Sectarian Islam and Sino-Muslim Identity in China

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For many years, the relatively small size of the Muslim community in China (some 25-30 million), and of the Hui population\(^1\) in particular (about 15-20 million), meant that studies on Chinese-speaking Muslims considered these people as a homogeneous group, despite the scattered pattern of their settlement throughout the vast land mass of the Middle Kingdom. Since the pioneering and rudimentary work of Marshall Broomhall and others in the 1900s,\(^2\) little has been done to document the immense diversity of identity and practice within Chinese Islam. In his work *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the Peoples’ Republic*, D. Gladney made significant progress in establishing the identity of the Hui as distinct from other Chinese-speaking Muslims and even from Hui in different geographic locations within China.\(^3\) He showed that the concept of “Huiness” has very different connotations for different Hui communities and individuals and, in a number of his more recent works, also examined some of the religious and political consequences arising from these differing understandings of Hui identity.\(^4\)

Within the Chinese Muslim community itself, there is internal division along sectarian lines that has been frequently overlooked by Western and, to a lesser extent, Chinese scholarship, despite the importance of these movements to Hui identity, especially in inland China. Over the last two decades, considerable work has been done mapping the historical background and social and religious practices of the various Chinese Islamic kinds of teaching, *jiaopai*, which we shall call here ‘sects’ only in this sense.

The word ‘sect’ has different meanings as it applies to different religious traditions. In Islamic scholarship, it is generally understood to indicate a movement which has moved so far from broadly accepted Islamic norms that it is properly considered heterodox. Sect can also be an uncomfortable word to use in an Islamic context, particularly in reference
to Sufism, because of its underlying connotation of exclusivity and heterodoxy. Even across the vast Sunni-Shi’ite divide, there is sufficient commonality in theology and worship style to permit ecumenical prayer in a way difficult to conceive of in, for instance, Christianity. This is especially true among Sufi orders, where followers are frequently initiates of more than one order.

It is somewhat anomalous then, that within the generally tolerant religious atmosphere of China, Islam should take on a more rigid, factional character. Chinese Sufis never belong to more than one Menhuan subsect within a single order. Similarly, the Wahhabi-inspired groups are organizationally discrete bodies. These strict and exclusive divisions within Chinese Islam therefore warrant being described as ‘sects’ in a way that equivalent, or similar, Muslim groups elsewhere may not.

There has been great difficulty in determining changes in the sect structure, history, substance and practice of Chinese Islam in the wake of the nebulous history of the circumstances under which they arose. This is particularly so with regard to the turbulent shifts in the ‘religious policy’ of the Peoples’ Republic since the mid-1960s. For this reason, much of the scholarship on sectarian Islam in China presents a fixed, rather than dynamic, picture of sectarian Islam in Hui communities. Despite this, a significant body of descriptive literature now exists recording many of the beliefs and practices of the major Islamic sects in China, much of it in Chinese. This article intends to build upon what information already exists, attempting an analysis of these sectarian groups and their role in defining Sino-Muslim identity in China.

There have been many attempts by Western scholars to map the complex array of teachings/sects within the Chinese Muslim community. Broomhall and D’Ollone were perhaps the first to recognize the existence of the division. Broomhall wrote of the white and black hats worn by the various sects, while D’Ollone described in his travelogue the ‘tomb-worshipping cult’ of Gansu and northern Sichuan. Later, several missionary scholars attempted to analyze in greater depth the Sufi ‘paths’ in northwest China. Perkins and Broomhall identified the importance of tombs and saints to these paths and realized that there were several, often feuding, paths within China.

In recent years, Western authors have turned their attention to sectarian movements within Chinese Islam. Israeli’s work *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation* (1978) was among the first to attempt an analysis of the origins and practices of the sects within Chinese Islam, drawing on a number of Chinese and Western sources. Gladney’s *Muslim
Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the Peoples' Republic (1991) touches on some of the historical issues in the development of Chinese Muslim sects. It further examines questions of sect and identity in contemporary Hui society. Lipmann, too, has done a considerable amount of work in this field; particularly notable is his excellent work Hyphenated Chinese: Sino-Muslim Identity in Modern China (1996).

During the past two decades of greater openness within the Peoples' Republic, students, scholars and tourists have again had the opportunity to travel and live in the Hui communities of China, including those in the Chinese-Islamic heartlands in Gansu and Ningxia. For the first time since the 1940s, Westerners with some knowledge of China, the Chinese language and normative Islam have observed, investigated and interacted directly with the Chinese Muslim community. While there remain difficulties in conducting long-term fieldwork, the first-hand knowledge gained to date has been invaluable to our understanding of Chinese Muslims.

