



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN CHINA

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### Introduction

In the People's Republic of China, religion has long been a contentious issue. Because the present Chinese image of religion is founded on a strongly secularist framework, religion has historically occupied a small portion of society, particularly in the educational arena. Although religion was permitted to some extent during the Republic's early years due to many other pressing concerns, all religious traditions were mercilessly destroyed in the late 1950s, particularly during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Following the Cultural Revolution, particularly during the 1980s, the government began to treat all religious perspectives and religions with more tolerance and acceptance due to newly-launched reform and opening-up programs (simplified Chinese). As a result, a diverse spectrum of traditional traditions, beliefs, and faiths was allowed to resurge and flourish to some extent. Authorities began to see a link between religious convictions and state security in the late 1990s, particularly in Falun Gong and Islam. The government's vocabulary has become progressively comparable to that of the west, where "war on terror" movements have targeted Muslims and their faith (Hilal, 2017).

China has long strived to keep religious rhetoric, knowledge, and activities out of the compulsory primary and secondary education systems when it comes to education. One of China's principal regulations controlling education, Article 8 of the People's Republic of China Education Law, issued in 1995, states: "Education activities shall be in the public interest of the state and society." Education and religion must be kept apart by the state. Religion may not be used to disrupt state education system activities by any organization or individual." As a result, since the early 1980s, the only religious curriculum offered in elementary and secondary schools has been limited to introducing the world's major religions and their important civilizations (Nanbu, 2008).

Academic courses and programs on religion have been offered at the university level, albeit only from a secularist or irreligious standpoint (Nanbu, 2008). As a result, according to Dru Gladney, a China expert, hostility toward Muslim minorities has been developing in China due to a significant absence of religious education in mainstream education. Even though religious content in Chinese curricula has increased in recent decades, it is still generally presented as shallow, harmful, or disparaging (Zhou, 2017).

Suppose religion has a place in the Chinese educational system. In that case, it is at religious institutions run by various patriotic religious organizations with the goal of training officials and scholars who work in spiritual fields. The essential responsibility of these schools is to develop a cadre of young religious professionals who are patriotic, socialist, and Communist Party loyal. Furthermore, according to Article 82 of the People's Republic of China's Education Law, "regulations controlling religious school education shall be created separately by the State Council." (Mahmut, 2019)

## History of Islam in China

Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Nestorian Christianity have been practiced in China for millennia. Even though Islam arrived in China later than the majority of these other religions, they have all adopted or embraced the Chinese culture. This is perhaps best proven because they were all referred to as a form of "teaching" (jiao). The same Chinese letter, si, referred to their religious constructions, which initially represented an official or imperial institution. They were substantially identical to imperial or governmental structures in terms of architecture. It was deliberate in using that secular imperial architecture and language in religious constructions, as the Chinese imperium's authority was carried across the land as much by its architectural features as by the conduct of its officials.

According to legend, an ambassador from the Arab state of Dashiguo (on the Arabian Peninsula) to Tang emperor Gaozong in 651CE was the first Muslim to enter China. However, unlike sacred buildings of other foreign religions, there are no mosques built in the Tang capital. In reality, all of China's earliest mosques are in port cities in the southeast, the first of which is Guangzhou's significant city (Canton). This is hardly surprising, given that most Muslims who visited China during that period did so as merchants who brought their religion with them. Until the Mongol conquests of the 13th century, foreigners practiced Islam in southern China's major commerce centers.

The Mongol conquests, which lasted from the early 13th century through the mid-1270s, were China's second significant source of Islam. Surprisingly, this wave of Muslim immigrants cemented Islam's place in China's religious landscape. Due to their tiny size, the Mongols had to rely on outsiders to control the settled towns they invaded. They brought in many people from Central Asia, Persia, and other places further west to China. Many of these people were practicing Muslims and were collectively called "semu" (meaning "colored eyes"; in Yuan-period texts, this compound signified "different varieties of foreigners"). While they, like the Chinese, were subservient to the Mongols, they dominated most of China's political and commercial scene during the period. More crucially, these people stayed in China permanently, where they were welcomed into their chosen communities, most often as intellectuals.

