

ISLAM IN CHINA

Abstract

Unlike other Muslim minorities in the world, the one in China is : a. Divided between two large ethnic groups: Hui in China Proper, who are concentrated in major urban agglomerations; and Uighurs, of Turkish stock, who used to make up the majority in North-Western China, but are now outnumbered by Han Chinese, via a policy of settlement and dilution of the minority. b. Except for Xinjiang, the Muslims of China are not attached to any particular territory (like the Mongols in Mongolia or the Tibetans in Tibet), but are spread all over the country, something which dilutes them into an insignificant minority (1-2%) in spite of their large absolute numbers (25-30 million). The vast distribution of the Muslims all over that vast country has made for a huge diversification in their creed and customs, beyond the division between Hui and Uighurs. This great variety has created many sects and sub-sects, some of which are very special to China.

Key words: Hui, Uighurs, Xinjiang, New Sect (xin-jiao), Sectarianism, separatism, secession

Introduction

As a rule, Muslims are required to live in Muslim lands for only there can the Law of Allah be brought to bear in daily life. Failing that, the believer who dwells in non-Islamic-ruled countries could either regard their stay as temporary and in the meantime do his best to live his Muslim life, or whenever possible return to the Abode of Islam (*dar-al-Islam*), or else when all other alternatives fail, try to turn his country into a Muslim one either through seizing power at its helm or seceding from it and establishing his own Islamic government. The existence of Muslim minorities under non-Islamic rule has always alternately pursued these trajectories and driven the Muslim guest culture into a state of mind varying from a quietist acceptance of its minority fate to violent rebellion. The response of the Muslim minority depended to no small extent on the perceived threat posed to it by the majority host culture. Whenever co-existence with it seemed feasible,

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however uneasy, the Muslims could always say that as long as they can perform the obligations of their faith without much inhibition they could consider themselves as living in virtual enclaves of the Abode of Islam, a state of affairs they could bear indefinitely. But as soon as perceived oppression made their lives as Muslims untenable, and they diagnosed their position in consequence as dwellers of *Dar-al Harb*, they were set on a collision course with their hosts, and conflict ensued.

This condition of minority-majority relations, which has been replicated in many countries where Islam found itself as a minority, is perhaps more acute in China due to the extraordinary convergence of several major factors:

1. Chinese society and culture which has a long tradition of assimilating foreign cultures, had to contend in this case with a self-confident guest culture which hardly lends itself to acculturation;
2. Unlike in other areas of the world where Muslim minorities may be attached to a certain territory (Arakan in Burma, Mindanao in the Philippines, Patani in Thailand), where their concentration lends them power and influence, in China they are dispersed in all major urban agglomerations, thereby diluting their presence;
3. In spite of their large numbers in China (some 30 million), their rate in a population of 1.3 billion comes down to almost an insignificant 2.5%.
4. The remoteness and isolation of China throughout most of its history, had rendered, until recently the links of the Muslim centers with the Chinese periphery very flimsy and intermittent. Hence the lack of intellectual and other modes of interaction of Chinese Islam with world currents of the faith;
5. Chinese Islam is not uniform. According to Chinese classification today, about half of it is labeled as *Hui*, spread in the eastern part of the country, what is called China Proper, who are Chinese for all intents and purposes, speak Chinese, look Chinese and are thoroughly acculturated, save for the core of their Muslim creed; the other half, which is dispersed in the vast and arid heartland of the Northwest and Southwest, is of Turkic stock, versed in Turkic languages and culture and itself subdivided into many ethnic groups, who still preserve tribal structures in part, and in part are settled in the oases of that desert half of the country. Foremost among them are the Uighurs, with lesser groups, like the Kazakh, the Kirghiz and others constituting the rest.
6. While in the East the minority situation of the Muslims had almost never inspired them to realistically aspire to autonomy of any sort, the Uighurs in the West, who have constituted the majority on their turf until the policy of Han settlement by the government reversed that Muslim predominance into a fragile demographic balance, were and remained more restive and striving to some sort of separatism.

A Brief Historical Overview

As early as the Tang period (7th-10th Centuries), probably during the 8th Century, the first Muslim settlers in China were Arab and Persian merchants who traveled via the sea routes around India and soon found the Chinese trade remunerative enough to justify their permanent presence in China's coastal cities. In those days, the Muslim newcomers dwelled apart in separate quarters and actually maintained the Muslim mode of life which they had imported with them, and this seclusion was facilitated by the almost extra-territorial rights they enjoyed. They preserved their Arabic or Persian names, their original dress, their Persian and Arabic tongues, and conducted their religious and social life independently of the Chinese. Moreover, many of them married Chinese women or bought Chinese children in times of famine, thus not only consciously contributing to the numerical growth of the Muslim community, but also unwittingly injecting into their midst the first germ of their ultimate ethnic assimilation.

