began to fascinate them.²

Adan was so excited that he then picked two grain-fruits (*mai-guo*) and gave one to Haowa, who immediately put hers into her mouth. She was so eager that she swallowed it whole, without chewing. Adan took only a bite out of his—but, while his bite was swallowed only halfway down his throat, he was caught doing it. Heavenly beings are not permitted to eat anything. They will cease to be holy and pure if they do so. Because Adan and Haowa together transgressed against this heavenly rule, God decreed that henceforth they should live on earth.

The world was shrouded in utter darkness and the sea of misery had no bounds. Adan and Haowa survived only with great difficulty. While kneeling and squatting upon a frozen river they prayed to Allah by way of reciting Quranic verses, five times in the course of each day.

One hundred years passed, and five hundred more years followed these. Allah was moved by the sincerity and piety which Adan and Haowa displayed toward him. And the merciful God therefore commanded, and instantly the earth and the sky broke apart. Between earth and sky, in the east, dawn cracked forth and the radiant sun arose to shine. The bright moon and the twinkling stars appeared in the evening. The world was now illuminated so that Adan and Haowa could see and recognize each other. They threw themselves into each other's arms with boundless joy. But then, in her excitement Haowa slipped and ended up sitting upon the ice. Adan also slipped and dropped to his knees upon that primeval glacier. In that position they continued to pray every day. Each time before they prayed they cleansed their hands and their feet—namely, their hands which

²The story of Adam and Hawwa (Adan and Haowa) can be found in the Quran, mainly in 2:34–37, and in the Hebrew Genesis, whereby the Arabic “Hawwa” corresponds to the biblical “Eve” (Mahmoud Abu Saud). Nevertheless, the *tienxian* are here an adaptation to Chinese mythology: originally Adan was a masculine and Haowa was a female heavenly being. This story in its totality therefore presents a dual explanation concerning the origin of sexuality.

formerly touched the forbidden fruit. They rinsed their mouths because with these they had eaten the fruit.

Another five hundred years passed, and because they repented Allah agreed to forgive them. But some distinct characteristics remained associated with their bodies. Adan's throat was bulging a little on account of the half-swallowed fruit. His knees had become cold because he slipped and landed on his knees upon the ice. All the while, the belly of Haowa was enlarged because she had swallowed the fruit whole. Her buttocks became cold as a result of her initial fall upon that frozen river. Moreover, because both have expressed a desire to eat, Allah gave them a sensation of hunger.

Allah also let them become husband and wife, to help each other, and to live together day and night—to let them satisfy their needs by way of working. He let the earth reward them fairly, in proportion to their efforts.

Adan cut through mountains to channel in water. He cultivated wastelands and turned them into fruitful fields. He modified the earth in accordance with the model of heaven and paradise. Haowa reached out and picked a rose-colored cloud and cut it up into many kinds of little flowers, similar to those that bloomed in the garden of paradise. She scattered them all over the world. God also gave to them the grain-fruit that formerly they stole and ate. And so, by careful cultivation, grains became their stable food.³ By their untiring hands the wilderness was transformed into a landscape of picturesque mountains and rivers.

Adan and Haowa gave birth to seventy-two twins—a boy and a girl for each set of twins. At the thirty-seventh birth, however, they received only a son, named Shisi. The family worried very much over the marriage prospects of this single boy; he had no wife. Moreover, many places on this vast earth were still uninhabited. Adan discussed this situation with his sons and daughters and resolved to send some of them to the heavenly paradise to obtain more fruits—so that by way of eating these his daughters, as well, would be enabled to bear

³The mythical *maiguo*, some kind of large “grain-fruit” from which big bites can be taken, stands in some kind of a relationship to wheat, which is the primary food grain in China's northwest. It is conceivable that pomegranates—full with seeds and marriage symbolism for Han people—were originally alluded to, in China, by this Near Eastern myth. In any case, Hui storytellers among whom we inquired did not know about a relationship with pomegranates.

children. He also wanted them to obtain Allah's further instructions. But all his children just stood and looked at each other and kept silent, all except Shisi. He was single and carefree, and he bravely volunteered.