Many of these same people were employed in civil and military roles by the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which ejected the Mongols from China and sent them to the plain. Traditional histories portray the Ming government as being significantly more multi-ethnic and tolerant than they were. Around this time, the Chinese Muslim intellectuals succeeded in establishing Islam as one of the "Chinese religions." The identification of "Muslims in China" was transformed into "Chinese Muslims." By supporting an imperial translation bureau to translate Muslim terminology, the state-supported the madrasa educational system and aided or at least enabled the proliferation of Islamic writing, including the translation of the Quran. This creative output by Chinese Muslim writers resulted in a corpus of over one hundred pieces mainly written in Chinese and Persian, and Arabic, as Zvi Ben-Dor Benito so eloquently illustrates. Han Kitab (a blend of Chinese and Arabic) was built on critical dialogue, an "encompassment" between Confucianism and Islam that was distinct from "accommodation," which implies some level of "sinicization." It reveals how Chinese and Muslim those authors were. This discourse, or encompassment, began during the Mongol era and has lasted to the present day through the Ming and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. It established a mosque-building and educational program based on these philosophers' works, including Chinese translations of the Quran. It had a crucial role in transforming Islam into a standard and broadly recognized part of China's more extraordinary religious landscape. (Brose, 2012)

Islam's story was more complex and varied in the late imperial years and during the Republican era than in previous periods. Violent Muslim-led rebellions have influenced many people's impressions of China in northern and southwestern China. That past is sometimes invoked proof of Muslims' inherent incompatibility with Chinese culture or the pre-modern or present Chinese state. However, it is also evident that Islam flourished in many local communities across China during this period and presented no threat to them. The first regional and national Chinese Muslim organizations were founded during the Republican period (1912–1949). Of course, during the solid nationalist movements that followed the creation of the People's Republic in 1949, notably the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976, all religions were questioned and later annihilated. Deng Xiaoping and his successors' "opening up" permitted Islam, like other religions, to grow in China only after Mao died. Muslims and their faith are divided into two categories in the People's Republic: state citizens and national minorities. We must analyze how these domains operate and interrelate to comprehend Islam's normative significance in China today.

## **Islam in China: Post-Imperial Developments**

The fall of the Qing in 1911 provided a chance for non-Chinese Muslims in Xinjiang's northwest area to secede from China. Because the Hui, who were dispersed throughout the land, saw themselves as Chinese, they would not attempt it. A Chinese warlord named Yang Zengxin seized power in Xinjiang and ruled until 1928. He cultivated solid connections and received economic aid from his neighbor, the Soviet Union, aware of China's deteriorating economic and political conditions. Simultaneously, he changed his policy toward the Muslim community to be less repressive. Following 1928, new officials reinstated more stringent and discriminating decrees against Muslims, known as Uyghurs. Xinjiang's Turkic nationalists retaliated by declaring the independent Eastern Turkestan Republic. Because the central government, which has been

governed by Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) since 1928, had little influence in Xinjiang. The local population appeared to have an incredible opportunity to establish its state. However, the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949 prevented Xinjiang from gaining independence and influenced the Hui. The government first claimed that China was made up of 56 nationalities, including the Han, who made up most of the population. Despite being ethnically Chinese, the Communist Party designated the Hui as a separate minority nationality, with the Uyghur Muslim people of Xinjiang being the most prominent. It is said to have pledged to protect the customs and religious practices of minorities. The creation of the Uyghur Autonomous Region in Xinjiang in 1955 was said to be proof of these ambitions. Many members of the predominantly Han People's Liberation Army seized Xinjiang, created the Production and Construction Corps (PCC), and established semi-military business companies in the region. The PCC, which accounted for more than ten percent of Xinjiang's population, wielded significant economic power and might deter Uyghur demands for greater autonomy or independence. Simultaneously, the Chinese government promoted or forced Han to go to Xinjiang. By this time, the government had undoubtedly hoped for more intermarriages and assimilation, but this has not happened.