During the Song period (Northern Song, 960-1127, Southern Song, 1127-1279) we again hear in the Chinese annals of Muslim mercenaries. In 1070, the Song emperor, Shenzong invited a group of 5,300 young Arabs, under the leadership of Amīr Sayyid So-fei-er (this name being as mentioned in the Chinese source) of Bukhārā, to settle in China. This group had helped the emperor in his war with the newly-established Liao empire (Khitan) in northeastern China, who gave their name to China in Slavic languages (Kitai in Russian). Shenzong gave the prince an honorary title, and his men were encouraged to settle in the war-devastated areas in northeastern China between Kaifeng, the capital of the Song, and Yanjing (today's Beijing) in order to create a buffer zone between the weaker Chinese and the aggressive Liao. In 1080, another group of more than 10,000 Arab men and women on horseback are said to have arrived in China to join So-fei-er. These people settled in all the provinces of the north and northeast, mainly in Shandong, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Shanxi and Shaanxi. As settlers in the area between the Chinese and the northern nomads, these Muslims became an important local element in the 11th and 12th centuries, being involved in the land commercial traffic along the Silk Road with the support of the Chinese, the Khitan, and the Tibetan and Tangut authorities.

So-fei-er was not only the leader of the Muslims in his province, but he acquired the reputation also of being the founder and "father" of the Muslim community in China. Sayyid So-fei-er discovered that *Arabia* and *Islam* were misnamed by the Tang and Song Chinese as *Dashi guo* ("the land of the Arabs") or as *Dashi fa* ("the religion, or law, of the Arabs"). This was derived from the ancient Chinese name for Arabia, *Dashi* which remained unchanged even after the great developments in Islamic history since that time. He then introduced *Huihi guo* to substitute for *Dashi guo*, and then replaced *Dashi fa* with *Huihui jiao*. "The Religion of Double Return" meant to "submit and return to Allāh". Thus, in Chinese,

Hui-hui (*Huihui*) was universally accepted and adopted for *Islam* by the Chinese, Khitan, Mongols and Turks of the Chinese border lands before the end of the 11th century.

The appearance of the Mongols in China meant a new phase in the development of Islam there. Their Yüan Dynasty was founded by Ḳubilay Ḳhān (r. 1260-94), a grandson of the Great Ḳhān, Čingiz Ḳhan (1206-27). His military forces, used for the overrunning of both North and South China, were built largely upon the thousands of Muslim soldiers which he brought with him from the Middle Eastern and Central Asian campaigns. At least two of the commanders-in-chief of the three Mongol war zones were Arabs: Amīr Sayyid Bayan (Po-yen, Boyan) (1235-94) and Amīr Sayyid-i Adjall Shams Dīn Umar (1211-79). They fought in the war against the Song, and helped to establish Mongol power in China, with many thousands of Muslims serving as high officials in the central and provincial governments. Because large numbers of the Mongol soldiers were Muslims, the Ḳhān decreed them to be second in rank citizens of the Mongol empire (after the Mongols themselves in Yüan China). One of Ḳubilay's Muslim commanders was a Bukhāran, who claimed to be a *sayyid*, i.e. descendant of the Prophet, Shams Dīn Umar, called Sayyid-i Adjall. He was Ḳubilay's governor of the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan for the period 1273 till his death in 1279. He was buried there, and his tomb, with its inscriptions, was subsequently discovered at the opening of the 20th century by the French Mission d'Ollone; a second grave also exists at Xi'an, also with an inscription, this being a cenotaph which only contained the dead governor's ceremonial court dress². Sayyid-i Adjall probably did much for the spread of Islam in Yunnan, but it is his son Nāṣir al-Dīn who is given the main credit for its diffusion there. The latter had been governor of Shaanxi, and when he died in Yunnan as governor there in 1292, he was succeeded by his brother Ḥusayn. Other sons of Sayyid-i Adjall and their sons in turn held high office under the Yüan emperors, and the family remained famous in Chinese life. Thus the famous scholar Ma Zhu (ca. 1630-1710) supervised the renovation of the tomb and shrine of his ancestor Sayyid-i Adjall, as attested by an inscription. It is certain that the dominant position of Islam in Yunnan dates from the Yüan period, being accomplished through land contacts and not maritime ones, and the Muslims of Yunnan must have remained in constant contact with the *Hui* Muslims of the northern provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu, especially as Muslims became famous as traders and hirers of animals for transport.

The tolerant, or rather, indifferent Great Ḳhāns thus encouraged the Muslims, as they did other religious groups within their empire. Under such conditions, the Muslim community in China made great strides, and the evidence of such Muslim travelers as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa shows that there were also flourishing

2 See A. Vissière, *Étu menhuan des sino-mahométanes*, Paris 1911, 41 n. 1

mercantile colonies in the coastal cities along the China Sea Muslims became prominent in occupations such as engineering, medicine, technology, transportation and overseas trade, agriculture and handicraft work. Under the Yüan, there was a significant change in religious life as well; mosques and schools were built, and a network of Muslim hostels was established for traveling Muslim merchants. In the 14th century, by the end of the Mongol rule in China, the Muslims totaled about 4,000,000, more than any other minority in China. They took their place in all aspects of Chinese life: political, economic, administrative and military; yet they were still confined to their own communities, somewhat isolated from the vast Chinese population surrounding them. Most of their large communities were still located in areas distant from "China Proper".

