

# Unity in Diversity

## The Islamic Revival Movement in China Today

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Until recently, China's Muslim tradition received relatively little systematic study. However, some recent scholarly works in English have begun to address the history and present state of Muslims and Islam in China.<sup>1</sup> In his book *Muslim Chinese*, Dru Gladney (Gladney 1991) offered one of the first extensive reports on Hui 回 Muslims in post-Mao China – the largest Muslim ethnic minority group in China – and a general portrait of China's Muslim peoples. But since it appeared, only a few works have dealt with the Islamic revival movement that has occurred in China during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> In China, scholarly recognition of the importance and diversity of China's Islamic heritage has also been slowly growing. According to statistics from the Islamic Association of China, at the end of the twentieth century China had a Muslim population of more than 20 million<sup>3</sup>, 35,000 mosques<sup>4</sup> and 46,000 *akhond* (Persian: 'teacher, clergyman') or clerics working for Muslim communities, 20,000 *khalifas* (Arabic for 'successors of the Prophet Muhammad' – the religious students studying in *madaris*, plural of *madrasa* = religious schools)<sup>5</sup> and there are at least a thousand local Islamic associations (including 422 at the county level), which co-

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<sup>1</sup> For the most representative works, see Israeli 1994 and 1981, Leslie 1981 and 1986, Pillsbury 1973, Lipman 1997, Fletcher 1995 and Gladney 1991.

<sup>2</sup> See Dillon 1996 and 1999, Rudelson 1998 and 1999, Gillette 2000, Jaschok/Shui 2000. As for Chinese scholarly works, due to the sensitivity of the topic in China, the author has not seen any special books on Islamic studies that have been published regarding the current situation.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Yu 2002.

<sup>4</sup> This statistic of the number of mosques in China is apparently an underestimate. According to a figure given by a Muslim scholar in an unofficial publication, the mosques in China number more than 40,000; see fn. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wan 1999.

ordinate Islamic affairs with government authorities under the control of the Communist Party.<sup>6</sup>

This paper will discuss the current state of Islam and Muslim communities in China based on extensive reading of periodicals published by many Islamic organizations and communities, interviews with Muslims from many walks of life, and finally the direct observations made during visits to many Muslim communities in different parts of China over the last decade. It will also build on other studies of contemporary Muslim China that have appeared in Chinese and English in recent years.

### **The Muslim Community in China**

Any examination of Islam in China must not overlook the basic organization of the Muslim community – its grassroots organizations, and the basic components of Islamic social life in China. Here a fundamental issue is the ‘exceptional’ character of Islam compared to other Chinese religious traditions. A fundamental difference between Islam and the Buddhist and Daoist religions that have traditionally dominated Chinese society is that Islam is an organized religion and Muslims live in a community based on Islamic law (*shari'a*). Other than monasteries and temples in which monks live in secluded settings only occasionally open to others, Chinese Buddhism and Daoism generally have no exclusive religious communities. Historically, the only exceptions to this rule were a few sects which arose at certain times in Chinese history. Chinese religions are not ‘organized religions’. In China, as elsewhere, Christianity has been a religion centered on church communities. But generally Christian churches have focused on spiritual activities, and have stayed removed from the economic, social and cultural activities that Muslim communities have encompassed. Thus, no other religion in China combines spiritual faith with mundane matters as intimately as Islam.

Another striking difference between Islam and other religions in China is that the Islamic faith is closely related to ethnicity; Muslims in China are nearly all classified by the Chinese government as belonging to one of several ethnic minority groups. Chinese followers of Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity have no such specifically ethnic links

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mu 2001.

and national social status. But, as will be explained in greater detail below, China's Muslims belong to ethnic minority groups, principally Hui and Uighur (Wei-wuer-zu 维吾尔族).

The typical Muslim community centers on a mosque, and its members enjoy a shared religious commitment as well as economic and social-cultural activities. In Arabic, such a community is called a *jama'a*. In this community all adult male members have equal rights and responsibilities to participate in communal affairs. Consensus over decisions concerning the mosque is arrived at by a board of management headed by a director and several elders. They also take care of routine affairs such as mosque maintenance, finances, education, administration, and daily activities that directly tie the mosque to Muslim life and public affairs.<sup>7</sup>

In China the majority of Muslims, except for members of several Sufi orders, follow the traditional Sunni custom in which each *jama'a* is a quite independent body and there are no strong cross-affiliations between communities. There is no central leadership of these communities, although there are strong spiritual and cultural bonds between them and there is also a widespread Islamic fraternal sentiment. Each *jama'a* is more autonomous than, say, a Han 汉 Chinese village or neighborhood, and other Muslim communities cannot interfere in its affairs or restrain its autonomy.

The *jama'a* has two parts: a mosque administration board, which is made up of members of the community and a *madrasa* (religious school) composed of the people mainly coming from outside the community, such as *akhonds*<sup>8</sup> (or imams) and *khalifas*.<sup>9</sup> Most Muslim communities in China have customary regulations that stipulate that a cleric, such as an *imam*, should be invited from another Muslim community to supervise the religious affairs and religious school of the host community. The essential requirements of the *imam* are: first, he must be knowledgeable in the Arabic Quran and Islamic theology; and second, he must be a virtuous, upright person willing to dedicate himself to Islam and his community. The qualities considered necessary for the selection of the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Suo 2002.

<sup>8</sup> *Akhond* refers to religious clerics who staff mosques and *madaris*; imams or *Akhonds* of *madrasa* teaching are the chief clerics of mosques.

<sup>9</sup> Concerning the structure of Muslim communities in China, even in history we can observe these parallel divisions among the Hui communities in Yunnan 云南. Cf. Wang 1996.

director and elderly members into the mosque management board are: a sense of responsibility and justice, as well as readiness for selfless engagement for their community. Usually, the term for members of the Mosque administration and the *imam* is three years, but their tenure can be extended for another term or longer if the community chooses.<sup>10</sup>

The Muslim community is thus centered on the mosque where the *akhond* and other clergy reside and preach. The mosque is a communal center providing religious services and instruction, as well as important social, cultural, economic and public welfare functions. Thus, Muslims regard the mosque as the soul of their community. In China, mosques have often come to be more active and effective units of community than the villages and urban neighborhood committees that dominate the grassroots Han social fabric.

Indeed, as grassroots secular power in China has eroded since the 1980s because of corruption and commercial reforms, mosque-based communities of Muslim society have actually strengthened their role in communal affairs. Today almost all the important affairs in rural China such as family planning, education, village elections, social security, and anti-drug campaigns, cannot take place without at least the tacit support of the *akhond* or *imam*. In Muslim communities the *akhond* is often more influential than local party officials, and before an important task is undertaken, officials must consult with the *akhond*. In many cases, the government officials may ask the *imam* to deliver a speech after the *jum'a* (the Friday prayers of the congregation) to communicate official policies and resulting measures to the followers.

In Muslim communities the *akhond* is the most prominent public figure, and his views can exert a powerful influence on ordinary members of the community. In not a few cases the director of mosque administration board is also a village cadre, thus combining the religious and secular administrative roles. If the director of the mosque board is not a village official, his authority may nevertheless exceed the power of local party and government officials whose bureaucratic status prevents them from enjoying the same authority in the community. This is one

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<sup>10</sup> This part in general has been summarized by the author after visits to various Muslim communities in China. Other Muslim scholars in Islamic periodicals such as *Kaituo* 开拓 (*Pioneer*), *Yisilan wenhua yanjiu* 伊斯兰文化研究 (Journal of Islamic Culture), and *Muslim tongxun* 穆斯林通讯 (Muslim Newsletter), etc. have also discussed this issue.

important reason the state has been losing authority among the Muslim believers in heavily Islamic parts of China.

After decades of restrictions and even harsh repression, the Chinese government began to adopt a more pragmatic policy towards religion in the 1980s, and this new tolerance ignited a revival of Islam. Now growing numbers of Muslims attend mosques to pray and attend religious services. Mosques in regions with a strong Islamic tradition such as Xinjiang 新疆, Gansu 甘肃, Ningxia 宁夏, Yunnan 云南, Hebei 河北, He'nan 河南 and Shaanxi 陕西, are often full to overflowing during the Friday *jum'a* prayers. Many pious Chinese Muslims pray five times a day, and in Muslim dominant areas an Islamic ceremony can attract more than ten thousand believers to pray and listen to the *wa'z* (Arabic: a sermon delivered by an influential *imam*).<sup>11</sup> The mosque black board always has posted the long list of the names of the Muslims who pay *zakat* (Arabic, alms) or contribute money or other items for religious purposes.

In urban mosques it is also not unusual to see Uighur Muslims praying side by side with Hui Muslims – a sign that Islamic fraternal feelings can cross ethnic boundaries.<sup>12</sup> It is also not uncommon to see Muslim women in heavily Muslim areas such as Kashgar (Kashi 喀什), Hotan (Hetian 和田), Lanzhou 兰州, Linxia 临夏, Weizhou 韦州 and Xi'an 西安 wearing the headscarves and modest dress many followers believe the Holy Quran stipulates. During Ramadan, the fasting month of the Islamic calendar, many Muslims now abstain from food and drink during the daytime.

Even in communities with weaker religious traditions, Muslims often observe basic Islamic customs such as refusing to eat pork and other foods proscribed by Quranic dietary law, observing Muslim practices in weddings, funerals and burial services, observing the ritual of

<sup>11</sup> For instance, in 1981 in Shadian 沙甸, a Hui community in Yunnan, the celebration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad was attended by 50,000 Muslims; the annual Islamic festival has for the last decade usually been celebrated by 10,000 Muslims (Wang/Ma 1996). Other big Muslim communities in Northwest China can also have such large gatherings for religious festivals, i.e., the Id-Kan Mosque in Kashgara and the Hui communities in Linxia of Gansu.

<sup>12</sup> In Beijing on Xinjiang Street 新疆村 many Uighur businessmen have opened restaurants and shops for commercial activities for people going to the Jingshifang 锦什坊 and the Haidian 海淀 Mosques for religious services.

giving Arabic names to new-born children, and following Islamic ritual in the slaughter of livestock.