The increased opportunities to travel and live within China and the desire of the Chinese government to develop friendly relationships with Muslim countries has led to greater contact between Chinese and foreign Muslims. This, in turn, has promoted an enhanced awareness of the Chinese Muslim situation among Muslims throughout the world and has resulted as well in various efforts to assist Chinese Muslim communities. 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 to China via the Maritime Silk Road. At this conference, delegations from different parts of the Muslim world met for the first time with their Chinese co-religionists. Muslim organizations throughout the world have begun to publish more detailed material about Chinese Muslims in their literature. The quality and accuracy of this material vary greatly. But it has meant that for the first time since the great medieval Muslim travelers recorded their observations, a large quantity of work published on Muslims by other Muslims now exists.

Finally, since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the Peoples' Republic (1966-76), a growing body of scholarship written by Chinese academicians, for the most part at least nominally Muslims themselves, is available. As the educational system has gradually been re-established in the aftermath of that disastrous chapter in Chinese history, so too has the quality of material produced by Chinese scholars improved. Some have started detailed works on sectarian movements within the Hui community. Ma Tong pioneered the re-establishment of the field after the Cultural Revolution with his twin works Zhongguo Yisilanjiao jiaopai yu menhuan zhidu
Methods of Inquiry

The idea that there were three distinct 'waves' of Islam in the Chinese experience has become in some academic circles an accepted paradigm which, like all paradigms, will occasionally need some revision. In brief, this theory posits that a first wave of Muslims came to China as traders, merchants, artisans and mercenaries during the late Tang through the Song and Yuan Dynasties (eighth to fourteenth centuries), settling first along the southeast coast and then further inland. What is known as the second wave, which was in fact no wave at all, consists of the internal revival movement triggered by Sufi saints which swept China from late Ming times (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) until the mid-nineteenth century. The third wave lasted from the end of the nineteenth century up until the communist revolution when Arabs, Turks and Chinese Hajjis brought to China modernist and radical Islamic ideas. Several authors have also posited a fourth wave in the post-Cultural Revolution era, as renewed contacts between the Muslim core and the Chinese-Muslim periphery create more interest in Islam in China.

The uniquely sectarian nature of Chinese Islam is generally viewed as having gradually developed during the second and third waves of Islam in China. While we acknowledge that the 'wave theory' has been useful in providing a framework for sectarian development and identity-building in Chinese Islam, we posit an analysis that takes into account a further layer of complexity. Specifically, we propose that sectarian development is best seen as a continuous process of renewal (or degeneration, from an Islamic normative perspective) with Chinese Muslims constantly seeking to reassert their individual and communal ethnic and religious identity through
the adoption of developments in the larger world of Islam (or, rarely, through building a distinct identity based on a closer synthesis of Islamic and Chinese beliefs). We hope to continue our work in the area of the historiography of Chinese Islamic movements, particularly those associated with the various Sufi Orders (tariqa), in the future.

Gladney’s three ‘waves,’ themselves drawn from Joseph Fletcher’s scholarship, are similar to Baudel’s theory of underlying currents of history which shift direction gradually throughout the centuries. This theory posits that these currents brought with them a myriad of gentle ripples, introducing first Sufism and then modernist and radical Islam to China’s shores primarily through the actions of individual Chinese and foreign Muslims reflecting the desire of the community to bring about renewal. In other words, while the wave theory is perhaps useful in developing a framework for understanding the broad strokes of the unfolding of Islam in China, it also tends to obscure the fact the Sino-Muslim development is an organic and dynamic continuum which has been related closely to events in the Islamic heartland, but at the same time also underwent evolutionary processes within Chinese Islam as a result of its interaction with Chinese society and culture.

This gradual yet continual process of renewal insured that Sino-Muslims retained a faith that was recognizably Islamic, but one that also adapted to Chinese culture. It is our contention that these adaptations do not, as some authors argue, make Chinese Islam a corrupt or ‘less pure’ form of Islam, just as Malaysian Islam, African Islam or Indian Islam are not inherently heterodox versions of the faith.

We also propose that information in widely available Arabic texts, as well as in recent Chinese historical works, suggests that Chinese Islam was divided along sectarian lines much earlier than is generally believed. In particular, a strong case can be made that Sufism existed in China from as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century. Further, it would appear that while Shi’ite Islam is no longer present in an organized way in China, the circumstantial evidence is strong, though not conclusive, that some form of Shi’ism was established in China during the Yuan Dynasty and that some expressions of Shi’ism may still be extant in contemporary China.