The high profile of some Muslims under the Yüan inevitably provoked a backlash. Many Muslim officials and commanders behaved arrogantly and oppressively, lording it over the native Chinese majority, with its own, much more ancient, Confucian ethos and traditions, very much at variance with many Muslim attitudes (e.g. in regard to taboos on food and to ritual cleanliness). Already in K̄ubilai's reign, Marco Polo noted the tyranny of a certain Aḥmad, who secured an ascendancy of the K̄hān and used it to further the interests of his own family, until after suffering 22 years of oppression, a Chinese revolt took place in which Aḥmad was killed.³

Hence the situation changed for the Muslims under the following indigenous Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644), during whose period the *Hui-hui* evolved from being Muslims in China to becoming Chinese Muslims but for whom the golden age under the Yüan was now over. At the beginning, Muslims were granted political, economic, social and religious freedom, but later this attitude changed. The new régime forced many Chinese immigrants to settle in the border zones, such as the northwest and the southwest where the Muslims had established their communities, and the majority of the people in these areas became Chinese. Moreover, the Muslims were prohibited from upholding their dietary, marriage, dress and speech customs. Under these circumstances, they adopted Chinese names, wore Chinese dress and often married Chinese spouses. This process of acculturation into Chinese culture continued steadily, and the Muslims in China came to consider themselves Chinese.

But with the increase of Sinicisation, they also insisted on retaining many customs and traditions attesting to their origin. Many Arabic and Persian words were preserved, particularly in religious life. This syncretisation of the two cultures created the *Hui* as we know them today, namely, not merely "Chinese with

3 Yule Henry, Cordier Henri, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, London 1903, pp. i, 415-23; cf. also H. Franke, *Aḥmed . Ein Beitrag zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte China's unter Qubilai*, in *Oriens*, i [1948], pp. 222-236.

Islamic faith”, but a minority with various ethnic distinctions from the Chinese. Towards the end of the Ming rule, in the late 16th century, the first Chinese translations of Arabic and Persian books concerning Islamic history, ritual and philosophy appeared in China. This was probably the most obvious sign of the culmination of the process of Sinicisation. By the end of the Ming, in the year 1644, the total Chinese Muslim population had increased considerably. But then, the almost 1,000 years of Islamic existence in China were undergoing a violent form. The new Manchu rulers, who conquered China and established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), would act adversely as far as the *Hui* minority was concerned.

The Muslims greeted the new dynasty with a series of rebellions. Muslim “Ming loyalists” led uprisings against the Manchus in various locations where large Muslim populations resided. Such was the Ding Guodong rebellion (1648) in Gansu. This ill-prepared uprising lasted one year and resulted in many cities destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Muslims killed. The Qing rule in China was characterized by many Muslim rebellions, and an uneasy coexistence between Chinese and Muslims. Intercultural and inter-religious violence usually triggered significant rebellions of the Muslims in mid-19th century China, when Muslim leaders established ephemeral Muslim states and threw all north-western and southwestern China into chaos. A case in point was Du Wenxiu, who took over much of Yunnan and styled himself “Sultan Sulaymān”. After 17 years of struggle, in 1872, he was defeated by the Manchu forces with more than one million Muslims killed. The remnants of those Muslims, who now dwell in Northern Thailand (Chiang-mai) are now known as Panthay Muslims. This was probably the last significant chapter in the history of Islam in Imperial China. In Gansu, Ma Hualong and in Xinjiang, Yaḳūb Beg of Kāshghar attempted also to throw off the Manchu rule, but they were likewise suppressed.

Religious Aspects of Islam in China

Some scholars tend to divide the development of Islamic religion in China into three tides of influence or movements which entered China from without, thus relating the changes in Chinese Islam to developments in the Islamic world. Not surprisingly, it was the maltreatment of the Muslims in China by the Manchus which conditioned much of their predisposition to rebel, when their oppression under the Qing coincided with the new winds of reform and change which blew from the core of the Islamic world. All this while, they stuck to their *Hanafi* school of law allegiance with moderation and without raising much antagonism or suspicion in their environment. They paid lip-service to the Imperial Calendar, but they lived by their own Muslim one. They built their mosques often without a minaret, in order not to give any prominence to their houses of prayer in comparison with Chinese temples. They behaved as Chinese outwardly,

but as Muslims indoors. They spoke Chinese outdoors, but inside the mosque they used Arabic script and ornaments, and sprinkled their speech with Arabic or Persian words. These Muslims are referred to today as *gedimu* ("the Ancients") (Ar. *Qadim*).

A second phase set in after the 13th century, when *Ṣūfī* orders penetrated into China. The *Ṣūfī* wave intensified and widened the roots of Islam, and it generated the spread of Islamic learning as well as the construction of new mosques. Of several *Ṣūfī* orders, the *Naqshbandiyya* brought from Central Asia via Xinjiang, became the most deeply and widely rooted in China. The next stage was connected with a movement of renewal (*tadjdīd*) generated by a prominent 18th century scholar, Ma Mingxin. His group was known as the *Xinjiao* ("New Teaching"). When he returned to China in 1761 from his trip to the Middle East and Central Asia, Ma Mingxin was imbued with revivalist ideas which generated much of the unrest in 18th and 19th-century China. He introduced new variants of ritual, for example, the reading out loud and declamation of the *dhikr* and the Qur'an (hence the name, the *Djahriyya* sect, compared with *khufya*, the silent reciting of before). There is reason to believe that many of the leaders of the rebellions, notably Ma Hualong and Du Wenxiu, were related to this revivalist trend.

