

ASIA PROGRAM

WAHHABISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

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NOVEMBER 2017

ASIA FOCUS #51



This article seeks to provide an overview of Chinese Wahhabism, and its relationship to other forms of Islam in China. The first section of the article offers a brief review of the long history of Islam in China and, thus, the context in which Wahhabism would later take root. As such, numerous Islamic movements contributed to the emergence of a complex culture of Chinese Islam, long before the arrival of Wahhabism, itself an important ideology within China's Islamic Revival during the twentieth century. This article then introduces the different Muslim communities within China. It illustrates briefly the structure of Chinese Islamic communities and the impact of the Chinese government's open door policy¹ on Muslim religious institutions and their professionals. Subsequently, this article focuses on Wahhabism and its arrival in South Asia generally, and China specifically, through the Salafiyya Movement. The spread of Wahhabism also had considerable implications for Muslim participation in the Chinese public sphere, as is revealed by examining the perspectives of transnational traders, international students with transnational networks and the concept of the global ummah. Finally, this article highlights the influence of individual conversions and networks of revivalists on conceptions of Wahhabism and perceptions of Chinese Islam as well as potential implications for the role of religion within the Chinese state.

THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE ISLAM

Islam entered China through Arab and Central Asian traders. Muslims have lived in China proper since the Tang dynasty almost 1,400 years ago². One of Chinese Islam's pioneers, Thaabit ibn Qays³ died in 635 CE on his return from China. He lies buried in the Xingxing Valley east of Hami and his tomb is visited with reverence by Chinese Muslims up to the present. Thereafter, the first Islamic Empire under the third Caliph,

¹ The term referred to China's policy of opening up to foreign business that wanted to have the economic transformation of modern China. Shizhang Hu, *Stanley K. Hornbeck and the Open Door Policy, 1919-1937* (1977) ch 1-2
² Gladney, Dru C. (Jun. 2003) "Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?" *The China Quarterly*, No. 174, Religion in China Today (Jun. 2003), pp. 451-467 by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20059003>

³ Zhang Xinglang ed.2003, *Zhong-Xi jiaotong shiliao huibian* "Historical documents on East-West relations", 4 vols, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju

'Uthman' sent the first 'official' delegation of Sa'd ibn abi Waqqas (651 CE)⁴ to Persia for diplomatic sojourns to China. In the eighth century⁵ other religions such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism arrived in China as well. Since the early Tang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) China shared its longest, and deepest, borders with the Islamic world and later, from around 900 A.D, interacted closely with the Islamic world in Central Asia and on the Indian Ocean (Mackintosh-Smith 2011, 2014).⁶

Muslims were at first tolerated as foreign guests. However, in the thirteenth century the Mongols, having already taken control of the Muslim Middle East, devastated China. At this time, many Central Asian Muslims were forced by the Mongols to migrate to Western China⁷. At the same time, Omar Shams al-Din⁸ was appointed as treasurer by the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan in 1259 CE and was eventually appointed as Governor of Yunnan, the region in the South-West of China. This period coincided with the construction of both Mosques and Confucian Temples in Yunnan⁹. Thus, the widespread presence of Islam, mainly in Yunnan but also other parts of China, is attributable in large part to the legacy of Omar Shams al-Din¹⁰. Equally noteworthy, Muslim general Lan Yu contributed to the founding of the Ming Dynasty in 1388. In response, Emperor Hung-Wu¹¹ offered Muslims unprecedented privileges to improve their religious-living conditions within China, for example by providing for new Mosques and Madrassas.

As a result of ongoing integration, Muslims started dressing in a way that resembled their fellow Chinese countrymen and incorporated praise for Confucius' teaching into their religious practice. According to Wang Daiyu¹² and Liu Zhi there was no contradiction between Chinese Confucian thinking and the nature of Islamic thinking.

⁴ Prophet Muhammed's maternal Uncle.

⁵ Tang Dynasty

⁶ see Ben-Dor Benite 2002/2003, 93-114. (<http://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-23>)

⁷ Rossab Morris, 2014 From Yuan to Modern China and Mongolia pp.: 221-249 (29) by Brill

⁸ Commonly known as Sayyid Ajall (1211-1279) who was the Yunnan's first provincial governor, as a Muslim appointed by Mongol Yuan Dynasty.