Although the distance between China and Saudi Arabia is considerable, and most Chinese Muslims are poor, the number of followers applying to perform the *hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca that each Muslim has to perform at least once – has been growing steadily since the 1980s. In spite of an annual official quota of 2000 *hajjis* in recent years,<sup>13</sup> the actual number of Chinese Muslims making the pilgrimage every year may be more than 6000; many go to Saudi Arabia on other pretexts such as visiting relatives and doing business.

To sum up, with the revival of Islamic consciousness and religious traditions in China, most Chinese Muslims can now freely practice the basic requirements of Islam, and the number of Muslims determined to strictly follow all ‘Five Pillars’ of the Islamic faith is growing quickly.

### The Diversity of China’s Muslim Communities

Although Islamic traditions have revived strongly in China since the 1980s, China’s Muslim communities are very diverse in terms of geographical location, ethnicity, languages, cultural features, and even their various doctrinal schools and religious practices.

1) First, the Muslim population in China is distributed widely but unevenly. All of China’s 32 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities have Muslim populations. Out of China’s nearly 2,400 counties, more than 2,300 have Muslims.<sup>14</sup> However, the geographic concentration of the Muslim population in China is also highly uneven: more than two thirds of China’s Muslims live in the country’s northwest, particularly in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu 新疆维吾尔自治区), Gansu Province, the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia Hui Zizhiqu 宁夏回族自治区), and Qinghai 青海 Province. The other third of the Muslim population is largely concentrated in predominantly Muslim areas in a number of other provinces: He’nan, Hebei, Yunnan, Shandong 山东, and Anhui 安徽.<sup>15</sup> Although

<sup>13</sup> The number of *hajjis* who performed a pilgrimage to Mecca in 2000 was 2200, and in 2002 about 2000, cited from my interview with an official at the Islamic Association of China 中国伊斯兰教协会, Feb. 8, 2002; Also cf. Ma Yongguang 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Zhang Tianlu 1991.

<sup>15</sup> See Map 2 and Map 3 in Wang Jianping 2001, p. xx-xxi.

most of China's regions outside the northwest have very small Muslim populations, these populations tend to live in dense concentrations; they dominate certain urban neighborhoods or villages, often close to historically strategic geographic sites such as rivers, canals or communication hubs. This remarkable feature of Muslims' residential patterns is a product of history: many Muslims moved into central inland and coastal China during the Yuan 元, Ming 明 and Qing 清 Dynasties, serving as militia in imperial armies, and they were stationed in strategic encampments from which 'Hui' Muslim communities evolved.

2) The Muslim population in China is also ethnically very diverse. There are ten ethnic minority groups in China that are classed as Muslim peoples. They are the Hui, Uighur, Kazakh (Hasake-zu 哈萨克族), Kyrgyz (Keerkezi-zu 柯尔克孜族), Dongxiang-su 东乡族, Uzbeks (Wuzibieke-zu 乌孜别克族), Tatars (Tataer-zu 塔塔尔族), Tajik (Tajike-zu 塔吉克族), Salar (Sala-zu 撒拉族), and Bonan (Bao'an-zu 保安族). The largest group is the Hui – mainly Chinese-speaking Muslims who are distinguished from Han Chinese largely by their religion alone – who number over 10 million and make up a little more than a half of the Muslim population in China.

The next largest group of Muslims is the Uighur people, who number eight million according to the latest census statistics.<sup>16</sup> The Uighur are followed by the Kazakh people, with a population of 1.5 million; the Dongxiang, with around 500,000; and the Kyrgyz with 200,000. The Salar have a population of 100,000, and the Tajik, Uzbeks and Bao'an have populations between 13,000 and 40,000. The smallest Muslim ethnic group is the Tatars, with a population of around 6,000.<sup>17</sup>

Linguistically, the majority of Hui speak Mandarin Chinese as well as the various Chinese dialects also spoken by local Han Chinese; a small number of Hui also speak Mongol, Thai, Bai and Tibetan thanks to a long history of association and intermarriage with these other ethnic groups. Several thousand Hui Muslims live on Hainan 海南, a large island province in the South China Sea, and they speak a Vietnamese-Ma-

<sup>16</sup> The census of 1990 gave the Uighur population as 7,214,431. The census of 2001 has not given any broken down statistics concerning the Muslim population in China. The figure of eight million is rather a very reserved estimate of the author.

<sup>17</sup> All figures are given in reference to the census of 1990 adjusted by the author according to the natural growth of these Muslim peoples. Cf. *Beijing Review* 1990, p. 3 (Major Data of the 1990 Census) and p. 30 (Population of China's Ethnic Nationalities).

lay language inherited from ancestors who came from Southeast Asia. The Uighur, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Salar and Tatars each speak their own distinctive languages, all belonging to the Turkic-Altai language family. The Dongxiang and the Bao'an speak a mixed Turkic-Mongol language also influenced by Mandarin Chinese. Finally, the Tajik speak an eastern Iranian language.

3) Although they share a common faith, Muslims in China belong to very diverse cultural traditions. The Hui have been more open to Han Chinese culture than other Muslim groups. The forefathers of the Hui came from Central Asia, Persia, Arabia and western Asia. But after many generations of intermarriage with Han Chinese and other ethnic groups, and encouraged by assimilation policies imposed by imperial governments, most Hui look like Han Chinese. In many ways they have absorbed Han Chinese culture and customs in language, dress, and social habits – with the exception of Muslim practices concerning diet, birth, marriages and funerals.

The Turkic-Altai speaking Muslim peoples generally resemble their Central Asian counterparts in cultural traditions and customs. The Kazakhs and Kyrgyz retain a nomadic tribal life with traces of pre-Islamic culture, including some shamanistic elements. Historically, the Uighur, Uzbeks and Tatars were mostly sedentary peoples who lived in settlements around oases; they manifest a strong farming and commercial traditions. The Dongxiang, Salar and Bao'an lead a life of farming, trading and herding, reflecting their demanding surroundings: geographically isolated areas with mixed economic activities. The mountain-dwelling Tajiks' lifestyle reflects their ties to Iranian culture and is similar to their ethnic counterparts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>

4) Islam in China is to some extent divided by the same doctrinal divisions and divergent religious practices to be found in the rest of the Muslim world. The majority of Muslims in China adhere to the Hanafi School 哈乃斐学派, the one of the four *madhhabs*, or theological-juristic schools, in Sunni Islam. But among Chinese Muslims there are divisions between Sufi mysticism and non-Sufi streams of Islam; between the Ikhwani School<sup>19</sup> and the traditional Qadim (Gedimu 格迪目, from

<sup>18</sup> Xiren et al. 1994, pp. 91-135.

<sup>19</sup> *Ikhwani* (Yihewani 伊赫瓦尼, Arabic for 'brotherhood'), originating from the Wahabit (*Wahabi* 瓦哈比) movement in Arabia and introduced into China in the late



Arab. "old") School, which is more tolerant of indigenous cultures; and between the Sunni and Shi'a groups.

It is safe to say 99% of Muslims in China are adherents of Sunni Islam. But at least of one third of the Sunni Muslims in China are followers of various Sufi orders. There are four major Sufi orders present in China: Jahriyya (Zhehelinye 哲赫林耶), Khufiyya (Hufeiye 虎非耶), Qadiriyya (Gadelinye 嘎德林耶) and Kubrawiyya (Kuburenye 库不忍耶). There are also some smaller orders such as Shaddhliyya (Shazilinye 沙孜林耶), Suhrawadiyya (Suhelawadiye 苏赫拉瓦底耶), Chistiyya (Qiesidiye 切斯底耶) and Qalandariyya (Gelandaiye 格兰岱耶). The largest group among the main four Sufi orders is the Khufiyya, with 2.5 million followers. But it is sub-divided into many sub-orders and schools. The Jahriyya also is divided into several groups with a total membership of 1.5 million. The Qadiriyya has a membership of about half a million. The smallest Sufi order is the Kubrawiyya, whose adherents mainly belong to the Dongxiang ethnic group in Gansu Province. These figures of the Sufi fellows only include those of the Hui, Dongxiang, Salar and Bao'an Muslim peoples. As for the statistics of the Sufi membership among the Turkic Muslims in China, the reserved figure probably is around more than one million.

Non-Sufi believers are also divided into several groups. The largest group is the Qadim, the traditional group which has accommodated local cultures in its faith. At a conservative estimate, the Qadim or the traditional Sunni group has at least ten millions followers in communities throughout China (including the figures both the Hui and other Turkic groups).<sup>20</sup> The Ikhwani movement has at least 2 million members in China. It split into two groups in the 1930s: the mainstream Ikhwani and the Salafiyya (Sailafeiye 赛拉菲耶), whose members venerate first three generations after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

There are several major differences between the Ikhwani and the Qadim or the traditional Sunni group. One of them is that the Ikhwani oppose to ritual tomb pilgrimages, veneration of the dead and celebration of the Maulid (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), all of which are practiced by the Qadim. The Ikhwani group regards these practices

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, later on they developed into a distinguished group differing from the Wahhabiyya.

<sup>20</sup> The figures of the Qadim and the Ikhwani groups are based on the tables provided by Ma Tong 马通's work with my estimation data including other Muslim peoples in China. See Ma Tong 1983, pp. 352–353.

as Chinese or indigenous acculturations and deviations from the righteous path of Islam. China's founding Ikhwani leaders were influenced by the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia they encountered during their *hajj* there, and they came back to China vowing to expunge alien Chinese practices from Muslim communities and restore Islam in China to the true way of Allah. The Ikhwani group is also opposed to all forms of Sufism. The slogan they popularized in the early 20th century was, "Down with *menhuan* 门宦 (Chinese for Sufism) and destroy the *qubba* (Arabic, referring to the tombs of the Sufi saints)".<sup>21</sup> Nowadays, 'purist' Chinese Muslims who wish to practice a more 'orthodox' Islam often belong to Ikhwani communities. Unlike the term Wahhabi, the Ikhwani School of the Hui Muslims does not have negative connotations of politicization and radicalism, and in fact Ikhwani groups are tolerated by the Chinese government.