Pathological Sectarianism

Sectarianism has been a characteristic of Islam even after the four Sunni schools of law (*madhahib*) were canonized and none could be added to them. For while in Sunni Islam a *madhhab* usually prevailed in an entire country or region, where the central authority of the state or the personal prestige of the 'ulama' of that school dominated scholarship and jurisprudence thus preventing further splits, in Shi'ite and Sufi Islam there was always a propensity for endless sectarianism. In the Shi'a, due to the doctrine of the Divine Light which was inherited from Ali, the first Imam, by his descendents, controversy arose in each generation as to who of the progeny of the Imam was bequeathed that light, and factions tended to form around various contenders to that charisma. Sufi Islam, which as a rule insisted on its Sunni affiliation, in China under its Hanafi School, a multiplicity of orders developed over the generations, with a founder-Saint who claimed affiliation to the Prophet or one of his Companions establishing his own hereditary *silsila* (chain of transmission), building his own system of propagation, spreading in specific areas of the Islamic world and giving his own name to his following (*Qadiriyya*, *Bektashiyya*, *Sanusiyya*, *Naqshbandiyya* etc.).

At times, orders split up on matters of rituals or of inheritance, like the rift within the *Naqshbandiyya*, between the *Khufya* and *Jahriyya* sub-orders over the

invocation of the name of Allah (*dhikr*) silently (the former) or loudly (the latter)⁴. However, uniformity and homogeneity were valued over schisms and splits, and attempts were often made to bring back into the fold schismatic elements like the Shi'ites. The fact that close to 90% of all Muslims remained within the Sunna, that all four schools of law remain inclusive of each other, and that no boycotts or excommunications against other Muslims were usually approved, goes a long way to illustrate these remarkable cohesion, unity and ecumenical spirit that kept Islam universal and open to others.

All that is applicable to the lands where Islam constitutes the majority or the ruling culture, because though devoid of clerical hierarchy, wherever it prevails it also entertains central authorities that enforce normative Islam to which the masses conform, and splits are thus usually averted. However, when Muslims are the minority guest culture, atomized splittism becomes the norm, because there is no central Muslim authority to enforce a "standard" creed and personal and theological struggles tear Muslim unity apart and are bound to create many divisions in its midst. In modern times, if one observes the multitude of organizations and tendencies among the Muslim immigrant populations in the West, who recently have become a living and fascinating laboratory for such developments, one finds a large variety of streams and inclinations, much larger than what one expects in a Muslim majority country. Consider for example, the difficulties the French government has been encountering in creating an umbrella organization for all Muslim trends among its Muslim new citizens. But these splits reflect for the most part various shades of Islam imported from the native countries of the immigrants and only seldom does one encounter new brands of Islam that are created locally. Fear of innovation (*bid'a*) and from accusations of heresy (*takfir*) by their original countries where they keep their loyalties and family ties, prevent them from sliding beyond the pale or expressly parting ways with established schools or orders. China is a salient exception to this rule inasmuch as it has harbored in its midst such an amazing succession of schisms and splits, often exclusive of each other and inimical to one another, as to make Chinese Islam, especially the *Hui* part of it, an almost unique phenomenon in Islamdom. This millennial Islam has been cut off long enough from the core-lands of Islam as to develop distinctly Chinese traits that were not duplicated elsewhere, in spite of the occasional injections of theological vigor and organizational renewal that came from the outside, notably from Central Asia⁵.

Only in recent decades did Western, and especially Chinese, including many Muslims among them, scholars begin to catalogue the multifarious splits in Chinese Islam, to sort out the confused and confusing terminology that has been adopted by Chinese and Muslims alike in the process, in order to map

4 See R. Israeli, *Muslims in China: a Study in Cultural Confrontation*, Curzon, London, 1980.

5 For details of these processes, see *Muslims in China*, op. cit.

out the vast array of these “sects” (*jiaopai*) that enrich the Chinese-Muslim *Hui* landscape across China. “Sect” will be used here not in the derogatory sense of slipping into heterodoxy (save in a few exceptions), for in Islam, even across the major Sunni-Shi’ite divide, there remains sufficient commonality in the theology and worship style to permit ecumenical prayer in a way difficult to conceive in Christianity. This is particularly true in Sufi orders where followers are frequently initiates of more than one-order or sub-order. Thus, while enmity is often their way, they all insist on their Muslim commonality. It is moreover somewhat anomalous that within the generally tolerant religious atmosphere of China (unless militant Islam was conceived as a threat to the regime, of course), Islam should take on a more rigid, factional character. Unlike other Muslims elsewhere, Chinese Sufi Muslims seldom if ever belong to more than one order at a time, even less so to sub orders, a special Chinese creation called *menhuan*. Similarly, *Wahhabi* – or *salafi*-inspired groups are organizationally discreet, drawing something from the clandestine, exclusive and strict character of the Chinese Secret Societies, something that justifiably bestows on them the attribute of “sects”⁶.