⁹ Michael Dillon (1999). *Chinese Muslim, Hui Community; migration, settlement and sects* p. 23 Richmond: Curzon Press

¹⁰ Jacqueline Misty Armijo-Hussein, 1996 "Sayyid 'Ajall Shams al Din: a Muslim from Central Asia, serving the Mongols in China, and bringing "civilization" to Yunnan" by Harvard University-dissertation-

¹¹ Tan Ta Sen; Dasheng Chen (2000). *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia* by Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. p. 170.

¹² Wang Daiyu was a Chinese Muslim scholar and studied Confucianism extensively and used it to explain Islam, also his works eventually became part of the Chinese Islamic text the Han Kitab with an other well-known Muslim scholar Liu Zhi. See, Gek Nai Cheng, 1997 "Islam and Confucianism: A Civilizational Dialogue" p .75

This combination was later called “*Gedimu*” (格底目) in Chinese, which is literally a corrupted form of “qadim” or “old” in Arabic, since the belief had been brought to China in earlier years¹³. Thus, the ostensible differences between Chinese Muslims and other Chinese were observable predominantly in marriage rituals, death ceremonies and the Islamic diet. It is noteworthy that Chinese Muslims did not translate the Qur’an into Chinese, and continued to read in Arabic. As Ding claims, Chinese scholars did not translate the Quran, out of fear they might misinterpret its text. Sha Zhong and Ma Fulu, who were well-known imams and Arabic calligraphers in Lanzhou, only began translating the Quran in 1909, completing their work in 1912¹⁴. Chinese Mosque education called *Jingtang jiaoyu* (经堂教育)¹⁵ was established in the 16th century which included the practice of using Chinese characters to represent the Arabic language¹⁶.

In the early 18th century, Chinese Muslim scholar Liu Zhi published Chinese Islam’s most prominent text, the Han Kitab¹⁷. This elaborate piece of scholarship sought to describe Islam through the lens of Confucianism, seeking to appeal not only to Chinese Muslims, but also to introduce Islam to the Han majority. In the Qing Dynasty constituted a difficult period for Muslims in China. Qing emperors prohibited the Halal slaughter of animals, banned Mosques and the pilgrimage to Mecca for the Hajj. In response the Hui Muslim minority of central China resisted during, the, so called, Dungan Revolts. As part of the uprising other Muslim ethnic groups joined the Hui in continuously resisting the Qing Dynasty in the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang from 1862 to 1977. The eventual failure of the uprisings caused the immigration of many Chinese Muslims (especially Hui people) from Western China to neighboring Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan starting in 1878.

¹³ Matsumoto Masumi, 2009, “Islamic Reform Movement in 19th Century China”

¹⁴ Ding Shiren, the Muslim Culture Institute of Lanzhou University, more info: http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-12/17/content_14281211.htm

¹⁵ See more: There were 5 Persian books and the Qur’an was among 8 Arabic books which made up the “Thirteen Classics”- Alles Elisabeth, Cherif Leila Chebbi & ConstanceE-Helena Halfon, 2003 “Chinese Islam: Unity and Fragmentation” by Carfax Publishing

¹⁶ Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi, 2006 “Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation and Communication” by Taylor & Francis

¹⁷ Michael Dillon (1999). “Chinese Muslim, Hui Community; migration, settlement and sects” p. 131 Richmond: Curzon Press

After the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912-1949, things improved for Chinese Muslims, as the republic's new cultural movements coincided with a revival of Islamic culture and education for Chinese Muslims. This revival faced an abrupt end through Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which is referred to as the "black decade" for all religions in China¹⁸. Before the cultural revolution, the Chinese Islam Association (CIA) was founded¹⁹ in 1953. It was forced to go underground in 1958, and reopened after "black decade" in 1978. The CIA played a significant role in bridging between state, law and party policy on one side and the needs of Chinese Muslim minority communities on the other. During the Reform Era that followed the Cultural Revolution, five religions were officially recognized in China, including Islam. The various Islamic sects in China²⁰ were all represented at the national level through the CIA, as discussed in more detail in the following section.