The major differences between Sufi and the non-Sufi groups are the following: First, a Sufi order has a religious leader who appoints his representatives to supervise his communities; non-Sufi groups have no such central leadership, and no hierarchical structure that spans local communities.<sup>22</sup> Second, the leaders of Sufi orders and suborders usually pass their power onto designated successors, in most cases chosen from their own kin or disciples. By contrast, non-Sufi groups choose their imams through community consensus. Third, Sufis practice a kind of mysticism (*tariqa*, Arabic for 'the way toward Allah') alien to non-Sufi Islam. In their rituals they emphasize *dhikr* (chanting accompanied by body movements) and meditation. Non-Sufi groups are devoted to fulfilling the religious obligations sanctioned by the Quran and the Sunna, and they reject the ritualistic and meditative practices of the Sufi. Fourth, Sufi orders are centered on a *qubba*, or tomb (*mazar*, Arabic, refers to the tomb of a Sufi saint among the Turkic Muslim communities) complexes holding the graves of the orders' founding saints, and Sufi disciples believe in *karama* – miracles accomplished by saints (*wali* 瓦里), or by Sufi masters. Therefore, they regard pilgrimages to tombs as

<sup>21</sup> Ma Tong 1983, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> This is only considered relatively, not absolutely since in the special time and special circumstance, i.e., in the time of the Muslim insurrection against the oppression of Chinese imperial authorities, the non-Sufi groups such as Qadim Muslims could formulate a central leadership or a prominent Muslim leader who led all Muslims fighting against the non-Muslim rulers. The most remarkable example is Du Wenxiu 杜文秀 (1823–1872) and Ma Dexin 马德新 (1794–1874) in the Yunnanese Muslim rebellion (19<sup>th</sup> century). See Bai Shouyi 1953.

their most important rituals, even more important than the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some Sufi groups even deem their Sufi leaders to have divine natures equivalent to the Prophet Muhammad or even Allah. However, the non-Sufi groups, particularly the Ikhwani, reject these practices as aberrations; they regard tomb venerating as a heresy.

There are also many other divisions that differentiate China's Muslim communities. More than half of China's Tajik Muslims in China follow Isma'il Shi'ism, or Seventh Imam sect in the Shi'a faith. They regard the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader, and pay annual tribute to his representatives from abroad. Many Uighurs in Yarkand (Yeerqiang 叶尔羌, today Shache 莎车) in southern Xinjiang are followers of the Twelfth Imam Shi'a, or the majority Shi'i group in the Islamic world. In addition, a small number of Hui in Xinjiang and Gansu follow Twelfth Imam Shi'ism.<sup>23</sup>

5) Chinese Muslims display a wide range of day-to-day religious practices. The sedentary Hui, Uighur and Uzbek Muslims pray regularly in mosques, and pious Muslims even pray five times a day. The nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz Muslims pray possibly one or two times a day in their tents. Fasting during Ramadan is widespread among Muslims in Northwest China, but Hui who live in coastal China often observe only a few days' fasting or do not fast at all. The Turkic Muslims of western China celebrate the Id al-Qurban (Day of Sacrifice) as the biggest Islamic festival. But the Hui mark the end of Ramadan as the most important Islamic festival. Many Hui communities in southwest China even treat Maulid, the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, as the biggest Islamic festival.

While the Hui have adopted many Chinese customs and cultural habits, the Turkic and Tajik Muslims retain the traditions of Turkic and Iranian Islam, including some pre-Islamic elements drawn from shamanism, Manichaeism, Buddhism and star-worship.<sup>24</sup> In the cities and towns Muslims often drink alcohol, but in regions with strong Islamic traditions drinking is regarded as a grave violation of Islamic law. In

<sup>23</sup> On the Shi'a among the Hui in Xinjiang, I got the information from my trip to the region in 2000; A Xinjiang Hui surnamed Yu 禹, now doing trade in Beijing, claims himself to be a Shi'a and assures me that there is a small group of Shi'a among the Hui in Yili 伊犁 of North Xinjiang. On the Shi'a Hui in Gansu, I got the information from my colleague Prof. Feng Jinyuan 冯今源 who saw them in his fieldwork in the 1980s.

<sup>24</sup> Zhao Enru 2000.

western China many Muslims take it as a religious duty to send their children to study the Arabic Quran and Islam in *madaris*, but full-scale *madrasa* education in the eastern part of China is considerably rare. Many Muslims in central and eastern China understand being Muslim to mean avoiding pork meat and little more; but for many ethnically Turkic Muslims in China's west Islam is a whole way of life, and they must follow the Quran and Sunna in their entirety. Among the Sufi groups the different orders sometimes clash each other just for a small variety in the tone of chanting the Quranic text, the method of meditation or in some ritual formation.<sup>25</sup>

## The Impetus to Unity Among China's Muslim Communities

Although the many factors described above offer a picture of tremendous diversity in Islam in China, there is also clearly a trend towards greater unity among these Muslim communities, particularly over the past two decades of economic reform. There are several factors encouraging greater unity among China's Muslim communities.

### I. Umma Solidarity

The sentiment of *umma* (Arabic, 'Muslim nationhood or fraternity') links otherwise disparate Muslim communities together as they all strive to survive in a non-Muslim society. If one visits a mosque in Shanghai, China's largest commercial and industrial city where many Uighur businesspeople travel to do business, one often sees Uighur Muslims praying alongside Hui Muslims. The Uighurs do not have their own mosque, and so the two communities pray together. In many other big cities, such as Beijing, Guangzhou 广州, Xi'an, Lanzhou and Shenzhen 深圳, it is common for Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds to pray together. The same applies to Hui travelers in Xinjiang; if they cannot find a mosque for Hui Muslims, they attend a Uighur mosque to pray. In *madaris* in Beijing and elsewhere throughout China, Uighur *khalifa* sit beside Hui *khalifa* in the same classroom studying the Quran and other Islamic subjects. Some Sufi orders such as Lingming Tang 灵明堂 and some sub-orders of Khufiyya also have trans-ethnic membership. As

<sup>25</sup> Ma Tong has recorded many cases of such clashes and even sanguinary conflicts among the different Sufi orders or suborders in China's history (Ma Tong 1983).

regional mobility grows, this kind of cross-ethnic religious mixing is also growing.

Occasionally, this trans-ethnic religious sentiment has also given rise to trans-ethnic protests. In 1989 Muslims in Beijing, Shanghai, Lanzhou, Kunming 昆明, Urumqi (Wulumuqi 乌鲁木齐), Xi'an and Xining 西宁 protested against a Chinese book *Sexual Customs* which had passages insulting to Islam. The public rallies brought together Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Dongxiang, and Salar Muslims with Hui Muslims. Under great pressure, the Chinese authorities banned the book and put the two Chinese authors under house arrest.<sup>26</sup>

Such *umma* solidarity is also reflected in mosque building and maintenance and Islamic education. When a local community builds or renovates a mosque, funds for the task are collected not only from the community itself, but also from other communities and individual Muslims even in far distant regions. Likewise, funding for *madrassa* schools and Islamic festivals often comes from a wide variety of sources. When a local Muslim community celebrates major Islamic holidays such as the Id al-Qurban, the end of the Ramadan, and the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, representatives from other Muslim communities are invited to participate in the festival and may travel thousands of kilometers to attend.<sup>27</sup>

## II. Shared Faith

The various Muslim ethnic groups and different Islamic schools described above share the same basic religious beliefs and practices, and this in itself helps to encourage unity between communities. Any Muslim – Uighur, Uzbek, Tajik, Dongxiang, or Hui – certainly believes in the same Quran, the Prophet Muhammad and probably hopes to master Arabic; all pious Muslims follow the same essential Five Pillars of Islam: reciting the Islamic credo in Arabic, praying, giving alms, fasting, and, if possible, making a pilgrimage to Mecca. The social cement that this shared faith generates is seen, for example, in social events that bring different groups together. In annual competitions of Quranic chanting

<sup>26</sup> Gladney 1991; see also Wang Jianping 1996b (The Incident of *Book of Sexual Customs* in China).

<sup>27</sup> Many pieces of the monument stones in various mosques have the inscription texts display this point, and the author himself has clearly seen the inter-links of Muslim communities concerning building mosque and Islamic festival celebration in his many trips to the Muslim communities in China. See Yu/Lei 2001.

organized by the Islamic Association of China or by local Islamic associations, Uighur Muslims and Muslims from other ethnic groups join with Hui Muslims in reciting the Arabic Quran with all the fluency and melody they can muster; this skill is considered a great virtue by all Muslims in China.

The basic creed of Islam that Muslims subscribe to is generally the same across communities, with some variations reflecting local cultural adjustments. In encountering a non-Islamic environment with a strong Han Chinese cultural influence, Chinese Muslims tend to focus on their own communities, and they prefer to mix with other followers of Islam rather than assimilating into Han Chinese culture. Muslims everywhere across China uphold the same dietary customs and dine at *halal* (according to Islamic regulations) restaurants or cafeterias. They also often pepper their conversation with some Arabic or Persian vocabulary, although they may speak Mandarin Chinese or Chinese dialects, especially if they are Hui.<sup>28</sup> Muslims away from home often find it easier to socialize with other Muslims and receive hospitality from locals Muslims. When Chinese Muslims meet other Muslims, they often greet each other with *dost* (Persian, 'friend') or *salam* (Arabic, peace). The way of Islamic way of life is thus deeply rooted in habits and traditions that transcend communal boundaries.