There have been many attempts by Western scholars to map the complex array or sects within the Chinese Muslim community. Broomhall and D’Ollone were perhaps the first to recognize the existence of that atomized division about one century ago. Broomhall wrote of the white and black hats worn by the various sects⁷ while D’Ollone described in his travelogue the “tomb-worshipping cult” in Gansu and Northern Sichuan. Later, several missionary scholars attempted to analyze in greater depth the Sufi orders in northwestern China. Perkins and Broomhall identified the importance of tombs and saints to these orders and realized that there were several, often feuding, orders within China that were, almost invariably, dubbed as New Sect (*Jiao-pai, Xinjiao*) or New New Sect (*Jiao Jiao Pai, Xin xin jiao*) when they run out of more finely-defining terminology. In recent years other western authors turned their attention to sectarian movements within Chinese Islam. This author’s work⁸ was an attempt to analyze the origins and practices of the sects within Chinese Islam, drawing on a number of Chinese and western sources. Dru Gladney’s more recent work⁹ touches on some of the historical issues in the development of Chinese Muslim sects. Lipman too has done considerable work¹⁰ in this field. But it was not until recent decades of greater openness of the People’s Republic that foreign scholars and tourists had again the opportunity to live and travel in China, including to the inland *Hui* communities. Their knowledge of the Chinese language and of the rudiments

6 See *Muslims in China*, op.cit., the Chapter on the New Sect.

7 M. Broomhall, *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*, London Missionary Society, London 1910.

8 R. Israeli, *Muslims in China*, op.cit.

9 D. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic*, Harvard, 1991.

10 J. Lipman, *Hyphenated Chinese: Sino-Muslim Identity in Modern China*, Stanford, 1996, pp. 97-112.

of Islam permitted them to collect valuable data of Chinese sectarianism. These developments have also facilitated journeys of outside Muslims to China and awareness by Chinese Muslims of other Muslim communities worldwide. In 1995, for example, a well-attended conference was hosted by the Fujian Academy of Science in Quanzhou on the theme of the introduction of Islam via the maritime silk road, where delegations from the entire Muslim world participated and met for the first time with their Chinese co-religionists, and subsequently the conference presentations were published. Though the quality and accuracy of subsequent publications vary, this has meant that for the first time since the medieval journeys of Arab and Persian Muslims to China, a large body of publications on Muslims in China by other Muslims now exists, and new light has been thrown on the intricate and intriguing issue of sectarianism among Chinese Muslims.

Finally, since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) a growing body of scholarship written by Chinese academics, many of them Muslim themselves, has become available, and as the educational system has been gradually restored, the quality of the research also improved. Chief among these scholars has been Ma Tong¹¹, followed by Feng Jinyuan, Gao Zhangfu and others whose contributions appear regularly in several journals like *Huizu yanjiu* (Researches on the Hui) and *Xibei Minzu yanjiu* (Research into Minorities in the Northwest). A very complex picture emerges of the vast array of sects and teachings that developed in China over the generations, partly as an evolutionary organic process within Chinese Islam, partly as a result of interaction with Chinese society, culture and religion, notably following the model of secret societies and sectarian movements, and partly as a reaction to the oppression the Muslims in China had to endure. At any rate, with very few exceptions, all these sects remained solidly within the pale of Islam, much as some authors have argued that Chinese Islam, just like African or Asian Islam, was corrupted in its margins and broke with the Faith. It is also noteworthy that divisions along sectarian lines as well as the existence of Sufism in China are a much earlier phenomenon than has been generally believed, and that though no Shi'ism is extant in China in any organized form, there is enough evidence to suggest that since Yuan times (1279-1368) some form of Shi'a did manifest itself¹².

Islam in Communist China

Under the Republic (1911-49), and then under Communist rule (since 1949), the Muslims have been recognized as a "national" minority, but under the PRC they are kept atomized under their various ethnic appellations (Hui, Uighur, Dongxiang, Kazakh, etc.) Generally speaking, because of the régime's necessity

11 Ma Tong's twin works that marked the post-cultural revolution scholarship were *Zhongguo Ysilanjiao jiaopai yu menhuan zhidu shilu* (A History of the Islamic Sects and menhuan in China, 1981) and *Zhongguo Yisilan jiaopai menhuan suyuan* (The Origins of Chinese Islamic Sects and Menhuan, 1986).

12 R. Israeli, "Is There Shi'a in Chinese Islam?", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, IX, No 1, January 1988, pp. 49-66.

to have relations with Muslim countries on the international arena, it attempted to avoid any overt and brutal oppression of the Muslims domestically. But during the harsh periods of ideological oppression (the Great Leap in the 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s), Muslims were grossly mistreated, as were members of other religious groups. *Wakf* lands were confiscated, mosques destroyed (only one remained open in the capital Beijing) and Muslims forced to undergo Marxist education. On some occasions, even physical attacks were launched by Chinese troops against Muslim villages. However, since the advent of Deng Xiaoping (1979) and the opening up of China to the outside world, there has been a considerable relenting regarding these policies. More Chinese Muslims than ever are allowed to go on the *Hadj*. Muslim delegations are allowed in from outside. There are at present several mosques open in the capital to serve its considerable *Hui* population, the largest and oldest of which, that in *Niuji* or Ox Street, has six *Ahongs* (Imams) on its staff. Scattered manifestations of Islamic revival are again in evidence in many a Chinese Muslim locality. Whether these emergences of Islam amongst the *Hui* will follow the path of fundamentalism, as has been the case amongst the Turks of Xinjiang since the early 1990s, or will settle into a pattern of mild protest and peaceful religious re-emergence, remains to be seen.