"My dear Father and Mother, for the sake of my kind brothers and sisters I will go and bring back the heavenly fruits, and also receive Allah's further instructions—even though I may risk my life and barely escape death."

Shisi climbed mountains and waded across rivers; he endured severe cold and extreme heat; he suffered from hunger. For countless days and over a vast distance he trudged onward. Despite blisters on his feet and swelling in his legs, Shisi refused to abandon his goal of finding Allah. With each step forward he prayed.

One day he was so exhausted that he fell to the ground, and he fell asleep at the top of a high mountain. There he had a dream, and in this dream he saw a white serpent (a boa), the body of which was a hundred zhang (ca. 1,000 feet) long and as thick as a barrel. The serpent raised its head and wiggled its body, and then it spoke to Shisi: "Handsome Lad, do not be afraid. I am a heavenly messenger (*tienxian*), sent to you by Allah to bring you to paradise. Please, climb upon my back and prepare for a ride—but close your eyes!"

Shisi did as he was told, and with the speed of a gust of wind he arrived at the gate of paradise, carried by that serpent. By the gate stood the angel Haole. After having understood the request which Adan had sent, Haole prayed silently to Allah. He made a gesture while heaving and swaying his white beard. Instantly a howling whirlwind began blowing up dust. It darkened the sky and concealed everything. It swept Adan (and Haowa), including their seventy-two sons and daughters, up into the sky and dropped them onto every corner of the earth. Allah also dropped onto the earth the five cereals, together with the six domestic animals.⁴ From that moment onward the earth enjoyed paradisaical prosperity.

⁴In Islamic literature, outside China, the five cereals or six animals are not mentioned (Mahmoud Abu Saud). In Chinese tradition the five cereals are rice, two kinds of millet, wheat, and beans. The six domestic animals are pig, bovine, goat, horse, fowl, and dog. One can assume that Hui Muslims, if asked specifically, would exclude the pig and substitute the camel.

As for Shisi, having been brave and unselfish, he was invited by Allah to remain in the heavenly paradise as one of his angels.

Adan and Haowa

Second Version

Place: Southern Ningxia

Narrator: Wang Xueyi (Hui), Tongxin, Ningxia

Recorder: Wang Zhengwei (Hui), 1980, University of Ningxia

It is said that long, long ago, Allah created the first man, the holy man (*shengren*) Adan. Soon after that he also created a spouse for him, a woman made out of Adan's rib.⁵ Her name was Haowa.

After the holy man Adan had come into being, God taught him the names of all things and beings; he even let Adan answer the questions which angels raised concerning these names, one by one. Soon thereafter God assigned Adan and Haowa to live in paradise in order to watch over it. They could live a life of pleasure there, well fed and well clad. They were, however, prohibited to eat of the grain-fruit in paradise.

At first Adan and Haowa obeyed Allah's command. They did not even look at this fruit. But then one day, when the holy man Adan had gone somewhere, the Devil (Yinbulisi) hastened into paradise and spoke to Haowa.

"The grain-fruit in paradise is the most fragrant, sweet, and delicious food. If you do not taste it, you will regret it as long as you live."

Haowa could not withstand this temptation and lost her resolve. She picked one with ease, and she ate it. When Adan came back she told him that the fruit tasted very good. And so Adan also went after

⁵The creation of Hawwa from Adam's rib is mentioned in alBukhari's Hadith (Mahmoud Abu Saud). It was recorded earlier in Genesis 2:21-24.

one and took a bite. When he was about to swallow that fruit an angel appeared, and he saw him do it. The angel grabbed Adan by his throat so that the fruit got stuck there. Ever since that moment, a man has had an "Adam's apple" in his throat. By the same token, women menstruate monthly, because Haowa swallowed the fruit all the way down.