### III. Crossregional Solidarity

Chinese Muslims have developed strong sympathies for the injustices they perceive other Muslims suffering in a predominantly non-Muslim society, and they have proven willing to aid other Muslim communities. There have been cases of Chinese Muslims acting in concert to resist or protest hostility from wider society. In late 2000 the "Yangxin Incident" occurred in which Hui Muslims in Yangxin 阳信, Shandong, fought with Han Chinese after Muslim bans on eating pork were mocked and violated. Hui from Mengcun 孟村, Hebei Province, traveled to Yangxin to show their solidarity with their fellow Muslims brothers. When the Hui protestors from Mengcun marched into Yangxin their way was blocked by armed police. The local government mishandled the incident and six Hui Muslim civilians were killed in the ensuing gunfire.<sup>29</sup> After word of this tragedy spread across China, many Muslim communities in Hebei, Shandong, He'nan, Tianjin and even Beijing mobilized and held protests

<sup>28</sup> See Wang Jianping 2001a.

<sup>29</sup> Gao Yaokuan 2002, p. 50.

demanding the government redress this injustice and pay compensation for the deaths.<sup>30</sup> Muslims in other regions donated money to the families of those who died or were injured. The central government, fearing wider instability, moved very swiftly to assuage Muslim anger and dismissed local leaders in Yangxin, including the chief of the police force. The government also met all the demands raised by the Hui protesters.<sup>31</sup>

In early 2001 a Sufi suborder (the Salar Menhuan) in Guanghe County 广河县, Gansu Province, broke out in internal fighting after its master passed away and there was a dispute over who was his rightful successor. The fighting cost two lives, and local authorities ordered the temporary closure of the suborder's mosque. The Sufi believers then had no place to pray, and other neighboring Muslim communities invited the Sufi believers to pray in their mosques, although they belonged to different Sufi orders and different ethnic groups.<sup>32</sup>

It is not unusual for a Uighur Muslim to seek shelter in a Hui mosque or community if traveling in central and eastern China. The traveler may even receive a few days' free accommodation from his co-believers despite different cultural backgrounds and customs.

The sentiment of the *umma* can therefore act as a unifying force transcending barriers between different communities, groups and schools. Indeed, throughout China's history many Muslim uprisings against imperial governments contained different Muslim groups: Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Salar, Dongxiang, and others.<sup>33</sup>

#### IV. Muslim Networks

In the wake of China's economic reforms, overlapping trade, communications and cultural networks have been emerging in Chinese Muslim

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<sup>30</sup> The author is aware of this through interviews he held with the participants from these provinces at a conference held in Beijing, November 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Refer to the Xinhua News Agency's report at the beginning of 2001; confirmed by the author's interviews with the Hui Muslims from North China during a conference held by Islamic Association of China (Zhongguo Yisilan-jiao Xiehui 中国伊斯兰教协会), Beijing, November 9–12, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Based on the author's personal observations in his fieldwork in Guanghe of Gansu, January 30, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the Muslim uprisings in Xinjiang in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Muslim uprisings in Northwest China and in Yunnan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Tan 2000, pp. 48–64; Jin 1989, p. 43; Gao Wenyuan 1998.

society. The growing influence of these networks in China is described in the following six scenes:

1) The Muslim economic network in China: After China opened its door to a market economy in the 1980s, private enterprise developed rapidly, and Muslims have taken advantage of liberalizing economic policies to set up their own business. Many Muslim-owned restaurants, workshops, shops, hotels, and companies have mushroomed across the country. According to recent statistics, in Beijing alone there are at least two thousand Muslim-owned enterprises such as restaurants, cafeteria, butchers, hotel, kindergartens, and other private businesses.<sup>34</sup>

In many areas of China markets for *halal* beef and mutton and other Muslim foodstuffs, leather, handicrafts, and herbs have absolutely become dominated by Muslims. Many of these private Muslim enterprises contribute part of their profits to mosques and Islamic schools. Their donations have already given rise to informal Islamic charity foundations serving Islamic welfare and public welfare. Some Muslim businessmen have founded business syndicates with many branches spanning many regions. Sha Pengcheng 沙鹏程, a Hui Muslim entrepreneur who owns a traditional Hui medical company in Xi'an and exports medicine to many countries in Middle East, Southeast Asia and European and American countries won the 2000 Economic Pioneer Prize sponsored by Omar Foundation in Los Angeles.<sup>35</sup> Many Chinese Muslims also use their connections with their friends in Islamic countries to do international business linking up with international Islamic foundations.

2) A regional network of transportation, communication and commercial links fostering economic and trade cooperation among Muslim communities: Even in imperial China, Muslims were famed for their far-reaching transport and commerce networks, such as the Silk Road, the Spice Road and trans-Asiatic caravan trade. For Muslims in China, as elsewhere, the early career of Muhammad as a trader set an example of combining commerce and piety. Traditionally, Chinese Muslims traded in porcelain, silk, textiles, minerals, tea, jade and other commodities. Muslims also developed special secret signs and practices to protect

<sup>34</sup> Peng 2001, p. 32; Peng 1996, p. 183; I gained this figure also from my interview with the Deputy Secretary in General of Islamic Association of Beijing (Beijing Yisilanjiao Xiehui 北京伊斯兰教协会) in June of 2002.

<sup>35</sup> News reported by *Zhongguo muslim* 2001/2, p. 41.



their trade, and they formed trade guilds to regulate trade and transportation.

Today, China's Muslims, especially the Hui and the Uighur peoples, have inherited a traditional proclivity for trade and commerce.<sup>36</sup> In western China, particularly in mountainous regions such as Yunnan, Gansu and Guizhou 贵州 where communications are backward, Muslims still dominate the modern 'caravan' trade of today. In these and other regions, Muslim owners of motor vehicles have developed regional networks carry passengers and goods. The trading traditions of China's Muslim communities, and their wider religious networks, have been given new life and influence in the wake of China's economic reforms, and this new influence is also reflected in strengthened contacts between Muslims across the country.

3) A network of production and distribution of Islamic goods to meet the demand of believers in China: Muslims in China have also developed their own networks to make and distribute daily goods used by Muslims everywhere. Muslims make and sell *halal* foods for residents and travelers. Many mosques have shops to distribute special religious items such as soap, white caps, cloth to wrap corpses, prayer badges, jewelry, headscarves, prayer carpets, porcelain, incense and incense-burner, and Islamic booklets and publications. The commercial links created by the circulation of these Islamic goods made by Chinese Muslims have formed an Islamic economy that to a considerable degree independent of the Han Chinese economy and commercial distribution networks.

4) The creation of Islamic websites: With the spread of the Internet, Islamic communities throughout China have also taken to using high technology to communicate. Two dozen or so Islamic websites have been set up by the Muslims in China since the last few years.<sup>37</sup> Most of them are devoted to spreading the doctrine of Islam and instructing Muslim people in their faith, and there are also a few Muslim-oriented commercial and academic websites run by Muslims. Islamic religious websites are usually operated by Hui Muslim teachers and students in *madaris*. Much of the content explains the basic tenets of Islam and promotes Islamic culture. The websites also report news from the rest of the Islamic world and offer commentaries on current Muslim affairs; for example, the reaction of the Muslim world to the September 11 ter-

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<sup>36</sup> For Islamic economy, see Lai 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Pan/Hu 2002, p. 24.

rorist attacks and the bombing in Afghanistan afterward.<sup>38</sup> Quite a few articles criticize the spread of materialism in contemporary Chinese society, and discuss how Muslims should protect their faith in an atmosphere of spiritual crisis.

Many young Muslims also socialize in special Muslim internet ‘chat rooms,’ and these rooms have also acted as a bridge for forming friendships between them. For instance, In April 2002 a traffic accident killed three Hui Muslim students from the Zhaotong Madrasa (Zhaotong Jing-xuexiao 昭通经学校) in Yunnan during a spring vacation outing; after news of the tragedy was posted on Internet, many Muslims from across China sent messages of condolence to Zhaotong Madrasa, and also sent donations to the families of the deceased and the school.<sup>39</sup> Many websites have opened discussion forums on topics such as how to be a true Muslim, attitudes towards the Chinese language, how to maintain faith in a non-Muslim social environment, and whether Muslims are allowed to sell drugs to others. These Islamic websites have become another channel for reviving and spreading Islamic tradition and culture in China.

5) A network of Islamic publications: In contemporary China a network has evolved to produce and distribute Muslim newspapers, magazines and books, as well as cassettes, videocassettes and CDs diskette of Islamic materials.<sup>40</sup> Many Muslim entrepreneurs, driven by religious piety, have opened Islamic bookshops, publishers, cultural centers and libraries to spread Islamic knowledge and strengthen ethnic-religious identity. Hundreds, even thousands, of Islamic shops distribute Islamic books, magazines and audio-visual materials throughout China. They sell material such as recordings of Quranic recitations; Arabic sermons (*wa'z*) delivered by famous clerics; sermons delivered during Friday prayers by notable imams or Khatib (*khutba*); and films and documentaries on the history and traditions of Islam, as well as on current affairs such as the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the Afghanistan War.

Muslim printing houses in many places, especially in northwest China, have published tens of thousands copies of Islamic books including

<sup>38</sup> Zhang Chengzhi 2002.

<sup>39</sup> *Musilin tongxun*, June 2002, pp. 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> Many Islamic publications such as *Kaituo*, *Musilin tongxun*, *Gansu musilin* 甘肃穆斯林林 (Muslims in Gansu) and *A min* 阿敏 (Peace) have the special column for “advertisement” to sell the Islamic books, cassettes and videocassettes with the Islamic contents.

the Arabic Quran, the *hadith*, the works of the *shari'a*, the *tafsir* (commentaries of the Holy Quran), *kalam* (theological-dogmatic discourses), works on Sufism, Islamic history, and instructional handbooks on Islam. These Islamic bookshops, centers and associations have created an informal system to distribute ideas and information to all Muslim communities nationwide, thus binding together scattered communities into an consciously Islamic.

6) A network of Islamic education has developed which spans different Chinese Muslim communities. China's Muslims communities are so widely dispersed and so religiously diverse it is impossible for any one community to maintain a system of religious education relying only on its own funding, teachers and students. Muslim communities in China usually like to invite an *akhond* from outside to take charge of *madrassa* schooling. On the other hand, a community with a strong Islamic tradition regards it as a duty to send its knowledgeable, pious *akhond* to do religious work in other communities, even remote ones, to revive and spread Islam.