**The Array of Sects and Teachings**

The summary chart presented in this paper is a diagrammatic representation of the sects that currently exist within Chinese Islam. More detailed descriptions will be elaborated in forthcoming work. The complex admixture of sects can be divided into five categories according to their chronol-
ogy, theology and structure. For the most part, these have been accepted by scholars of Islam. The categories differ from Gladney’s description of a scale ranging from assimilationist to rejectionist Islam. The two separate classification systems are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Gladney’s sectarian classifications are intended to describe ways in which various Sino-Muslim groups have attempted to assert their identity within Chinese society. The classifications put forward below are a means of describing Sino-Islamic movements in a way that is more meaningful to scholars of Islam while remaining more useful to Sinologists.

**Extant Sects in Chinese Islam (Hui Only)**

The first of these categories is what we have termed pre-sectarian traditionalist Islam. This is represented by the oldest of the Chinese Muslim tendencies, the *Qadim* (*Gedimu*). The *Qadim* are traditionalist Muslims in the sense that they do not claim a direct connection to the philosophies of Islamic reformers over the past two centuries. The designation ‘pre-
sectarian’ is proposed in order to indicate that the Qadim mosques have chosen not to align themselves with any of the various factions or teachings which appeared in China later in history. In areas of China where the Qadim are dominant (primarily the coastal regions and in the northeast, the first to be settled by Muslims), the majority of Muslims are only vaguely aware of the deep sectarian divides among their co-religionists in inland China, lending further credence to the appellation ‘pre-sectarian’.

The second category is represented in China by four Sufi orders and two dozen sub-sects called Menhuan. These four paths are the Qadariyya and Kubrawiyya Orders, and the Khufya (frequently and incorrectly transliterated as Khuфия in works on Chinese Islam) and Jabriyya (also often incorrectly transliterated as Jabariyya) branches of the Naqshbandiyya. Sufism, accepted as part of traditional Islam by scholars of the Holy Law, was perceived by later Muslim puritan reformers as a corruption of the original, pure faith.

The third category is revivalist Islam, sometimes termed ‘fundamentalism’ or ‘extremism’ which has been represented in China by the Ikhwan (Brothers) and the Salafiyyah. At the end of the 1920s, the Egyptian Islamist Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood, which has since spread throughout the world. The Salafiyyah, literally ‘following the predecessors’ (aslaf), which also developed in turn-of-the-century Egypt as a radical outgrowth of the modernists, fitted in with the traditional Chinese orientation towards the past. Emerging from the Wahhabi movement in eighteenth century Arabia but claiming spiritual ancestry from the earliest days of Islam, radical Muslims seek to return Islam to its early pristine form from the time of its founding. They oppose conservative Muslims, whom they accuse of corrupting Islam with their medieval accretions. Thus, the appropriation of ancient Islam for those radicals means returning to the holy text of the Qur'an and the Hadith and shunning later interpretation and modification.

The fourth category consists of the modernists in the Islamic world who have influenced Muslim communities in China, most notably in those areas closest to the centers of Chinese civilization. It is our opinion that those small communities which have been enumerated as Qadim, or occasionally remnant Menhuan, and located in the larger Muslim communities in coastal China (Beijing, Nanjing, and parts of Shandong, Hebei and Manchuria) where modernist influence is strongest. Modernist Islamic concepts were brought to China in the last years of the nineteenth century principally through Muslim activists within the influential New Culture Movement (Xin Wenhua Yundong). Modernist thinking, which attempted to
modernize Islam by reopening channels of interpretation long closed to conservatives, has deeply influenced the official China Islamic Association (Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiebui), which paradoxically is dominated by adherents of the Ikhwān. This raises an important question, not yet satisfactorily answered, as to the extent of the Ikhwān's putative transformation from a radical to a modernist movement. Anecdotally, modernist influences appear to be strong in the Ikhwān hierarchy but the question is essentially unanswered at the popular level.