CHINA'S MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

China's vast population of over one billion people includes 10 Muslim minorities. Muslims in China are multi-ethnic and, as the first section of this article has indicated, they form a significant part of China's history. The ethnic groups with a considerable Muslim population are the Huis, Uyghurs, Kazaks, Dongxiangs, Khalkas, Salas, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Bao'ans and Tatars (Mi & You 2004). As a communist country, religion faces constant suspicion from the Chinese state and is tolerated only within limits.

Although there are no official government records as to how many people practice Islam in China, the Muslim population is projected to increase from 23.3 million in 2010 to

¹⁸ Alles, Elisabeth, Le.la Cherrif- Chebbi, and Constance-Helene Halfon. "Chinese Islam: Unity and Fragmentation." *Religion, State Society* 31, no. 1 (2003): 7–35.

¹⁹ In early 1952, the Chinese Islamic leaders Burhan, Depusheng, Makien, and Pang Shiqian began organizing a Chinese Islamic association. They invited representatives from all the Muslim communities in China to the First Islamic Conference, held in Beijing in May 1953. This marked the birth of the Chinese Islamic association, the national organization of Chinese Muslims.

²⁰ Such four main denominations as Qadim, Ikhwan, Xidaotang, and Salafiyyah and such four main sects as Khufiyyah, Jahriyyah, Kadiriyyah, and Kubrawiyyah have formed in the Chinese mainland; and Ishan, Sunni, and Shiite, etc., have formed in Xinjiang. Min Junqing, 2013 *The Present Situation and Characteristics of Contemporary Islam in China* p.31 *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions (JISMOR)*

nearly 30 million in 2030²¹. In other words, China has more Muslims than many Middle Eastern states²². The two largest Muslim groups, the Hui and Uyghurs, together comprise approximately 90% of Chinese Muslims. There are marginally more Hui than Uyghurs: There are 9.8 million Hui Muslims and 8.4 million Muslims Uyghurs, mainly in the West of the country. Given Hui migration from Western China in the Qing dynasty the Hui are now also the most numerous minority in areas where the Han are the majority. Despite their ethnic similarity with the Han, the People's Republic classifies the Hui as a 'National Minority' and not as Han people, who happen to be of the Muslim. Conversion to, or away from Islam does not affect this classification.

In the reform period of the 1980s, the Chinese state engaged in a policy of cultural liberalization which involved the reopening of religious facilities such as mosques. However, the events of September 11, 2001 triggered intensified reflection both within the Chinese state and in the Chinese Muslim communities regarding 'Muslim identity' and specifically what it means to be 'Chinese' or what identifies a 'Muslim' in China. Within this rethinking process, the Chinese authorities focused on North-Western Muslim communities, particularly of Uyghur descent. The North-West had, by then, become China's most politically sensitive region as many Muslim separatist groups called for Xinjiang to form an independent East-Turkestan state. Open support for separatist groups increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent Muslim states in Central Asia. The defeat of the Soviet Union by the *Mujahedeen* in Afghanistan also fuelled radical Islamism in the Uyghur community. Thus, among the Uyghur groups in Xinjiang opposing Beijing's authority, militant Islamist factions emerged. These groups were ideologically also affected by the post 9/11 international expansion of extremist Islamist movements. From the Chinese state's viewpoint, those violent attacks were associated with religious extremism and are viewed as a significant threat to the national interest.