It is not uncommon nowadays, for example, for an *imam* from Xinjiang to travel to Guangzhou in South China to act as an *imam* of a mosque there and give religious instruction in the *madrassa*. When a famous *akhond* opened a course on the Arabic Quran, *shari'a* and *hadith* in a *madrassa* in Yunnan, many students came from distant places such as Guizhou, Sichuan 四川, Gansu, Ningxia, Heilongjiang 黑龙江, Hainan and He'nan to study under his guidance. The local community also regarded it as a duty and honor to accommodate these students from other communities. When they graduate, these *madrassa* students will probably accept positions as imams in their home or other communities.

Often larger communities with strong Islamic traditions establish big *madrassa*, and invite prominent Islamic scholars to recruit and teach Muslim students. There are also heavily Muslim areas with many mosques and *madaris* boasting famous Islamic teachers who attract large groups of students; these areas have developed reputations as China's "Little Meccas" (*xiao maijia* 小麦加), and their influence radiates out to other Muslim communities throughout their home regions. Currently, they can be found in Xinjiang (at Kashgar, Hotan, Yarkand, Turfan, Aksu, and Yili); Gansu (Linxia, Guanghe and Lanzhou); Ningxia (Weizhou, Yinchuan 银川, and Tongxin 同心); Yunnan (Shadian 沙甸, Kunming, Weishan 巍山, Najiaying 纳家营, and Dali 大理); Shaanxi (Xi'an); Shanxi 山西 (Changzhi 长治); He'nan (Zhengzhou 郑州, Sang-

po 桑坡, Baizhai 白寨, and Gadangdian 疙瘩店); and Hebei (Cangzhou 沧州).<sup>41</sup> They are widely considered by Chinese Muslims to be central places of Islam in China. These “Little Meccas” act as regional hubs in a loose nationwide network of Islamic education.<sup>42</sup> They could potentially play a central role in uniting scattered communities at a regional level, becoming regional headquarters for guiding Muslim interaction with the majority Han Chinese society and the Chinese state.

## The Features of the Islamic Revival Movement in China

### I. Mosques

The Islamic revival in China over recent decades is vividly displayed in the building of many new mosques, in both Arabic style with domes and Chinese style with pagodas, and the restoration and enlargement of many existing mosques.<sup>43</sup> These mosques play a fundamental role in the religious, social and cultural life of Muslims; they cannot live a proper Islamic life without a mosque led by an *akhond*. Among Sufi orders, many *mazar* complexes, mosques and spiritual residences have been rebuilt since the government took a more tolerant attitude towards religion in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Over the last decade I have visited and photographed many mosques and *mazars* throughout China: the deserts and oases of South Xinjiang; large modern mosques with big domes and tall minarets newly built in Yunnan, Gansu, Shanghai and Ningxia; traditional Chinese temple-style mosques in Shaanxi, Jiangsu 江苏, Beijing and Tianjin; and many small mosques in the northern Chinese countryside of Hebei and He’nan.

A mosque is an architectural complex with many religious, social and cultural functions.<sup>45</sup> As China is so remote from Mecca and Medina, the centers of the Islamic world, and as many Muslim communities – particularly the Hui – are surrounded by non-Muslim majorities, Chinese mosques are widely regarded by Muslims as a particularly sacred

<sup>41</sup> On this central place in Hebei, see Wu Piqing 1999, vol. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Concerning the theory of “Little Mecca” in studies of Islam of China, refer to the author’s doctoral dissertation (Wang Jianping 1996a), pp. 158–160.

<sup>43</sup> See Wu Jianwei 1995 and 1998.

<sup>44</sup> See Dawut 2001, the latest book on *mazar*, published by Dawut Rahila, a female Uighur scholar in Xinjiang; see also Dawut 2002, p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> For more specific information, see Feng 1992, pp. 30–34 and Wang Jianping 1996a, pp. 130–133.

sites that play a central role in community life. A mosque complex often has walls to keep out non-Muslim intruders.<sup>46</sup> It usually consists of a prayer hall, rooms for ritual ablution, a religious school, a *khalifa's* dormitory, an *akhond's* residence, a *maita* (Arabic for 'corpse') room where the deceased are kept, a meeting room, a courtyard or garden, a kitchen, storerooms, and a shop that sells religious books and items, a minaret and historic relics such as tomb stones and memorials. In some areas mosques include special prayer halls for women. Given mosques' central importance, over recent years many Chinese Muslim communities build large, elegant mosques, and even small, poor villages can boast quite grand ones. Since the 1980s, many communities have built mosques in the Arabic architectural style with large domes, tall minarets, and crescent symbols.

The mosque is usually a complex that functions not only as a religious site but also as a site for education, cultural activities, social and economic exchanges, and even martial arts training. Now we turn to the most significant of those functions for the Islamic revival movement in China: education and publications, both closely linked with mosques.

## *II. Islamic Education*

Islamic scholars in China have argued that in every mosque the *madrasa*, or religious school (*jingxuexiao* 经学校), should be at the center of the mosque's life.<sup>47</sup> At a conservative estimate, there are about 40,000 mosques in China, and at least half of them have a *madrasa* or *madrasa*-style religious school in which the children learn the teachings of Islam learning and pious young Muslims are trained to be clerics. China may thus have about 20,000 Islamic schools or Quranic study centers of varying sizes and status. Local estimates also suggest that these schools are numerous; for example, Linxia Prefecture, Gansu, has a reputation of being a "Little Mecca," and it had more than 10,000 *madrasa* students studying at various Islamic schools in 1997.<sup>48</sup> For China as a whole, at a conservative estimate there are probably more than 200,000 students studying in *madaris*.

<sup>46</sup> Not only a few mosques put a wooden board on the gate of the prayer hall written in Chinese: No non-Muslim is allowed to enter the hall. I observed this kind of board in my fieldwork in Yunnan, Gansu, Hebei and Beijing.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Naiwen 2000, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Zhang Zhihua 1997, p. 19.

Islamic education in China can be divided into three sectors: official *madaris*, private *madaris* tolerated by local authorities, and finally, and most widespread, community-run general instruction in Islam.<sup>49</sup>

The official *madaris* are sponsored and administrated by the Islamic Association of China, a semi-government body in charge of Islamic affairs, and by provincial-level Islamic Associations. The aim of the official *madaris* is to train imams or *akhonds* to serve important Muslim communities or work as intermediaries between the government and communities. At present, there are more than ten official *madaris* across the country: Urumqi, Xinjiang; Lanzhou, Gansu; Yinchuan, Ningxia; Zhengzhou, He'nan Province, where more than one million Hui Muslims live; Shenyang 沈阳, Liaoning 辽宁; Kunming, Yunnan; Xining, Qinghai; Shijiazhuang 石家庄, Hebei; and a national *madrasa* and a municipal *madrasa* in Beijing.<sup>50</sup>

Some regions and municipalities have also opened the training classes for *akhond*; these can be found in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Huhehot (Huhehaote 呼和浩特), and other areas. According to 1999 statistics, there were 20,000 Muslim students studying in these various official *madaris* and training classes.<sup>51</sup> The official *madaris* have regular curricula. Besides the Quran and *hadith* and other Islamic subjects, they have introduced modern Arabic as well as Marxist philosophy, Chinese history, Chinese language, computer training and English. The graduates are granted a diploma equivalent to a college degree.

But the number of students graduating from official *madaris* is far less than the demand for graduates from Muslim communities across China. The authorities have allowed Muslim communities to collect funds and open their own *madaris*, but these schools must be registered with, and supervised by, government religious affairs departments. (As this author observed during a trip to Linxia there are also unregistered *madaris* or Quranic classes).

Against this background, thousands of private *madaris*, large and small, have mushroomed all over China. Some prominent private *madaris* can recruit several hundred students and boast impressive modern buildings and sports grounds far larger than many official

<sup>49</sup> For more detailed information, see Wang Jianping 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Based on the author's interview with an official who works at China Madrasa (Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Jingxueyuan 中国伊斯兰教经学院) in Beijing, May, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Wan 1999, pp. 17–18.

*madaris*. For example, the Linxia Arabic School in Gansu Province has even established a women's college as well as a men's one, and both have several hundred students from all over China who come to study Islam and Arabic. Other prominent private *madaris* include the Tongxin Madrasa, the Nanguan Mosque Madrasa (Nanguan Quingzhensi Jingxuxiao 南关清真寺经学校), and the Weizhou Madrasa in Ningxia; the Xiguan 西关 Mosque Madrasa and Boshuxiang 柏树巷 Mosque Madrasa in Lanzhou; the Guanghe Madrasa in Gansu; the Najiaying Madrasa (Najiaying Yisilan Wenhua Xueyuan 纳家营伊斯兰文化学院), Dali Arabic School (Dali Alaboyu Xuexiao 大理阿拉伯语学校), Kaiyuan 开远 Arabic School, and Huihuideng 回辉登 Madrasa in Yunnan; the Gadangdian 疙瘩店 Arabic School, Zhoukou Amin 周口阿敏 Arabic School, and Baizhai 白寨 Arabic School in He'nan; and the Changzhi Arabic College (Changzhi Alaboyu Xueyuan 长治阿拉伯语学院) in Shanxi, Daqi 大祁 Mosque Madrasa and Xinhua 新华 Mosque Madrasa in Linxia, Gansu.

After more than ten years' operation, many of these large-scale private *madaris* have a stable body of students and teachers, and are well equipped with computers and photocopiers. Some of them even have their own libraries containing thousands of Arabic books from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and other Islamic countries.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, most private *madaris* in China are very small, with only several students (*khalifas*) and an *akhond* (or *imam*) who teaches them Islamic doctrine in the courtyard of a mosque.