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Adan and Haowa disobeyed Allah's voice and ate the fruit. As a result they were driven out from paradise and made to live on the dark earth.

Adan and Haowa could not see anything on earth. They lived separate from each other and in darkness. After a long time, in that primeval darkness, they happened to meet each other on a frozen river, and they embraced each other. They laughed with joy and held on to each other to support themselves. That night, on the ice, Adan and Haowa joined. And from that time on a man's knees and a woman's buttocks have been cold.

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After they had joined themselves, Adan and Haowa remained squatting upon the ice. Soon the sky brightened in the east. There was now light on earth. Adan and Haowa for the first time saw each others' faces and their naked bodies. Haowa felt ashamed, and she picked a leaf to cover the lower portion of her body. Adan tore a strip of bark from a tree to cover his as well.

Thereafter, Adan and Haowa never separated. They no longer lived together as carefree as they once had been in paradise. They now made a living by working with their own hands. Somewhat later Haowa became pregnant. The sage Adan prayed to Allah and asked him to forgive their sin of having eaten the grain-fruit. Allah then gave them another commandment, stipulating that they must wash four things—their faces, their foreheads, hands, and feet—so as to take the stains off their bodies and to atone for their sins.

They were required to wash their faces because with their eyes they saw the forbidden fruits; with their mouths they ate of them; and with their noses they smelled them. They were required to wash their foreheads because with these they touched the branches and the leaves

of the fruit tree. They were required to wash their hands because with these they picked the fruits. And they were required to wash their feet because with these they walked up toward the tree.⁶

From that time onward there were human beings on earth. Also at that point in time the ablution ritual (*wuduyi*) was handed down to Muslims for them to prepare themselves for prayer.

Adan and Haierma

Third Version

First published in *Hei long jiang min jian wen xue (The Folk Literature of Heilongjiang)*, 1981.

Place: Heilongjiang

Recorder: Zhang Wenbing

It is said that at the time of creation there were no human beings in the world. There was only Allah. His four heavenly angels emerged from fire. They still had no definite form.

Allah considered it not much fun to exist like this, day in and day out. So he sent forth his first heavenly angel to fetch soil of five colors—red, yellow, blue, white, and black. But the five types of soil refused the request, and they said, “We are used to receiving all sorts of dirty things, such as feces, urine, and spittle. Being as dirty as we are, how can we have an audience with Allah! Please go back.”

The heavenly messenger returned, and thereupon God sent the second heavenly angel to fetch the five colors of soil and instructed him before leaving, “Be sure to bring back the five. I am going to fashion a man out of these.”

Upon being told about Allah’s specific intentions, the five kinds of earth were even more reluctant. So, God had no other choice but

⁶The act of washing the mouth, hands, feet, and the face corresponds to the ablution which Muslims perform before offering their prayers. Nowhere in the Arabic texts are these washing rites traced back to Adam and Hawwa (Mahmoud Abu Saud).

to send his third heavenly messenger to fetch the five kinds of earth. His name was Abraham (Yinbolaxi).⁷

The five-colored earth told Abraham, "I am not worthy to see Allah, and I am even less worthy to be molded into a man. I cannot possibly come with you."

Then Abraham said, "I was sent by Allah. So you will have to come along to Allah and explain yourself." He tolerated no argument. Instead, he seized the five colors of earth and said, "Let us go!"

Allah was very pleased to see Abraham return with the soil of five colors. He added some water to the soil, and from these elements he fashioned a man, lying down. God called him "Adan," and he improved on him every day. He admonished him not to get up by himself. Nevertheless, as time passed Adan grew tired of just lying down. He felt strong enough to rise up by himself. Therefore, one day, while Allah was momentarily absent, Adan tried to sit up.