Over the last six decades, the Chinese government's policy regarding Hui and non-Chinese Muslims in Xinjiang has shifted. The government listed the Hui as a minority nationality, yet ethnic Chinese in their districts or provinces often shared more than Hui in other parts of the country. Despite occasional clashes between Hui and Han, the Hui did not want independence. The Chinese government is significantly more worried about the Muslims in Xinjiang, but it has yet to formulate a coherent and realistic policy. It suppressed Uyghur expressions and affirmations of their language, religion, and culture during such radical periods as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, jailing and sometimes killing dissidents labeled "splittists. The Turkic peoples were terrified of shedding their skins after "The Red Guards" damaged mosques, forced religious leaders and regular Muslims to rear pigs, and destroyed mosques. The government had a more forgiving stance at other periods, though it nevertheless launched "strike hard" campaigns against splittists.

Relations between the Uyghurs and the government are now tense. Uyghurs still make up a small percentage of top leaders and managers in the Communist Party, local governments, and businesses, with the predominantly Han PCC having significant power. The state is progressively emphasizing the Uyghur language study of Chinese, with less emphasis on supporting Han language study of Uyghur. Censors continue to review literature, historical works, films, and music for ethnic affirmations or nationalism deemed offensive. Religious expression, particularly religious study groups and extremely zealous representations of Islam, is occasionally restricted by the government. It has implemented affirmative action measures in education and employment that benefit Uyghur and other Xinjiang minorities. Furthermore, the one child per family rule does not apply to so-called national minorities, mainly to deflect charges that the Chinese government attempts to diminish the number of non-Han people.

Chinese policymakers have been concerned that the Uyghurs of Xinjiang will seek independence the same way as the former Soviet Central Asian republics did and have attempted to forestall this "threat" by defusing Central Asian support, Uyghur separatists. Increased commerce and treaty agreements with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (established in 2001) have pushed Central Asian governments to refrain from supporting and restricting Uyghurs within their borders. "Signing treaties with China pledging that they would neither harbor nor encourage separatist groups," the Central Asian republics said in 1996. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The 2001 Treaty of Good Neighborly Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation allayed Chinese fears of Russian involvement with Uyghur nationalists, as the Treaty stated that neither party would allow "the establishment on its territory of an organization or group which harms the sovereignty, security, or territorial integrity of the other." After September 11, 2001, the administration used US efforts to its advantage. It persuaded Richard Armitage, the US Deputy Secretary of State, to declare the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which seeks Uyghur independence, a terrorist organization, in August 2002.

Tensions between Uyghurs and the Chinese continue to exist. Sporadic outbreaks of violence have persisted, and the attacks on police officers during the 2008 Summer Olympics drew international notice. The government has played the so-called Uyghur card, claiming that the Uyghur independence movements are part of a united terrorist conspiracy with centralized leadership, accusing splittists of more than 200 terrorist attacks and killing more than a hundred individuals. "A more nuanced appraisal of the record of political violence in Xinjiang in the 1990s would hardly identify a united movement, let alone blame a single organization," says a Xinjiang historian.

The West China economic development initiative, intended to reduce Han-Uyghur hostilities in the 1990s, has proven to be a mixed blessing. Economic activity has accelerated due to government investment, but the Han have reaped the most benefits. They have a larger per capita income than the Uyghurs, and they are nearly entirely in charge of state-owned businesses, many of which are centered on mineral extraction. "The central and regional administrations appear to be pursuing a textbook policy of economic imperialism," according to one expert, "by primarily investing in the mining and exploitation of raw materials". Furthermore, putting a higher emphasis on cotton agriculture, which requires a lot of water in a dry environment, could lead to another calamity like the Soviet Union's desiccation of the Aral Sea in Central Asia.

To summarise, the history of Muslims in China provides teachers with a wealth of material to elucidate and analyze. The Silk Roads, Mongol invasions, and the usage of Muslims in China by the Mongols and Zheng He's missions can all be viewed through the lens of the Muslim experience in China. The Muslims in China can be linked to international developments in East and Central Asia through Qing expansionism and Russian and British colonialism. Ethnic identification and integration are undoubtedly important aspects of the plot, as are current government attitudes toward Muslims and the Islamic world.(Rossabi, 2009)