The textbooks and curricula of these private *madaris* vary greatly depending on their locations and the religious traditions of the *akhonds* who run them. Some use modern Arabic textbooks and new teaching methods; others use old fashioned religious textbooks and follow the traditional *madrasa* schooling methods that have been passed on by *akhonds* for many generations.<sup>53</sup> Most graduates students of private *madaris* work as clerics in their hometown mosques. But many students choose other occupations, although they usually remain faithful Muslims and play some core role in the affairs of their communities.

The last type of *madrasa*-style Islamic education is the general Islamic education offered by many communities. For instance, there are Quranic schools affiliated to mosques which offer classes during the

<sup>52</sup> Based on the author's personal observation in Linxia and Lanzhou of Gansu Province, January 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Jianping 2001.

winter and summer school vacations. There are also occasional classes taught by *akhond* for kindergarten children, adults or university students. These schools, classes and short-term programs do not aim to train the clerics but rather provide their students with basic knowledge of Islam: to teach them how to perform ritual ablution, how to pray, how to recite the core passages of the Quran.<sup>54</sup> The impact of these shorter teaching programs should not be underestimated; they help to reaffirm the Muslim identity of many participants, and some Muslim clerics have pointed out in articles how participants can experience a spiritual re-birth.<sup>55</sup>

All the funds for private *madaris* and the primary Islamic education come from alms donated by Muslim believers. The results of this privately-supported network of Islamic education are striking: even in cosmopolitan cities like Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai one can find many children studying the Quranic phases and basic Islam teachings at mosque schools during the summer vacation.

### III. Islamic Publications

With the resurgence of Islamic consciousness and the strengthening of Muslim identity, and also the growing role of the mass media in Chinese society, Chinese Muslims in China are increasingly publishing their own newspapers, magazines and periodicals to spread their ideas.

Lin Song 林松, a professor of Quranic studies at the Central University of Nationalities (Zhongyang Minzu Daxue 中央民族大学) in Beijing, has estimated there are more than fifty Islamic periodicals sponsored and published by Muslims in different parts of China.<sup>56</sup> Many of them have become more influential with the rise of Islamic nationalism and religious ideology among China's Muslim communities, particularly Hui communities. These periodicals are entirely supported by donations collected from believers nationwide, and many editors of these periodicals are volunteers. Most editors and contributors are the Hui Muslim intellectuals, students and clerics. A few titles, such as *Kaituo* (Pioneer), *Gansu musulin* (Muslims in Gansu), *Musulintongxun* (Muslim Newsletter), or *Yisilan wenhua yanjiu* (Journal of Islamic Culture), have

<sup>54</sup> Dawud 2000; see also Musa 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Ma Minglian 1997, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Personal interview with Prof. Lin Song 林松, August 12, 2001 in Beijing. For a more detailed introduction to these periodicals published by different Muslim organizations and communities in China, see Wang Jianping 2001.



print runs of more than 10,000 for every issue, and their distribution covers all China. The longest surviving such magazine is more than twenty years old, and many have published for more than five years. Mostly subscribers receive them for free.

The contents of these magazines are very rich. These periodicals address subjects such as Islamic education, Islamic history, and Islamic philosophy, and also carry translations from Arabic publications; their columns cover Quranic studies, *wa'z* (sermons) and *hadith*, discussions of Islamic doctrine such as *kalam* (theology) and *shari'a* law, Quranic commentaries on community news, and news reports from the Islamic world. They also address controversies in China's Muslim societies. For instance, Muslim intellectuals and clerics have debated crucial issues such as Islamic education reform, how Islam should adapt to the modern world, how to combat the 'decadent' Chinese cultural influences in Hui communities, and how to revive Islamic tradition.

Increasingly, these magazines have also begun to address sensitive political issues. A recent issue of *Amin* 阿敏, a magazine published by a *madrasa* in Zhoukou 周口, He'nan Province, strongly criticized the aggressive policies adopted by Ariel Sharon against Palestinians and criticized American foreign policy in the Middle East. The magazine expressed the solidarity of He'nan's Hui Muslims with the Palestinian people, supporting their struggle against Israeli occupation.<sup>57</sup> A magazine published by Tianmu 天穆 Hui community in Tianjin even appealed to the Islamic Association of China to organize a Muslim Volunteer Army to go to Palestine and stand by side the Palestinian people against Israel as it killed the Palestinian youths in the occupied land.<sup>58</sup>

These Islamic magazines and newspapers have helped to foster the growth of Islam nationalism in China, and sometimes voiced a radically Islamic response to the West and secular Chinese society. Thus the emergence of these Islamic periodicals has not only helped to link up networks of Muslim communities throughout China, it has also given voice to aspirations for a strong, unified Islamic identity.

<sup>57</sup> See *A min*, Winter Issue, 2001 with an article extracted from an official newspaper. Not only *Amin* but also other Islamic periodicals in China have similar articles or express the same views, as for instance, *Shanghai musilin* 上海穆斯林 (Muslims in Shanghai), *Kaituo*, *Gansu musilin*, or *Musilin tongxun*.

<sup>58</sup> "Qingyuan shu" 请愿书 ("Appealing Call"), *Tianmu musilin* 天穆穆斯林 14, May 20, 2002, p. 3.

#### IV. *Islamic Movements*

7) The new push of the Ikhwani movement: The Wahhabi school of Islamic revival first emerged in China at the end of the 19th century.<sup>59</sup> It became the Ikhwani movement from the 1920s to the 1940s, when it spread across China and converted many Qadim communities into Ikhwani ones. The Ikhwani movement was encouraged by Hui Muslim warlords such as Ma Hongbin 马鸿宾, (1884–1960), Ma Hongkui 马鸿逵 (1892–1970), Ma Buqing 马步青 (1901–1977), and Ma Bufang 马步芳 (1903–1945), and it developed rapidly in northwest China. Ikhwani doctrine even became the dominant stream of Islam in the northwest during that period.<sup>60</sup>

Ikhwani influence gradually faded away after 1949, when Islam as a whole was intensely restricted from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. But after the 1980s, when Islamic religious activities were allowed to resume, the Ikhwani movement again developed momentum. Ikhwani activists have sponsored pilgrimages to Mecca, study in Arabic countries by Chinese Muslim youths, and missionary work in China by clergy from Arabic countries.

Many Ikhwani activists advocate purifying the Islamic way of life among the Muslim communities in China; they complain that Qadim communities have absorbed too many Chinese cultural influences which diverge from the orthodox path, and they have demanded the eradication of these alien influences. Inspired by a faith in the pristine Islam of Mecca founded by the Prophet Muhammad, Chinese Ikhwani activists have also torn down traditional temple-like mosques and replaced them with Arabic-style architecture.<sup>61</sup>

They have opposed Chinese cultural influences in weddings, funerals and other rituals. They demand women wear headscarves in public, and even ask young girls attending public schools or college to wear headscarves. They have also admonished Muslims to abstain from any alcohol and opposed young students indulging in pop music, movies, mixed dancing, and unhealthy television programs. Some extremists

<sup>59</sup> Ma Tong 2000, pp. 95–107.

<sup>60</sup> Qi 1996, pp. 62–65.

<sup>61</sup> The author personally observed in his trips to Yunnan and Gansu that many historical Chinese style mosques were demolished by Hui Muslims, particularly the Ikhwani groups, and were rebuilt with the mosques in Arabic architectural style on the same sites.

have even destroyed the decorations on mosques structure and Islamic historical relics.<sup>62</sup>

Among the ethnically Turkic peoples of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region the Ikhwani (often by Chinese officials called as the Wahhabiyya, however, the local Uighurs who are the members of this group entitled themselves with the Sunni tradition; as for those Uighurs who oppose this group labeling them as the Wahhabiyya) movement has been intertwined with a nationalist campaign for an independent Eastern Turkistan. There it has vocally condemned Sufi mystical practices and pro-Beijing tendencies in social and political life, and it has also attacked the implementation of family plan programs among Turkic Muslims. Some Ikhwani followers even advocate a fundamentalist theory of *jihad* (holy war): killing or expelling 'infidels' (Han Chinese) from their land.<sup>63</sup> The Xinjiang government fears that a strong Ikhwani presence in southern Xinjiang could spark instability and fuel the separatist movement there; a few years ago it issued a ban on Wahhabiyya organizations and disbanded any Wahhabiyya communities, dismissing their clergymen, even jailing them in the 'Strike-Hard' campaign against national separatism. The central government of China entrusted the official Islamic Association of China to issue a new sermon (*wa'z*) collection devoted to denouncing nationalist separatism among Uighur clergymen.<sup>64</sup> The Xinjiang Chinese government has also organized training classes to instruct Uighur imams and *akhonds* in the theories of Marxism and Mao Zedong on religion, and to instruct them in combating religious extremism and separatism.

8) Revival of Islam among Qadim communities: Although most Chinese Qadim communities (in the Uighur areas, they are entitled as "the traditional Sunni group") are not as radical and political as the Ikhwani (or the Wahhabiyya labeled by the government in Xinjiang) movement,

<sup>62</sup> Many Ikhwani communities even have prohibited their religious students to watch TV or read Chinese literature in Linxia of Gansu where the Ikhwani movement is strong; the author's personal observation when visiting that area during January and February, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> See *Tiantang de yaoshi* 天堂的钥匙 (The Key to the Paradise), a hand-copied Uighur text circulated among the Uighur underground, 1999.