"Oh, now I did it!" Adan's skull cracked open and his vital energies leaked out. Some of his soul-essence reached the mountains and became minerals of all sorts—gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, and others. Some of it went up into the sky and became birds of all kinds. Some reached the ground and became various animals. Some went to the rivers and lakes and became various kinds of fishes, turtles, shrimps, and crabs. Adan realized the danger he was in. He knew that if all his soul-energy escaped he would die. With his left hand he hurriedly took some mud from the middle of the sole of his right foot, and he took some from the sole of his left foot with his right hand, to seal the crack on his head with mud.

That is why, nowadays still, man has a hollow arch at the bottom of both feet—because he took mud from there to seal the crack that opened on his skull.

It is said that man would be immortal if it were not for the fact that our first ancestor, Adan, let some of his soul-essence escape when first he started to sit up on his own. God knew that there was no use complaining about what had happened. He continued to improve on the shape of Adan to a point of completion. When at last God permitted him to rise, Adan wandered from place to place. He

⁷"Yinbolaxi" is the Chinese version of the Arabic "Ibrahim," which is the biblical Abraham (Mahmoud Abu Saud).

ate some fruits when he was hungry, and he drank from the river in paradise when he was thirsty.

After some time a mysterious lump appeared on Adan's third rib. It grew larger and larger. And no one knew how long it would be before the lump would erupt and a woman would come forth. And no one knew why Allah named her Haierma.⁸

Adan noticed that Haierma was different from himself, and a sexual passion overcame him. He implored Allah that he be given a wife—and God agreed to let Haierma be that wife. Adan and Haierma were appointed to watch over the grain-fruit garden of paradise.

And God enjoined them before they went: "You must not touch the fruit. If you do, I will punish you."

Adan and Haierma kept Allah's warnings in mind and guarded the garden conscientiously. Spring passed and autumn was approaching. The flowers withered and all the trees were heavily laden with fruits.

When the fruits were ripe Haierma spoke to Adan, and while she spoke water gathered in her mouth. "We have been cultivating these trees seven springs and eight autumns. Why should we not pick a fruit and taste it?"

Adan was afraid. He shook his head and said, "No, we must not touch what Allah has forbidden."

"There are plenty of fruits in the garden. And besides, we will eat only one—or a half. And surely, God will never notice if you and I keep quiet." Then, with ease, Haierma plucked a large one and broke it into halves. A sweet smell greeted her. It caused her taste buds to itch as if a little hand was reaching out to touch them. Haierma gave half of the fruit to Adan. She put the other half into her own mouth and swallowed. Adan accepted his half and put it into his mouth. He, too, was about to swallow when he heard Allah's voice. He became terribly frightened, so much so that the fruit got stuck in his throat.

Both were severely scolded by Allah. To punish them, God caused the fruit in Adan's throat to protrude, as a reminder of his sin. The fruit inside Haierma was transformed into menses. And then God

⁸Most probably the name "Haierma" is derived from the Arabic "Hurma," which means "wife" (Mahmoud Abu Saud).

separated them and placed Adan in the east and Haierma in the west. God made them miss each other, and they could not come together.

Adan had no idea where Haierma was, nor did Haierma know where Adan was. Every morning Haierma combed her hair by the sea. A swallow carried some of her loose hair to the place in the east where Adan was. Likewise, Adan washed his face every morning. The swallow carried the beard hair, which he had washed out, westward to Haierma. Observing the direction from which the swallow flew, Adan reasoned that Haierma must be in the west. Haierma, likewise, realized that Adan was in the east. So they started to seek each other in the direction of the swallow's path. Eventually they came together. As a result of their long separation they had developed a deep longing for one another.

Many years passed and together they had seventy-two children, resulting from thirty-six births. The older sons married their younger twin sisters, and in this manner they multiplied.

Adan and Haierma, and their offspring, lived together at one place. They made much noise chatting and laughing. Allah became greatly annoyed by their hubbub. He therefore drove them to a place south of Tianshan Mountain, in Xinjiang. These are the ones who became the ancestors of the Hui people.