The Muslim-Turkic unrest of the Uighurs in Chinese Turkestan, triggered by the liberation of formerly Soviet Turkestan (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kirgizstan which are bordering on China) at the onset of the 1990's, opened the door to widespread violence in practically all areas of Xinjiang, the northwest and the far west of China. Admittedly, some of the violence was engendered by printed insults to the Muslims, but it escalated after the military intervention of the People's Liberation Army, as in Xining in the Fall of 1993. In some areas, as in Kashgar, Islamikaze bombing was perpetrated (October, 1993), resulting in the ominous war cries of *jihad*, associated with a local "*Hizbullah*" (the Party of Allah,) being voiced.

This whole series of manifestations of Muslim violence began in 1989 with what has come to be known as the "Chinese Rushdie Affair", when multitudes of Muslims, first in Beijing and then elsewhere, went out to the streets to demonstrate against the blasphemous depiction of their faith by Chinese writers. Although initially the Beijing demonstrations by representatives of all Muslim "nationalities" were supported and allowed to be reported by the Chinese authorities, these demonstrations later spilled onto Turkestan. By 1990, and certainly thereafter, these sentiments which had at the outset just generated demonstrations, were later woven into a powerful fabric of rebellion, supported by cries "Free East Turkestan!!" by the Muslim minorities who lived there, notably the Uighurs. Unlike the Beijing demonstrations which were a plea to the authori-

ties to deal with the blasphemous writers, this uprising was directed against the Chinese authorities and was aided from the outside, mainly by the *Mujahideen* of Afghanistan and the adjoining Kirghiz, Tajik and Kazakh Republics. These riots broke out in an atmosphere which viewed Islam as a victor (in adjoining Afghanistan) and godless Communism (namely the Soviet Union) as the routed enemy. Once the Soviet Communist giant had foundered, the other Communist Superpower - China was eyed as the next target.

Since then, China has been waging a propaganda and security battle to guarantee its control over Xinjiang (=old land newly returned) its name for that vast area, where its nuclear and space industries dwell, and which is rich in minerals and strategic supplies of oil and gas which are vital to the expanding Chinese economy. China claims that Al-Qa'ida has trained more than 1,000 members of the (Uighur) East Turkestan Islamic Movement, classified as a terrorist group by America and the United Nations. The group took its name from the short-lived Republic of East Turkestan that was declared in Xinjiang in 1933 during the Republican era, then crushed by the Hui warlord Ma Zhongying. China has persuaded Pakistan and Kazakhstan to hand over captured militants for interrogation, secret trials and execution, a policy that may have helped fuel the fundamentalist rage now gripping Pakistan. Chinese security services have also created a pervasive apparatus of informers and deployed new units of black-clad anti-terrorist police to patrol around mosques and markets in the cities of Xinjiang. But the iron-fisted security policy has made more enemies than friends. Extensive travel and interviews in Xinjiang by western journalists has unveiled a society segregated by religion and ethnicity, divided by reciprocal distrust, living in separate sections of tightly policed cities. The same human rights abuses that exist across China - forced labor for peasants, children trafficked to slave as beggars, girls lured into sweatshops - deepen political tensions and turn young men to violence. Western intelligence officers have indicated that the Chinese consistently exaggerated Uighur terrorist links with Al-Qa'ida to exploit any opportunity to strike at their home-grown opponents. Chinese information was unreliable and no western intelligence service has handed back Muslim citizens to China, they said. One of the officers said the real concern was that Chinese repression was creating recruits for terrorism.¹³

Summary and Present-day Developments

Events in early 2007 have come proof that 60 years of Chinese military "occupation" have crushed significant opposition but failed to win loyalty. Officials have confiscated the passports of thousands of Muslims in a crackdown

13 Michael Sheridan, "War on terror hides brutal crackdown on Muslims", *The Sunday Times*, July 22, 2007. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/china/article2116123.ece>

to break the growing influence of militant Islam. Police ordered the Muslims to hand in their passports and told them that the documents would be returned only for travel approved by the authorities. The aim is to stop Chinese Muslims slipping away to join militants in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Conversely, China has invested billions of *yuan* to modernize Kashgar, renovating the square in front of its principal mosque and building new hotels to accommodate backpackers and up-market western tourists. It has also imported thousands of ethnic Han Chinese to populate new apartments, a pattern of mass immigration used across Xinjiang. They dwell in effective segregation from the Muslims, who keep to their old quarters of mud-brick houses, mosques and reeking alleys where freshly killed sheep hang up for sale. The "Communist Party does its best to achieve integration through politics. In 1949 the Uighurs were 90% of the population of Xinjiang. Today they account for less than half. It is the classic colonialist model", said Nicholas Bequelin of Human Rights Watch, author of a critical report on Xinjiang. In Urumqi, the industrialized capital city of Xinjiang, there was evidence that repression had united Uighurs with other Muslim ethnic groups such as the Hui, who constitute the mainstay of Islam in China Proper. Chinese intelligence woke up late to the fact that Hui Muslims were being financed by extremists from the Middle East. Their clerics, influenced by Saudi Arabia's purist *salafi* doctrine, often fulminated against Israel and the West. The Hui are much more radical than the Uighurs, said Bequelin. Such radicalization is fuelled by injustices endured by many Chinese but all the more potent when suffered by an angry minority.¹⁴