Further, Beijing has commenced propagating Chinese mono-culturalism, thus trying to assimilate China's ethnic minorities, particularly Uyghurs, to the dominant Han

²¹ "The Future of the Global Muslim Population" <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-asia/>

²² see Gladney, Dru C. 2003 "Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?" p. 451

culture²³. This policy has alienated many Uyghurs and nourished anti-Han Chinese sentiments among the Uyghur community. Anti-Han sentiments were further intensified by the Chinese state's resettlement policy, which consciously sought to relocate vast numbers of Han Chinese to Xinjiang. This policy brought major development projects and prosperity to Xinjiang's major cities, attracting technically qualified Han Chinese from the eastern provinces.²⁴ The political mobilization of Han settlers in Xinjiang sought to replace the Uyghurs, who today represent only 45 percent of the population of the province, despite having been a large majority as recent as 1949.²⁵

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WAHHABISM IN SOUTH ASIA AS A SAUDI IMPORT

Wahhabism in Southern Asia is not an indigenous religion but rather a 20th century export. For the purposes of this article Southern Asia is defined as a region spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as bordering regions in neighboring states. During the 14th century, Arab and Indian Muslim trading links into Southern Asia rapidly increased. The version of Islam that was spread via these trade linkages was referred to as Shafi'i, which, while rooted in Sunni Islam, is an interpretation of Islam based on the flexible combination and incorporation of non-Islamic or pre-Islamic cultural traditions²⁶. Southern Asian rulers who converted to Islam²⁷ gained privileged access to the spice trade which extended to markets in China, India and beyond the Arabian Peninsula to Europe. Arab and Southern Asian Muslim traders not only established contacts with cross border relations, but also operated with a degree of coordination to exploit favorable market conditions²⁸. Islam became effective in creating a sense of community, offering both a distinct identity as well as

²³ Special Report: The battle for China's spirit by Freedom house Feb, 2017

²⁴ see, Amnesty International, in a [report published in 2013](#)

²⁵ China clamps down on Xinjiang's Muslims over Ramadan, <http://observers.france24.com/en/20150701-china-muslims-uyghur-ramadan-freedom-religion>

²⁶ Means Gordon P. 2009, "Political Islam n Southern Asia" p. 22 by Boulder London

²⁷ Megat Iskandar Shah was the second ruler of Malacca who maintained a good relationship with the Ming Empire of China. See John N. 2013, Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300-1800 p.163-164 by NUS press.

²⁸ Means Gordon P. 2009, "Political Islam n Southern Asia" p. 26 by Boulder London

favorable economic incentives. Thus, Southern Asia became more integrated into global currents of both international commerce and political Islam. Through the mobility associated with Silk Road trade networks, Southern Asian Muslims were also influenced by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, such that elements of syncretism with Hinduism, Buddhism and other native religions characterized the nature of South Asian Islam before the arrival of Wahhabism.

In the late 1970s Wahhabism, whose international proselytization by Saudi Arabia was spurred by increasing rivalry between revolutionary Iran and the Saudi monarchy, began to also appear in Southern Asia. Saudi Arabia started investing in Muslim majority nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of physical infrastructure, but also by funding religious pilgrimages and schools. Saudi aid and investment into Malaysia and Indonesia was channelled primarily through the Saudi government, together with religious charities and foundations²⁹, which grant funding to mosques, Islamic schools, cultural institutions, and social services. At the same time, Wahhabi institutions developed close ties to non-Wahhabi Muslims and Sufi religious leaders in various Muslim majority countries in Southern Asia³⁰. As a result of such investments, observers and commentators became increasingly concerned about the increase of in Wahhabism in Southern Asia, which has also been termed a form of Islamic revival that is sweeping the region.

This growth of the Wahhabi religious interpretation was considered an impediment to cultural, folkloric practices and resulting understandings of citizenship. For example, Marina Mahathir³¹ stated that “Malays are losing their own identity and are in danger of an ongoing ‘Arabisation’ in the way they dress and practice their faith”. Mahathir and other cultural leaders also shared the concern that Saudi influence through Wahhabism causes greater intolerance towards minorities and increased sectarianism in countries

²⁹ Fred R. Von Der Mehden, 2014, “Saudi Religious Influence in Indonesia” see, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/saudi-religious-influence-indonesia>

³⁰ Dorsey James M. 2016 “Creating Frankenstein: The Impact Of Saudi Export Of Ultra-Conservatism In South Asia – Analysis” <http://www.eurasiareview.com/30072016-creating-frankenstein-the-impact-of-saudi-export-of-ultra-conservatism-in-south-asia-analysis/>