The fifth category is what we have called Sinicised traditional Islam. This group is represented by a uniquely Chinese sect, the Xidaotang, or Western Path. The Xidaotang sect is a blending of the forms of Chinese Sufism with modernist Islamic concepts and indigenous Chinese philosophies. It is a unique and important movement, as it is the only sect which was founded without direct inspiration from foreign Islam and seems to be the outgrowth of a thoroughly syncretized Islam. As a deliberate attempt to accommodate Islam into the Chinese world, the authors believe that the Xidaotang represent a ‘Sinicised’ movement built within the framework of what is claimed as traditional Sufism of a peculiarly Chinese brand. While the Xidaotang is thus an important movement in an academic sense, the influence of its teachings outside of the small Gansu town of Lintao has been very limited.

This discussion of the nomenclature of Chinese Muslim sects, however, should also be put in the context of the confusing field of Laojiao (Old Teaching), Xinjiao (New Teaching) and Xinxinjiao (New New Teaching). These were appellations used by Chinese officials, Western missionaries, and even Chinese Muslims themselves, in attempting to describe the complex sectarian structure of Chinese Islam.

The Qadim is the group which has been most frequently known by the term Laojiao. Officials in Imperial China usually equated Laojiao with Lianghui (Good Muslims) and Xinjiao with Huifei (Muslim Bandits, or Bad Muslims). For this reason, other groups have at times sought to use the term to avoid suspicion of persecution. During the Jāhiyya-inspired Muslim rebellions in the Qing Dynasty, many of the Ḫufṣya called themselves Laojiao in order to be disassociated from the aggressive and trouble making groups. It is certainly wrong to suggest, as Fletcher did, that the term Laojiao applied exclusively to the Ḫufṣya.

Further complicating matters, the Wāḥhabī-inspired groups have, from the early part of the twentieth century onward, tended to lump the Sufi Menbūān and the Qadim together and describe them all as Laojiao. While the term Laojiao has primarily applied to the Qadim and at times to some or...
all of the Sufi groups, the term Xinjiao has an even more confusing history. In all likelihood, its use predates the arrival of the Jahriyya Naqsbandis in China. Several newly established Menbuan within each of the main Sufi orders have at times described themselves as Xinjiao, and have likewise been described as such. As previously mentioned, the Ikhwan also used this term to distinguish themselves from more established groups within China. It is therefore impossible to say that the term Xinjiao refers conclusively, or even primarily, to any particular movement, except in the context of a single historical document. The term Xinjinjiao has applied to only two groups within Chinese Islam, the Salafiyyah and the Xidaotang. Both of these groups have used the term as a self-descriptor.

In many Muslim communities such as the Muslims of Yunnan, the various teachings were so difficult for outsiders to distinguish that the Chinese authorities differentiated them on the basis of their rebellion against, or collaboration with, the government. Thus, when Du Wenxiu led the uprising against the Qing Dynasty (1855-1873), his followers were 'bad Muslims,' while the quietists either in Yunnan or elsewhere remained 'good Muslims.' This led to confusion in the Late Imperial writings of both Chinese scholars and missionaries as to how the various Sufi groups were interrelated. The legacy of this confusion continues to cause difficulties for those reading source material or trying to sort things out on the ground.

It is clear that these terms have outlived their usefulness to scholars. Except in the description of singular instances or documents relating to Sino-Islamic documentation, the use of these terms in academic writings is now unnecessary, and probably even counter-productive.

In the absence of any definitive statistics, it has been generally assumed in Western and Chinese writing that the majority of today's Hui are Qadim-traditional Muslims. Both Ma Tong in 1980 and Gladney in 1991 estimated that close to or even more than half the Hui population belong to this school of thought which is also seen as 'standard' or 'normative' Islam. While neither Gladney nor Ma provide us with sources other than their own impressions and field surveys, the Chinese Muslim scholar Yang Huaizhong has conducted specific fieldwork aimed at identifying the sectarian affiliation of mosques in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in the Northwest. The results of Yang's work are tabulated in the chart at left.

Assuming, as would appear reasonable, that the individual's sectarian affiliation is roughly equivalent to that of mosque complexes, there is a prima facie need for some reconciliation between Yang's figures and the estimates of Ma and Gladney. Two possible explanations present themselves: either the numerical strength of the Qadim in China is far smaller
than generally believed, or the religious affiliation of the Hui in the northwest of the country is not representative of China as a whole. A significant body of circumstantial and historical evidence indicates that the latter explanation is the most plausible. So, although the northwest provinces of Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai constitute the 'heartlands' of Chinese Islam, most of the Hui in the major urban areas of China proper, which have not been touched by Muslim sectarianism, remain, as always, traditional-Qadim.