## Islamic Belief and Culture

Most Hui Muslims in China are Sunni Muslims who adhere to the Hanafi school of Islamic law (known in Chinese as a medium from Arabic *al qadim*, "old"). This legacy also influenced the Sino-Muslim literati tradition and the creation of Han Kitab literature. In the 1920s, Hui intellectuals created and published popular Islamic weekly literature in various China, less well-known but as crucial to the Hui "community." Hui readers received monthly magazines that taught them how to pray and worship properly, presented stories about prominent historical Hui individuals, and spread reminiscences and stories by local Hui writers. Throughout truth, these Hui writers were part of a more significant trend in China, where a new type of popular writing for the masses evolved in response to the May 4 movement's modernizing aspirations in 1919. For the first time, an effort was undertaken to construct a systematic system of transliterating Islamic language into standard Chinese due to the literary flowering. In the 1980s, after the chaotic Mao years had passed, a dictionary was released including hundreds of Arabic and Persian Islamic terms used by Ningxia Hui Muslims in their religious and daily life and assumed to be utilized by Hui across China. (Brose, 2012)

### Diversity and Unity?

The goal of this study was to refute two widespread misconceptions: the first is that China is not a member of the "Islamic World," and the second is that Islam is not part of China's normative religious landscape. Using the Hui as an example, it should be evident that China's membership in the Islamic World is a given conclusion due to the sheer number of Muslims in the nation, much alone the vibrancy of their faith.

It is more difficult to disprove the second argument that Islam is historically or culturally distinct from China and Chinese society. Some Muslims in China, particularly those from the Uyghur group, would agree with this viewpoint. Official policies toward ethnic minorities and access to resources in specific places where some minority live have formed their obstacles and issues with the Chinese state and society, as much as any essential hatred toward Islam. On the other hand, the Hui Muslims is an excellent case study for evaluating Islam's normalcy in China. (Brose, 2012)

Is anything that genuinely unites the Hui Muslims into a group with a similar identity, except their religious allegiance as members of the orthodox Sunni tradition? To consider any religion as normative in a country, the concept of a collective identity is essential. In China, there is no centralized Islamic religious leadership. Like other Chinese Islamic groups, the Hui are not restricted by location, culture, or ethnicity and place a high significance on regional or local identities. Being Muslim is no different for the Hui than being Buddhist or Daoist is for other Chinese. Some locations' linguistic, sociological, and cultural traits transcend or compete with any more major religious identity, defining specific spiritual activities.

## Conclusion

Although their Islamic identity puts them more subject to government surveillance and potential harassment, Islam remains a crucial source of conviction and pride for Chinese Muslims. Their faith gives them a sense of self-identity and self-assurance that allows them to more easily face the obstacles posed by the diversity of current societal issues plaguing China. While many people in China today are looking for an ideology in which they can believe and put their faith, Muslims in China may turn to their religion as one that has never been discredited, despite being attacked and persecuted in the past. Furthermore, China's current societal problems are substantial, affecting practically everyone in every region directly or indirectly. HIV/AIDS and drug addiction are now widespread in China's provinces, prostitution is common, violent crime has skyrocketed, women are kidnapped and sold across the country, and unemployment is a significant worry everywhere. The government's systematic destruction of the socialist welfare state exacerbates the social malaise that accompanies these issues. Free housing, education, and health care are no longer available. Patients are practically dying on the doorsteps of hospital emergency rooms because they are no longer permitted to enter unless they have cash on hand to pay for their medical treatment. As previously stated, college fees in many rural communities have become unreasonably expensive. Even though Muslims endure similar hardships and are substantially poorer in many parts of China than Han Chinese, Muslim groups have tried to join together to provide as much support as possible. But, perhaps most crucially, at a time when so much in China appears to be changing so quickly, and nearly invariably for the worse in rural China, Muslims can find some comfort and hope in their faith.

To summarise, although retaining religious beliefs and practices has been a constant challenge over the years, Muslims in China have always been confident in their identities as Muslims and Chinese. Even though many historians assumed these identities were intrinsically antagonistic, Islam's existence in China for over a millennium defies these ideas. Islamic and Chinese values are sufficiently complementary, dynamic, and fluid to allow Islam to flourish in China. There is no doubt that the Muslims of China have authentically Islamic traditions, a strong faith, and are true Muslims.

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