<sup>64</sup> 200,000 copies of a *wa'z* speech collection in Uighur language have been printed and distributed to Uighur clerics in Xinjiang in 2001, according to Shams al-Din 夏木西丁, the deputy Chairman of the Islamic Association of China (personal interview, Beijing, November, 2001); see also Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Jiaowu Zhidao Weiyuanhui 2001.

they have also experienced a revival of Islam since the 1980s. The manifestations of this re-Islamization include the following:

- a) Renewed enthusiasm for Quranic study among Muslims: Before the 1980s, only 10% of the Uighur Muslims could know how to chant the Quranic version in Arabic or Uighur language, however, there are 90% more Uighur are able to recite or are studying the Quran at present.<sup>65</sup> Among the Hui and other Muslim peoples, many communities have opened part-time classes to study the Quran taught by community *akhonds*.<sup>66</sup>
- b) Sending Islamic missionary teams from religious centers, large *madaris*, communities with strong Islamic traditions to distant villages and communities: The Linxia Arabic School has sent several groups of the missionary teams made up of *madrasa* teachers and students across northwest China, they have also journeyed a thousand kilometers to Yunnan in southwest China for Islamic missionary work. The teachers and students spread Islamic teaching among the Hui communities in these regions and promoting renewed Islamic consciousness, all in the hope of creating a unified community of believers (*umma*) across China.<sup>67</sup>
- c) Anti-drug and anti-alcohol campaigns launched by religious activists among the Muslim communities: In Xi'an and in Tianjin the Muslim communities organized an anti-alcohol campaign in the 1990s and in 2001.<sup>68</sup> They campaigned for local Islamic restaurants and shops to stop selling any alcohol, and urged Hui Muslims to give up alcohol and censure those who broke Islamic law. Many Muslim communities in Gansu, Ningxia and Yunnan have launched strong campaigns to fight drug trafficking and heroin use, which they condemned as *haram* (Arabic: 'prohibited by Islamic law'). Muslims in these communities denounced drug trafficking by traders from Muslim communities describing it as a disgrace for Muslims to engage in such crimes.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cited from Khahna 卡哈纳, an Uighur scholar (now residing at Cambridge, Massachusetts in the United States), at the conference of Civilization Dialogue between Confucianism and Islam, Nanjing, China, August 8-11, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Ma Xiulan 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Yibulaxin 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Gillette 2000, pp. 167-178; Gao Yaokuan 2002, pp. 100-103.

<sup>69</sup> Abdu 1999.

d) A resurgence of Muslim identity among young people: Confronted with widespread Han prejudice against religious believers as backward and ignorant, many Muslim young people are proud of their identity as Muslims.<sup>70</sup> Many young Muslim girls wear headscarves and modest Islamic clothes in public, sometimes enduring contemptuous glances from non-Muslims. Many Muslims find resolve and assurance in their faith when confronted with a Chinese society afflicted, as they see it, by materialism, corruption and immorality. Their faith teaches them that at the end of the world God will judge all people and punish evil and reward good, and also that Islam will certainly defeat materialism and *shaitan* (Arabic, 'satan') in a final battle.<sup>71</sup>

9) The revival movement among Sufi orders: Like Ikhwani and Qadim groups in China, various Chinese Sufi orders have also experienced a revival movement during the past decade. This Sufi renaissance is reflected in several trends:

a) A more coherent organizational structure has emerged among various Sufi orders, thus enhancing the binds between Sufi leaders and disciples. Many orders have built strong, fortress-style monasteries (*qubba*) which form semi-autonomous socio-economic bodies. For instance, the Lingming Tang, a Sufi suborder under the Qadiriyya Order in Lanzhou, has a membership of 200,000. Its members spent more than ten year and 100 million Yuan (about 10 million Euro in 2005) to build a huge headquarters complex, as well as a highway, irrigation works, ponds, power lines, a cattle farm, vegetable gardens, and small workshops.<sup>72</sup> The Lingming Tang has several branch-monasteries in other parts of China, and their leaders are nominated by the suborder's leader Wang Shoutian 汪寿天. Shaykh Wang regularly travels to his Sufi communities to collect alms and administer communal affairs. He has several *akhonds* devoted to *madrassa* education, and managers in charge of finance, business and transport. Many Sufi orders resemble the Lingming Tang in having a hierarchical organization: a leader, his representatives in different areas, other subordinates in scattered communities, disciples who imple-

<sup>70</sup> Tong 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Ali 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Personal observations during my fieldwork at Lingming Tang, Lanzhou, Jan. 23 to Feb. 1, 2001.

- ment the leader's religious instructions, and staff who work for the order in various fields.
- b) Prominent *shaykhs* or Sufi *walis* exercise absolute power over their followers. In communist society the Party once wielded absolute power. In the wake of the religious revival of the past two decades, however, in Sufi orders the power of the party has given way to the *shaykh* or *murshid* (Arabic: guide). A *murid* (Arabic: follower) or disciple of a Sufi master must wholly submit himself to his master; must absolutely obey the *shaykh*. So a Sufi leader can mobilize his followers – often a large force – thanks to the closed boundaries of Sufi organization.
- c) Forming tight social and religious networks: Many Sufi orders have developed networks of followers that span counties, regions and provinces. The Jahriyya, Khufiyya and Qadiriyya have communities that spread throughout most parts of China. Through centralized leadership, these Sufi organizations have established a widely cast net of organizational, communications and economic networks. Because of their mystic nature and sometimes clandestine ways, other groups – even non-Sufi Muslims – find it impossible to penetrate their networks. The experiences of repression in imperial times and persecution in recent decades have led Sufi orders to turn inwards for protection and support. This makes some Sufi orders highly suspect in the eyes of government authorities. In recent years there have been clashes between local authorities and Sufi orders.
- d) Enlarged scope and capacity: Since the 1980s many Sufi orders have organized large scale activities, including tomb (*mazar*) veneration by Sufi orders in Xinjiang and *amal* (Arabic: charitable deeds, especially in the memory of deceased Sufi leaders) service by Sufi orders in Hui and Dongxiang Muslim communities. In the late 1980s, for example, at the Odam Mazar in the southern part of Kashgar, Xinjiang, an annual *mazar* veneration ceremony attracted 100,000 to 200,000 ethnic Sufis and other Muslims of Uighur and other ethnicities.<sup>73</sup> Such *mazar* veneration activities usually last several days and have become a most prominent event in Uighur society. *Amal* services among the Sufi orders of Hui communities have also expanded

<sup>73</sup> This reserved figure is based on my investigation in Yarkand (Shache), Xinjiang in August of 2001. According to Wang Shouli 1983, Yarkand had a population of 400,000, 90% of which participated in veneration to about twenty prominent *mazars*; see also Dawut 2002, p. 44.

in scope and importance. In Linxia about 200,000 Muslims, most of them the Sufis, attended the funeral service of Yang Shijun 杨士骏, the Sufi leader of the Qadiriyya order.<sup>74</sup> The Jahriyya order has also held large-scale *amal* for its deceased Sufi leaders; they can be large rallies attracting more than ten or a hundred thousand Sufis from different parts of China.

## The External Relations of Muslim Communities in China

### *I. Relations with Han Chinese*

Muslims make up only 2% of China's population, and Han Chinese make up more than 93%. In a non-Muslim majority society, China's Muslims usually keep a low profile. There are several factors that account for their seeming invisibility. One is that Islam, as a religion with non-local origins, is not part of the mainstream culture of the socialist state; another is that most Muslims live in marginalized regions, especially in northwest China, where deserts, barren hills, and mountains dominate the landscape, and economic resources are limited.

Although Chinese Muslims have tended towards caution in dealing with the Han majority, they have also enjoyed some advantages in establishing a foothold in society. In particular, Muslim communities have to some degree benefited from the favorable ethnic minority policies implemented by the Communist Party. The national minority policies introduced by Chinese government in the 1950s were modeled on Stalin's policies in the Soviet Union. Under them, Muslim peoples in China have enjoyed the several advantages:

- a) Disproportionately high representation in political bodies such as People's Congress and Political Consultative Committee, Communist Party Congress and organizations, the United Frontier Department (Tongzhanbu 统战部), and government organs such as the State Bureau of Religious Affairs (Guojia Zongjiao Shiwuju 国家宗教事务局) and State National Minorities Committee (Guojia Shaoshuminzu Weiyuanhui 国家少数民族委员会). This "special status" is particularly reflected in system of autonomous regions, prefectures, and

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<sup>74</sup> *Zhongguo musulin* reports this event, also confirmed by my fieldwork in February 2001.

counties that grants some self-governance to Muslim and other minorities.<sup>75</sup>

- b) To a lesser or greater degree, most Muslims in China are enjoying a loose restriction in the family-planning program that nearly all Han Chinese must abide by: one family and one child. Urban Muslim families, and other ethnic minority families, can usually have two children, and rural Muslim families can have three children. (Normally, an urban Han Chinese family can only have one child is allowed, and a rural Han Chinese family can have two children if the first is a female.)
- c) Ethnic minority groups can send their children to schools, colleges and universities with considerably lower entrance scores than Han Chinese students.
- d) In government departments, institutions and the state-owned enterprises, Muslims and other ethnic minorities enjoy more favorable treatment than their Han Chinese counterparts in the allocation of living allowances, job promotions and housing.
- e) In civil legal disputes and even crime cases, if a case involves two different ethnicities, often the party who is an ethnic minority receives favorable consideration.<sup>76</sup> Of course, this is not absolute; as in many countries, China's ethnic minorities also suffer racial and religious discrimination. And unfortunately, the preferential policies granted to minority nationalities have also generated backlashes. They have reinforced the ethnic identity of Muslim peoples and also provoked antagonism against Muslim and other minorities.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, as in other countries in Europe and North America, many Muslims in China felt tremendous pressure and suspicion from the mass media that often gave the misleading impres-

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<sup>75</sup> In the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, for example, the Hui only occupy one third of Ningxia's population. The regional governor, however, should be a Hui and the main posts of the government usually are taken by Hui cadres. This is also similar to Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolian etc regions and prefectures.

<sup>76</sup> Many Han Chinese in Xinjiang complain that they are actually discriminated by the law in the civil cases such as traffic accident, economic dispute and others if they have arguments with the ethnic minority groups. This is one of the main reasons for them wanting to emigrate back to Inland China. I personally encountered not a few complains from Han Chinese during my traveling in south Xinjiang in the summer of 2001.



sion that Islam is equivalent to fundamentalism, terrorism and extremism.<sup>77</sup> Many Muslims, including young people and clerics, complained in interviews and conversation that they felt discriminated against by the press and television. Many Muslims became fearful their relations with Han Chinese could be seriously damaged by negative media coverage.