Historical Analysis

The above data appear to confirm, at least with regard to the northwest, the thesis of the Chinese scholar Gao Zhanfu that, "from the Qing Dynasty onwards, the history of Chinese Islam can be seen as principally a sectarian question." The sectarian nature of Chinese Islam and the sectarian allegiances of Hui Muslims thus become central to understanding the question of Muslim identity in modern China. Much work has been done by several authors, most notably the late Joseph Fletcher, in attempting to establish the origins of the earliest sectarian movements in Chinese Islam. Fletcher's historical detective work forms the basis of current assumptions that generally posit a significant Sufi influence in China from around the middle of the fourteenth century. While this appears to be the earliest date traceable through extant Sufi Menhuan sources in China, a number of facts suggest that Sufi Islam, which was the basis of later sectarianism there, was present in China even earlier.

Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveler of the fourteenth century, mentions the presence of a Sufi community in Hangzhou and also describes meeting an Islamic mystic, presumably a Sufi, in Guangzhou. Ibn Battuta's credible record appears to indicate that Sufism was well established within China proper by the time of his visit there during the mid-fourteenth century. Ma Tong also cites evidence that by 1312 the Imamate of the Quanzhou mosque was hereditary, which strongly suggests either Sufi or Shi'ite influence, perhaps the precursor of a local Menhuan. These early records of Sufism are worthy of further investigation, as they constitute a link between these early Sufis of the southeast and contemporary Menhuan in the northwest. They may force a re-examination of the origins of sectarian Islam in China. The early records also suggest that it is inappropriate to depict Chinese Sufism solely as a product of a second Sufi wave of Islam in China.
The existence of quietist Sufism in China proper, even if it prepared the way for the spread of mysticism into the northwest and southwest, means that Sufism does not necessarily have to evolve into sectarianism and unrest, as was the case in the outlying areas of China in the nineteenth century. These findings perhaps also indicate that it takes something more than sectarianism to provoke rebellion. If the major sectarian-motivated uprisings unfolded in the areas where Islam constituted sizable 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 outnum-
bered 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 heart-
land populated by like-minded sectarians in order to have any chance of success in establishing themselves.

It is further interesting to note that the smallest of the Sufi orders in China, the Kubrawiyya, which has more Shi'ite characteristics than one usually finds among Muslims in China today and which is represented in Gansu by a single Menbuan—the Dawantou or Zhangmen Menbuan—is generally believed to have been brought to China in late Ming times by an Arab Sufi known in China as Muhuyindeni Yibuni Aluobi. Ma Tong states in his book that there is no historical record of the Kubrawiyya arrival in China and that it is only the stories of Kubrawiyya adherents that posit its transmission in China during the Ming Dynasty. Chinese scholars have not yet determined a fixed date for the arrival of Kubrawiyya in China. Ma Tong believes that the Kubrawiyya may have arrived in northern China as early as Southern Song times, which would make this the oldest Sufi group in China. Further work on the origins of the Kubrawiyya could shed light on the reports found in sources by Ibn Battuta which suggest a Sufi presence in China from well before Ming times. The Kubrawiyya were certainly active in Central Asia from the thirteenth to early fifteenth centuries, though the possibility of a connection is tenuous.

While Sufism may have entered China from as early as the fourteenth or even the late twelfth century and became established in some of the coastal ports, it was in the northwest and to a lesser extent Yunnan, that Sufism was to become a powerful force within the Hui community. It later became the driving force behind the Muslim uprisings of the nineteenth century in precisely those areas where regional sectarian dynamics were most pronounced. However, while the Menbuan in China have assumed some uniquely Chinese characteristics, particularly their exclusivity to-
wards each other, the roots of Chinese Sufism are found in Central Asia, Persia, and Arabia.

From the twelfth century onward, wandering Sufi ascetics, traders and missionaries took their mystical brand of Islam further and further eastward into what had once been the predominantly Buddhist lands of Central Asia, including present day Xinjiang. The principal Sufi orders in this region were the Naqshbandiyya, the Qadariyya, Khawarijiyya and the Yasawiyya. In Xinjiang, the Naqshbandiyya predominated, though divided into the Jabriyya (meaning those who recite the dhikr loudly) and the Khufiya (those who recite the dhikr quietly). These two branches of the Naqshbandiyya were bitterly divided; violence frequently occurred in Naqshbandi dominated areas of Central Asia.