³¹ The daughter of Malaysia's former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, see <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/marina-mahathir-malaysia-undergoing-arab-colonialism#kYQMD0vwTKGB9URS.97>

such as Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia³². This concern is shared by citizens and human rights groups, which emphasise the funding of ultra-orthodox clerics in mosques in Indonesia³³. Thus, the nature of Southern Asian Islam has significantly changed in the last three decades, resulting in an increase in Islamist violence in Southern Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia. While governments in Southern Asia initially did not connect Saudi Arabian money and the radicalization of Islam in their own countries, there are now strong suggestions that Wahhabism's spread is increasing fundamentalism in South Asia³⁴, thereby triggering antipathy for non-Muslims and Western government philosophies³⁵.

Thus, despite international criticism, Saudi Arabia largely succeeded in transforming its originally predominantly local sect of Wahhabism into an influential force in Muslim nations and communities across the Southern Asia. Many Muslims are now Wahhabis or members of related sects that practice a form of orthodox Islam similar to the type found in Saudi Arabia. One of these sects is a conservative movement known as the Deobandi movement,³⁶ which, while indigenous to South Asia, is influenced by Wahhabism³⁷. Thus the influence of Wahhabi ideology extends from Africa through the Middle East to Southern Asia. Concerns associated with the rise of radical and fundamental branches of Wahhabism were also voiced within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional intergovernmental organization formed in 2001 and dominated by China and Russia. Among other strategic objectives, this organization seeks to campaign against the “three evil forces” which are “the three evils of separatism, extremism and

³² Dorsey James M. 2016 “Creating Frankenstein: The Impact Of Saudi Export Of Ultra-Conservatism In South Asia – Analysis” <http://www.eurasiareview.com/30072016-creating-frankenstein-the-impact-of-saudi-export-of-ultra-conservatism-in-south-asia-analysis/>

³³ Human Rights Watch, 2013, “In Religion’s Name” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/02/28/religions-name/abuses-against-religious-minorities-indonesia>

³⁴ Pillalamarri Akhilesh, 2014 “The Radicalization of South Asian Islam: Saudi Money and the Spread of Wahhabism” <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2014/12/20/the-radicalization-of-south-asian-islam-saudi-money-and-the-spread-of-wahhabism/>

³⁵ see; Malaysia’s Attorney General that the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, received \$680 million from the coffers of the Saudi royal family. The Razak administration has altered the policy between Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus in the Malaysian federation. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/saudi-arabias-680m-gift-to-malaysian-prime-minister-najib-razak-perfectly-legal-a6834241.html>

³⁶ Tariq Mir, “Kashmir: The Rise of a Hard Faith,” *Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting*, December 13, 2011, <http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/kashmir-india-pakistan-sufi-wahhabi-islam>.

³⁷ Pillalamarri Akhilesh, The Radicalization of South Asian Islam: Saudi Money and the Spread of Wahhabism http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2014/12/20/the-radicalization-of-south-asian-islam-saudi-money-and-the-spread-of-wahhabism/#_edn5

terrorism”³⁸. However, the precise definition of “extremism” remains unclear. Moreover, there are cases of religious minorities being harshly punished for seemingly benign religious or educational activities that governments arbitrarily label “extremist”.

THE EMERGENCE OF WAHHABISM IN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms commencing in 1978 ushered in a period of partial religious liberalization and relaxation of the People’s Republic’s hostility towards religion. As a result, over the past thirty years, China experienced religious revivals of all creeds.

In response to the spread of new, modern ideas and lifestyles, Salafism³⁹ which is a branch of Sunni Islam whose modern-day adherents claim to emulate “the pious predecessors”⁴⁰ found a popular following across many Muslim societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Wahhabi-inspired reform movements, known as the Yihewani⁴¹ were founded by Ma Wanfu (1849-1934). In 1886, He returned from the Hajj pilgrimage, bringing back many Wahhabi texts, which he then used to introduce his interpretation on Islam to the Hui community. The Yihewani rose to popularity under nationalist and warlord sponsorship across China and were noted for their critical stance towards existing Chinese Islamic practices, as too acculturated to Chinese Confucian traditions. The Yihewani also opposed Sufism as too attached to saint and tomb veneration⁴². Even before the arrival of Wahhabism proper (*wahabiye* 瓦哈比耶), the Salafiyya Movement (三