The price for the remarkable economic development driven by the government, say the Uighurs, is the slow extinction of their identity. Their children take compulsory Chinese lessons. Teaching in Uighur is banned at the main university. Their fabled literature, poetry and music are fading under the assault of *karaoke* culture. Their history is being rewritten. For western tourists, who come to Xinjiang to roam the ruins of the Silk Road, the Chinese have erected a new museum in Urumqi. It portrays the final Chinese conquest of this harsh territory, first claimed by the Han emperors in the era before Christ. Qinghai and Xinjiang, which are closer to the Islamic world than the rest of China and have been drawing support from some of it, have advanced demands for, and used violence in pursuance of, some sort of slipping out of Chinese dominance. Thus, due to both the lax policy of the Chinese government, which permits links and visits between its Muslims and the Muslim world, and the pressing interests of the radical elements in Islamdom, more and more outbursts of this sort can be anticipated which may culminate, if the circumstances so allow, in concrete demands for outright secession from China, not unlike the process that brought the Soviet Union to its demise. On the other hand, however, in view of the unitarian concept of

¹⁴ Ibid.

government in China, which has never acknowledged the existence of “federated republics” in its midst (like in the Soviet Union), nor tolerated secession (for example the unfortunate Tibetan example), it is hard to conceive a China that would sit idly by while its borders are permeated by rebellion and chaos.

Conclusion

The historical growth of sectarianism in Chinese Islam is a captivating story in itself and was dealt with elsewhere¹⁵. Here suffice it to list the major splinter groups that emerged in Chinese Islam and are still active, for the sake of making the point of the unusual schisms in its midst. As a base one must take the oldest traditional Islam that came to China over a millennium ago, and is known there as the *gedimu* (Arabic Qadim = old, ancient), a self-proclamation that insists that it has nothing to do with the various reform movements of the past two centuries. Indeed the *gedimu* mosques remain prevalent in eastern China, where the first Muslim settlers via the Maritime Silk Road led them. In fact, these Muslims, that we may term “traditionists”, are only vaguely aware of the deep rifts that separate their co-religionists on the Northwestern heartland. These are also the usually inoffensive Muslims that were identified as the “Old Sect” (*Laojiao*) by the Chinese authorities during the Muslim rebellions that tore apart northwestern and southwestern China during the latter part of the 19th Century, and were often synonymous with “Good Muslims” (*Liang Hui*), as opposed to the rebellious Muslims (*Huifei*) that were identified as the New Sect (*Xinjiao*), and will be discussed below.

A second category of Muslims are those affiliated with four major Sufi orders and their sub-orders (*menhuan*). They are: the Naqshbandiyya, the Qaderiyya, and to a lesser extent the Kubrawiyya (reputed to have absorbed some accretions of Shi’ism) and the Yasawiyya. The most prevalent however remain the two sub-divisions of the Naqshbandiyya: the Khufya and the Jahriyya, which were bitterly inimical to each other on the basis of their invocation of the name of Allah in silence (by the former), loudly (by the latter). The late Joseph Fletcher, who was a pioneer in tracing the coming of Sufi Islam to China, also made the major blunder of falsely identifying the separation between Old Sect and New Sect under the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) as the Khufya and the Jahriyya, respectively. He must have been misled by the reports of Old-Sect people joining the government in crushing the rebellions triggered by New Sect adherents, which corresponded to the same splits in taking sides with or against the rebellions by new trends of reformed Islam as compared with the old established and quietist Islam, namely the *gedimu*. This is perhaps the explanation for the diffusion of the new trends of Islam only in the rebellious Northwest while the East and north-eastern coast remained solidly traditionist and peaceful. The khufya-Jahriyya di-

15 R. Israeli and A. Rush-Gardner, “Sectarian Islam and Sino-Muslim Identity in China”, *Muslim World*, Vol 90, No 3-4, Fall 2000, pp. 439-57.

chotomy has been the most prolific in atomizing these two rival sub-orders of the same Naqbandiyya into more than a dozen *menhuan*. Menhuan have been created around charismatic leaders, who claimed descent from the forefathers of the Order or Sub-order much like the logic of fragmentation in the Shi'a which followed the various claimants to the Divine light of the Imams and the factions that clustered around them. No less than 12 *menhuan* were identified as claiming affiliation to the Kuhfya and another half-dozen to the Jahriyya. No kind words are reserved by members of a *menhuan* towards the others, the followers on one founder deeming the others as imposters. It was this process of fragmentation which brought confusion into the literature, because once you termed one of them "New Sect" (*Xinjiao*) when it appeared, and a more recent one "New New Sect" (*Xinxinjiao*), you ran out of terminology and started to confound one with the other. The Qaderiyya boasts four *menhuan* and the Kubrawiyya a single one.