In this hostile atmosphere of ignorance and misunderstanding, which to some extent predated September 11, many Muslims in China have begun to turn to their religious traditions for consolation.<sup>78</sup> Some of them have become more isolated and radical. This is especially true of Uighur Muslims, and is reflected in their attitudes towards non-Muslims and Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics. Many of them refuse to discuss their views about these issues.<sup>79</sup>

## *II. Relations with the State*

Chinese Muslims have a complex relationship with their government, controlled by professed atheists who disavow all religions. Many Muslims take a pragmatic approach towards the Communist Party-run government; they believe the Chinese government is a so powerful they must accommodate its demands and strive to survive under it while also enjoying the government's preferential minorities program. The relationship between Muslim peoples and the state is often a bargaining process, or game of cat and mouse, that has evolved over recent decades.

China's Muslims are officially classified as ethnic minorities and therefore enjoy some privileges in political, economic and cultural status, so to some extent they benefit from the status quo. Moreover, Muslim communities are organized in combining religious activities with economic, social, cultural and educational functions. The Chinese government has sought to use these two factors to contain nationalist-religious ferment in Muslim communities and restrain radical Islam. It has

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<sup>77</sup> For instance, an article published by the *Qunyan* 群言 ("People's Voice") magazine recently labeled Islam as backward, anti-reform and anti-modernity. The tone of this paper was so offensive that the Islamic Association of China appealed to the central government and requested for a formal apology by the author (Zhou 2002).

<sup>78</sup> Ma Lizun 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Not a few times did the author have such experiences in his fieldwork in Xinjiang, particularly when talking to Uighur intellectuals and governmental officials. Only some young college students and grassroots level cadres in the Uighur society expressed their feelings and opinions more freely.

also made great efforts to implement constitutional and legal goals to assimilate ethnic minorities, including Muslim peoples, into a harmonious national family committed to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Guided by this two-pronged strategy of containment and absorption, the Chinese government has unhesitatingly cracked down on any ethnic separatist movements and religious extremist activities, but has also taken a lenient attitude towards the law-abiding social, economic and cultural activities of Muslim peoples. Taking advantage of these policies, most Muslims, particularly Hui Muslims, have been generally "Chinese law-abiding" while also exercising their legal rights and political influence to assert their rights and obtain better treatment. Thus, when incidents involving the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims occur, such as the pork contamination riot described above, Muslims communities throughout the region affected mobilize to protect their rights and demand compensation or concessions from Non-Muslims and the local government. Usually, in the wake of the incident it is the Han Chinese who make concessions under official arbitration, and the Muslims press forward towards their goals.

Muslim communities have adopted these tactics to protect their officially-endorsed rights, but their efforts have the paradoxical effect of encouraging growing of nationalism, strengthening ethnic identity boundaries, and fuelling Islamic sentiment. Communities can deploy these forces in confrontations with non-Muslims and the government. The state, in turn, fears potentially larger challenges from Muslim groups and generally attempts to devise solutions that minimize nationalism and Islamism while appeasing Muslim elites. This often involves a combination of state supervision and 'soft' incentives in the form of special treatment and status.

China's Muslim elites have proven skilled at exploiting their relationship with the state. They can bargain with the government by appealing to the potential force of the Muslim communities under their authority, thus pressuring local Chinese authorities to provide better treatment for themselves and their peoples. Here the lessons of Chinese history have considerable influence; in the past, when the central government was weak, China's Muslim elites developed into semi-independent forces or warlords dominating large tracts of territory.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Xu 2001.

In modern times China has still not overcome the cycle of control and resistance that results from these contending state, elite and popular forces, with periods of (unsustainable) control and repression giving way to disorder and instability. The Chinese government thinks that its implementing the preferential minorities program could strengthen its central power and better control the minorities' inhabited frontier land. Eventually, it does not expect that its policy to appease the Muslim minority peoples only stimulate their nationalism and religious sentiment. The inflexibility the Chinese central government's policies toward ethnic minorities and Muslim believers cannot remain stable in the long term. They are short-sighted and full of pitfalls, and in the future may give way to riots and chaos.

### *III. Relations with the Islamic World*

Within the framework of *umma* all Muslims are brothers and sisters. These fraternal ties transcend national borders, ethnicity, language and social status. Even in the past, before modern transportation by ship and plane made the Middle East much more accessible to Chinese Muslims, many of them made the *hajj* journey to Mecca by traversing the Euro-Asian continent or taking a sea route across the South China Sea and Indian Ocean.<sup>81</sup> Returning from the *hajj*, Chinese Muslims also brought back Islamic texts for their home communities, and so their access to the Islamic tradition was constantly refreshed.

Today, China has re-opened its doors to the rest of the world, and as a leading developing country it wants to develop friendly relations with Muslim countries and official organizations in Asia and Africa, including the League of Arab States, the Muslim World League, and the Islamic Summit Organization. The Chinese government cannot easily afford to damage links with these countries and international bodies, and this makes it difficult for the government to stifle the ties between Chinese Muslims and their fellow believers in the Islamic world.

Compared with the past Chinese Muslims now have more advantages for fostering relations with Muslim countries. First, there are strengthened economic ties. Many Chinese Muslim entrepreneurs do business in western, central, and southeastern Asia and African countries, and much of their business is, of course, done with fellow believ-

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<sup>81</sup> Ma Dexin 1988, pp. 55–63.

ers. Chinese Muslims even do business with the Muslims in European and North American countries.

Beside this economic relationship, many Muslims – irrespective of whether they are Hui, Uighur and another ethnic group – participate in the annual *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. More and more young Chinese Muslim students are studying Arabic and Islam in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the Gulf States, Libya, Syria, Jordan, Pakistan, Malaysia, the Central Asian republics and other Islamic countries. Every year, the Islamic Association of China sends scholars and learned men to attend religious conferences and symposia, competitions in Arabic Quranic recitation and Arabic calligraphy, and other religiously-oriented activities with Muslims abroad. The Chinese government, represented by Islamic Association of China, also maintains regular contacts with international Islamic organizations.

These economic, cultural and scholarly contacts with Muslims abroad also allow for a great deal of informal interaction. They make it possible for many Chinese Muslims to bring back materials such as religious literature, cassettes and videos, and to spread information about China's Muslim communities to Muslims abroad. These exchanges have also exposed Chinese Muslims to new ideas about Islam from abroad, including Islamic fundamentalism and radical political Islam. In this way, the seeds have been sown in China for the spread of many of the ideas that have galvanized other Muslim populations in recent decades.

Chinese government is, however, highly vigilant against religious extremism from abroad. In 1996 China expelled an Iranian diplomat for improper conduct in spreading revolutionary Islamic ideas among Muslim communities in Northwest China.<sup>82</sup> In quite a few cases Islamic missionaries from Pakistan have been expelled for disseminating Islamic fundamentalism in China.<sup>83</sup> In Xinjiang the custom officials and border guard posts are particularly watchful for possible entry of radical Islamic materials from the Central Asian republics. Local authorities there have confiscated and destroyed large numbers of books, cassettes, and videos promoting dangerous religiously-inspired ideol-

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<sup>82</sup> The author heard these news at the Second International Conference of Iranology in Beijing, October 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Lu 2002, pp. 14–16; also see reports in Hong Kong based newspapers, such as the *South China Morning Post* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, between 2000 and 2001

ogies and advocating national separatism among Uighur communities in southern Xinjiang.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Muslim society is quite different from other parts of Chinese society in its beliefs, ways of life, cultural traditions and social organization. It is miraculous that China's Muslim communities have preserved their own identity and avoided assimilation or destruction by the authoritarian Chinese state. In two decades of resurgence since the 1980s the Muslim peoples of China have developed their own semi-independent economy, production and market structures, social and cultural networks, education system, press and mass media.

This Islamic revival has gained impetus from China's progress towards modernity and globalization: as China has developed a market economy and become more integrated in international commerce and affairs, Chinese Muslim communities have accumulated more resources to organize and assert themselves. China is constantly vigilant against any internal or external challenges to Marxist ideology and the socialist regime, and the state has been on the offensive against religious fundamentalism and the radical Islamic movement, but Muslim society has evolved a strong fabric of religious tradition and social exclusivity, and over time China's Muslim communities have increasingly departed from mainstream Chinese society and culture.

These communities have, to varying degrees, resisted the general consequences of modernization. While the communal structure of the majority Han Chinese has been drastically eroded by commercialism, materialism and individualism, the communal ties of Muslims have steadily strengthened over last two decades, particularly with the Islamic revival movement and the spread of Islamic education. After entry into WTO, China will become an increasingly unbalanced, contradiction-filled society – an increasingly liberal market economy under a Marxist socialist regime. In these circumstances, the state will certainly find it increasingly difficult to deal with Islam, especially spreading radicalism and nationalism, merely by offering economic and social privileges on the one hand, and threatening to apply force and coer-

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<sup>84</sup> See *Turkistan Newsletter*, an Internet website information based in Netherlands edited by Sato, May 24, 2002.

tion for suppressing the national separatism and religious extremism on the other hand.

China's authorities feel growing uncertainty about the increasing influence and organization of Muslim society in China. During the past decade the Islamic revival movement in China has developed particular momentum in two regions: in Turkic Muslim society it has expressed itself through a nationalist independence movement; in Hui Muslim society it has expressed itself through confrontations with majority Han Chinese over incidents of pork contamination or religious defilement.

The revival of Islam and Muslim society in China may potentially pose a serious challenge to China during the country's historic transition. If China were to fail to renovate its political apparatus, which gives so much power to a highly centralized government, it will experience increasingly tense relations with its Muslim peoples. A direct conflict with religious ethnic minorities would cost China precious resources and damage its modernization program, as well as risk its denunciation by Western countries and the Islamic world. However, if the central government makes too many concessions to Muslim communities, its capacity to control these communities will erode. Whether the revival of Islam truly becomes a major source of instability in China will depend on whether the next generation of leaders of the Communist Party can navigate between these two possibilities.

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