³⁸ Davis, Elizabeth Van Wie 2008 “Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang, China” <http://apcss.org/college/publications/uyghur-muslim-ethnic-separatism-in-xinjiang-china/>

³⁹ Al-Salaf Al-Sāliḥ; often equated with the first three generations of Muslims. The ideas espoused by these scholars have more or less culminated in the Wahhabi movement that started on the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century, which in turn helped spread a Salafi message to the rest of the Arab and Muslim worlds and even beyond. Wagemakers, Joes 2016, “Salafism”

⁴⁰ Wagemakers, Joes 2016, “Salafism” Islamic Studies, Religion and Politics by Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.255

⁴¹ Ikhwan

⁴² Dru C. Gladney, 2003 Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism? The China Quarterly, No. 174, Religion in China Today p.451 467

抬) which is known as the “preceding three generations”⁴³, for its focus on the rightly guided caliphs of Islam, emerged out of the Yihewani in the 1930s. According to Matthew Erie, translation of the terms of Yihewani and Wahhabi is problematic in that they do not mirror the meaning of such terms in the Middle Eastern context. Further, determining the exact moment of separation between the Salafiyya Movement in China and Chinese Wahhabism is difficult. Both sects share considerable similarities in their scriptural ideas, historical ancestry and opposition to traditional Chinese Islam. While Wahhabism is a subset of Salafism, it focuses specifically on those characteristics imported from Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Salafis and Wahhabis are seen as problematic groups espousing a foreign religious-political project that constitutes a threat to traditional indigenous Islamic practices as well as posing a potential security threat on the national level in China⁴⁴.

Many studies claim that Chinese Muslims have had Salafi ideas before they knew what Salafism was⁴⁵. The original propagator of Salafiyya⁴⁶ in China is Ma Debao (马德宝) (1867-1977) who was educated in to the *Yihewani* tradition. He settled in Xining to establish and teach the Wahhabi doctrine as the main form of Islam in China with Ma Zhengqing⁴⁷. In this regard, he exercised a more hard-line view of Salafi thought than the mainstream *Yihewani*⁴⁸. Soon, Ma Debao distanced himself from the *Yihewani* and established his own group (*menhuan*) in Lanzhou and Linxia. His Salafi Movement encountered strong opposition from the established *Yihewani* clergy and their warlord backers, forcing Ma Debao’s movement to assume a more cautious and quietest attitude towards politics for the sake of its own survival. After the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, the Salafis experienced a brief period of religious growth, with its leaders actively participating in a number of state organs under the CIA. Through the “Religious Reform Campaign” in 1958, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the

⁴³ Erie, Matthew S. 2016 “China and Islam” pg,107 by Cambridge University Press

⁴⁴ Al-Sudairi, Mohammed Turki, 2016 “Adhering to the Ways of Our Western Brothers Tracing Saudi Influences on the Development of Hui Salafism in China” sociology of Islam 4, 27-58 by BRILL

⁴⁵ Stewart, Alexander Blair, 2014 “Individual Paths to the Global Ummah:

Islamic Revival and Ethnic Identity in Northwest China” p, 79-86 by University of California, San Die- PhD dissertation

⁴⁶ The Salafiyya were initially also known as the “White Sect” because one of the Ma Debao, who came from Baizhuang (White Manor) village in Guanghe county which is between Lanzhou and Linxia. (Dillon, 1999 p, 103)

⁴⁷ Dillon, Micheal 1999 China’s Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects, Psychology Press p, 104

⁴⁸ Erie, Matthew S. 2016 “China and Islam” pg,110 by Cambridge University Press

Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the Salafiyya Movement was forced to go underground once again, as many of its leaders and adherents were tortured or sent to internment camps. It survived as remnants of its leadership settled in Xinjiang.