Another category consists of the new modern trends which are somehow linked with modernist or "fundamentalist" movements, and in China are known as the *Ikhwan* (Brothers, not necessarily the Muslim Brothers of Egypt), *salafiyya* (followers of the example of the predecessors (*aslaf*)). These groups which claim inspiration from the Wahhabi movement of Arabia, wish to return Islam to its pristine form and accuse conservatives (the *gedimu* in the Chinese scene) of distorting and corrupting Islam with their accretions over the centuries, instead of strictly abiding by the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Some of those "radical" groups, which are "accredited" with stirring trouble and rebellion in China, and even with attempts to establish independent Muslim states in the Northwest and Southwest in the 19th Century, were also termed New Sects by the Chinese authorities or by their rivals within Islam, thus compounding the existing confusion between these various sects. Yet another category relates to modernist influences that were imported to China at the end of the 19th Century by Muslim activists within the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua Yundong*) and implemented mainly in the large urban agglomerations of the east coast, such as Beijing, Nanjing, Shandong and Manchuria, where the *gedimu* Muslims have been traditionally entrenched. This trend sought to reopen the channels of interpretation long closed to conservatives, and has had a definite impact on the China Islamic Association (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiehui*), which is paradoxically dominated by the puritanical *ikhwan*. Whether the latter have been transformed from a radical to a modernist-reformist movement, or otherwise, remains to be investigated. And finally, there is a tiny totally sinicized grouping dubbed the *Xidaotang* (Western Path) which apparently blends forms of Chinese Sufism with modernist Islamic concepts and indigenous Chinese philosophies. IT is important in spite of its limited numbers inasmuch as it is the only sect that was founded without direct influence from the outside and seems to be the outgrowth of a thoroughly syncretized Islam. However it may be important academically, its influence outside the township of Lintao in Gansu has remained very insignificant.

The confusion in the terminology used for this wide array of groups does not stem only from how one group dubbed the others and inspired the government to differentiate between the good-obedient vs. the bad-rebellious ones, but also by the deliberate attempts of those Muslim groups to cover up their activities, for which they were persecuted by the regime (for example *xinjiao*), by taking up appellations that were more palatable (like *laojiao*) and afforded them the opportunity to escape retaliation. Thus, while some *Khufya* followers who feared persecution called themselves *laojiao*, it is also certain, contrary to Fletcher's belief, that not all *laojiao* were *khufya*. Conversely, Wahhabi-inspired groups have since early 20th Century tended to lump the Sufi *menhuan* and the *gedimu* together and describe them as *laojiao*. The *xinjiao* appellation, which in all probability pre-dates the coming of the *Jahriyya* to China, has been given to many new *menhuan*, *Khufyi* and *Jahri* alike, and was not restricted, as Fletcher had posited, to the *Jahriyya* only. This term was also occasionally used by *ikhwan* who wished to distinguish themselves from other groupings, say the *gedimu*. But it appears that the term *xinxinjiao* was mainly used for the *Xidaotang* and the *Salafiyya*, either as a self-descriptor or when they appeared to other Chinese Muslims to have placed themselves at the two edges of the sectarian gamut, somewhat akin to the *ghulat* in Shi'ite Islam. All in all, it is estimated that about half of Chinese Muslims today are followers of the *gedimu*, or "normative-traditional" Hanafi Islam which dwells in the East; while Islam in the northwestern heartland of Gansu-Ningxia and Qinghai would rather tend to the various Sufi *menhuan*, or to a *salafi*-Wahhabi trend.

Though the unrest in Northwestern and southwestern China has been related to sectarianism, mainly the *Jahriyya* and other brands of *Xinjiao*, the existence of quietist Sufism in China proper means that Sufism does not necessarily have to evolve into sectarianism and unrest, as was the case in the outlying areas on 19th Century China. This indicates that it takes perhaps something more than sectarianism to provoke rebellion. If the major sectarian-motivated uprisings unfolded in the areas where Islam constituted sizeable minorities or strong local majorities (in China proper the Hui of the large cities were always more or less insignificant minorities) they were still vastly outnumbered by the huge Han populations around them. Thus, it was not enough to have a restive and hard-driven sectarian leadership in order for the Muslims to take the course of rebellion. The rebels had to control a heartland populated by like-minded sectarians in order to have the chance of success in establishing themselves. At the same time, since it took a Sufi outsider or a Chinese Muslim who returned from the Hajj with new ideas to create a new *menhuan* or a new trend like the modernists, and there was no strong charismatic local leadership recognized across its county and province, that would command unity and absorb the new trends rather than letting them break their own path, the propensity for fractures and dissents accentuated the process of sectarianism.

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Рафаел Израели

ИСЛАМ У КИНИ

Резиме

За разлику од осталих муслиманских мањина у свету, ова мањина у Кини је: а.) подељена између две велике етничке групе: Хуи у унутрашњости Кине, који су концентрисани у главним урбаним англомерацијама, и Ујгури, турског порекла, који су чинили већину у северно – западној Кини, али су сада бројчано надјачани од стране Хан Кинеза, преко политике насељавања и разблаживањем мањине. б.) Осим Сикјанга, муслимани у Кини нису везани ни за једну посебну територију (као рецимо Монголи у Монголији или Тибетанци у Тибету) већ су расути по целој земљи, што их чини неприметном мањином (1 – 2%) имајући у виду њихов укупан број (25 – 30 милиона). Огромна дистрибуција муслимана широм земље је учинила да се направи велика диверсификација њихове вере и обичаја, изнад поделе на Хуи и Ујгури. Та велика варијабилност је направила велики број секти, од којих су неке посебно специфичне за Кину.

Кључне речи: Хуи, Ујгури, нове секте (xin-jiao), сепаратизам, сецесија

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