Simultaneously, Salafiyya, as a religious doctrine, grew in China through Saudi Wahhabi influence, as a result of increasing numbers of Chinese Muslim pilgrims taking part in the Hajj and through over-land trade networks via Central Asia and Yunnan. Between 1923 and 1934, 834 Hui Muslims⁴⁹ took part in the Hajj. As alluded to previously, the Hajj also increased the amount of Wahhabi literature available across China. Chinese pilgrims returning from the Hajj in the 1930s and 40s brought with them large quantities of Wahhabi texts and books generating, in turn, a greater reception for the message of *al-dawah*, the belief in the active proselytization of Wahhabi doctrine⁵⁰. Thus, the mobility of Islam influences all Muslim minorities in China until today. Huis were faced with the task of accommodating each new Islamic movement within Chinese culture⁵¹. Therefore, among China's Hui ethnic group, Salafism has been present for nearly a century with the effect of opening a new gate to Wahhabism.

THE EMERGENCE OF WAHHABI FACTIONS IN HUIS AND UYGHURS

Since the 1990s, and particularly following 9/11, the Chinese state placed the Salafi community under close surveillance. Specifically, the Chinese state started to worry about close connections of Chinese Muslim communities with Saudi Arabia as well as about presumed overlapping Uyghur Salafi networks which were seen to be growing over the past few years. An additional concern is that this ideological wave may also appeal to Hui people, whom the Chinese state fears might herald political and religious violence in the future.

However, concerns regarding religious extremism have an even greater impact on the

⁴⁹ Gadney Dru, 1999

⁵⁰ Ma Tong 2000, *Zhongguo Yisilan Jiao pai yu Menhuan Su yuan*, by Ning xia Ren min Press 中国伊斯兰教派与门宦溯源 / 马通著 宁夏人民出版社

⁵¹ Dru C. Gladney, 2003 *Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?* The China Quarterly, No. 174, Religion in China Today p.451 467

grassroots level of the Uyghur community. Because of the on-going extensive security crackdown on Xinjiang’s Muslim population, long-standing restrictions on the practice of religion by civil servants, teachers and students have been enforced with increasing strictness⁵². In 2016, senior officials, including President Xi Jinping warned against “religious extremism” and “overseas infiltration through religious means”⁵³. This view is shaped partly by China’s own “War on Terror” in Xinjiang, growing fears surrounding the emerging linkages between Chinese radicals (*jiduan fenzi* 极端分子) and the Islamic State (*Yisilanguo* 伊斯兰国), as well as longstanding discourse emanating from anti-Salafi groups such as the *Gedimu* 格底目, *Sufei* 苏菲 and *Yihewani* 伊赫瓦尼⁵⁴, themselves sects of Hui Islam. Underlying all this is Saudi Arabia’s role, which is seen as the source, supporter, and enabler of Salafi groups and the ideologies they espouse. China’s “war against extremism” relies on tighter restrictions⁵⁵ such as the arrest of students and writers pursuant to “counter-terrorism” laws brought in 2016 and the jailing of government critics⁵⁶. At the same time the police and military presence in the region was strengthened⁵⁷. In regard, one of the cause of this Uyghur’s opposition to the Chinese regime is mainly an ongoing ethnic conflict. In order to raise the issue both the state and some Uyghur groups seek to instrumentalise religious ideology.

In terms of integration, the Uyghurs are perhaps the least integrated minority group in Chinese society. Thus, they stand in stark contrast to the Hui community. Aside from Huis speaking the same language as and having closer cultural affinity to Han Chinese, the Chinese government has also allowed Huis to express their identity with reference to Islam. Despite, and in some cases pursuant to these freedoms many Hui Muslims have taken to adopting Arab beliefs and practices rather than the more pluralistic form of Islam rooted in China’s history. For instance, in recent years many Hui women started wearing headscarves, something their mothers or grandmothers never did, whether in

⁵² Gisela Grieger 2014, China: Assimilating or radicalising Uighurs? By European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 538.966

⁵³ Zhou Viola, 2017 Why China’s Hui Muslims fear they’re next to face crackdown on religion | This Week in Asia by South China Morning Post

⁵⁴ This is a *menhuan* which had its origin in Linxia in the 1930s and spread throughout northwestern China in 1950s.

⁵⁵ Daerdan, Lizzie, 2017 “China bans burqas and ‘abnormal’ beards in Muslim province of Xinjiang” <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-burqa-abnormal-beards-ban-muslim-province-xinjiang-veils-province-extremism-crackdown-freedom-a7657826.html>

⁵⁶ Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2016 “China’s New Counter-Terrorism Law and Its Human Rights Implications for the Uyghur People”

⁵⁷ Zhang Yiqian “Anti Terror Plans Go National” <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/862190.shtml>

rural cities or in universities⁵⁸. Within this transformation, questions of purity and legitimacy become paramount, as Huis are faced with significant internal socio-economic and political change, and are exposed to different interpretations of Islam from the outside Muslim world. The increasing popularity of the Wahhabi ideology through Salafiyya, especially among young Chinese Muslims who studied abroad (in Middle Eastern countries) also triggered unease within the Chinese state. Fears about Wahhabism are based on either its perceived association with religious extremism, the possibility that it could upset the sectarian balance of power or a simple aversion to new religious movements. Salafism is banned in Xinjiang and discouraged to various degrees elsewhere in China. However, it is not banned in Hui community in general.

CONCLUSION

This paper provided an overview of the development of Islam in China with a specific focus on the emergence of Wahhabism as a foreign Saudi interpretation of Islam. Saudi Arabia has several motivations for spreading Wahhabism throughout South Asia. As shown above, the first is a zeal for spreading the movement's teachings. It is intrinsic to Wahhabism to spread and Saudi oil money gives it the means to do so⁵⁹. Another reason for Saudi Arabia to spread Wahhabism in Asia is to counter the influence of Shia Iran. This includes Southern Asia, where Saudi Arabia wants to counter Iran's tendency to use Shias groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan to expand its political influence in those countries⁶⁰. Thus, future studies of religious extremism in Southern Asia should extend beyond its present focus on Wahhabism/Salafism.

⁵⁸ Gonul, Hacer Zekiye, 2016 "Role of Ethnic Community of Hui Students in Internal Unity in the Context of Urbanization" in Hui Muslims in China (pp. 177-186) by Leuven University Press

⁵⁹ Ed Husain, "Saudis Must Stop Exporting Extremism," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/opinion/isis-atrocities-started-with-saudi-support-for-salafi-hate.html>.

⁶⁰ Abbas Nasir, "Zia's Long Shadow," *Dawn*, July 6, 2012, <http://www.dawn.com/news/732329/zias-long-shadow>.

While China encourages the growing economic links between Muslims in China and abroad, they are also sensitive to combating the infiltration of extremist Islamic thought in Xinjiang. Chinese Muslims no longer represent only their own Islamic heritage in their interactions with the Muslim Ummah, but instead also become an agent of foreign Wahhabi ideology. The mobility of Chinese Muslims along the Silk Road contributed to the emergence of contemporary Chinese security policy. If China’s “war against extremism” widens the divisions between the Chinese state and Muslim communities, one can expect that Muslims in China will be increasingly regarded as a threat to state rule and social integration. This does not bode well for the future integration of Muslims in China. Ideological intolerance is a problem in Wahhabism itself, thus amplifying security concerns. In this vein, the Chinese state has blamed Uyghurs for relying on Wahhabism or Salafism as part of their radicalisation. The religious aspect itself is, however, not helpful for understanding comprehensively all causes of separatist terrorism in Xinjiang. Religious ideology adopted by radicals is often a mask for other issues. In this regard, addressing the inequalities between the Hui and Uyghurs Muslim minorities as well as between Muslim minorities and the Han majority by the Chinese state is essential. In doing so, equal treatment can counteract future violence in the country. Currently, the Chinese state views Hui Muslims as bridge builders between China and the Arab world. However, since Huis have both close cultural affinities to Han Chinese and share the same religion as Uyghurs, Huis could also act as bridge builders between Uyghurs and the Chinese state. Thus, it could be useful for the Chinese state to develop a healthier relationship with all of its minority groups by using the Hui minority to reach Uyghurs and other alienated groups. ■

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ASIA FOCUS #51

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NOVEMBER 2017

ASIA FOCUS

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