Throughout its history, Chinese Islam has always placed great emphasis on connections with the Islamic heartlands to the west. In Islamic communities throughout the world, respect is given to those Muslims who have made the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. This is especially so in the case of Chinese Muslims who were isolated and, at times, persecuted by China’s rulers. This meant that the numbers of Chinese Muslims making the journey to Mecca was among the smallest proportionally of any Muslim community in the world. This in turn has raised the status of foreign Muslims and Chinese Muslims fortunate enough to travel to Islamic countries. Sufism was thus brought to China by Central Asian and Arab Sufis and by Chinese who had ventured to these lands to study, trade or to make the Hajj.

Of the principal Central Asian orders, the Qadariyya and the two branches of the Naqshbandiyya have given rise to the most influential of the Menhuan in Chinese-speaking Muslim communities. Much of the historiography of these orders in China has been traced. In a forthcoming work, we intend to summarize and extend our knowledge of these orders in China

**Sectarianism and Identity**

In analyzing the origin and development of these orders, some striking similarities are immediately apparent. First, there is the deeply fractured nature of all the major orders, leading to the plethora of divisions and sub-divisions within Chinese Sufism which still cannot be called sects in the sense generally understood by scholars of Islam because of their continued adhesion to the core of Islam. Secondly, the Menhuan, both in the form of orders and sub-orders, were all established in China by either foreign Muslims or Chinese Muslims who had journeyed abroad or had a personal
connection—biological or by spiritual descent—with the wider Muslim world. A third point of obvious interest is their geographical concentration in the north west of the country. Indeed, the vast majority of Sufi tombs and pilgrimage sites in China are found in the Qurān belt, a reverse L-shaped crescent running in a narrow band from Xining in Qinghai, through Linxia, Lintao and Tianshui in Gansu, and then turning sharply northwards through Guyuan, Tongxin and ending near Yinchuan in Ningxia. The core of this area is the city of Linxia and its hinterlands, referred to by Hui as China’s little Mecca, Zhongguo de xiao Mājīa.

From the thirteenth or fourteenth until the nineteenth centuries, this Qurān belt was undoubtedly the focal point for China’s Muslims. To this day, while official Islamic organizations are headquartered in Beijing for the convenience of the central Chinese authorities who supervise them closely, the north west is the cultural heartland of the more dynamic and independent Islamic groups in China. The Sino-Muslims of this region, at the periphery of the Chinese world, maintained a distinct identity that was more recognizably and openly Islamic than that of Muslims in the center of the Chinese cultural world. This distinct identity has been maintained through constant reference to foreign Islam, whether in Central Asia or the Middle East. It was periodically expressed in the Muslim uprisings in those areas whenever a weak central government provided the opportunity or whenever the level of oppression triggered the necessity to do so. In sum, as long as Sufism was the dominant expression of Islam in Islamic countries to which Chinese Muslims traveled, so also was it key in defining Sino-Muslim identity among the most vibrant of China’s Islamic communities.

The late nineteenth century saw Chinese Muslims making the Hajj via the sea route once again. Contact between Chinese and Central Asian Muslims was limited, however, as a result of the reduced travel along the land route to Mecca and the eventual closing of this route following the onset of Soviet rule of Central Asia. Another result was that China’s Islamic communities were exposed to the newly dominant philosophies of the Middle East, particularly the Ḥijaz region. Just as with the Sufis, it was foreign or foreign influenced Muslims, particularly Chinese Ḥajjis, who brought radical and modernist Islamic concepts to China. Because this occurred more recently in history, this process has been far better documented than that of the arrival of Sufism in China.

A number of Chinese Ḥajjis returned from the Ḥijaz distressed at the obvious variance of Islamic practice in China and Arabia. From 1892 onward, Ma Wanfu and other Chinese Ḥajjis promulgated a new Wahhabi-inspired teaching throughout northwestern China. Imbued with the
charismatic appeal of belonging to foreign Islam, the *Ikhwan* group, as it became known, spread rapidly throughout China. After little over a century of presence in China, the *Ikhwan* now has more than a million followers, making them larger than any Muslim Sufi order in the country. The *Ikhwan* is now the predominant force within the official China Islamic Association, a state approved and supported body. As mentioned previously, this raises an interesting question about the extent of the transformation of the *Ikhwan* from a radical to a modernist Islamic movement in China, particularly at the popular level. Related in part to this transformation is the emergence of the Salafiyyah, a second *Wahhabi*-inspired group in China.

The *Salafiyyah* trace their theological ancestry to Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), a Syrian theologian and jurist. Emerging from within the *Ikhwan* in 1936, the *Salafiyyah* had spread throughout the northwest and beyond by the time of the Communist Revolution. They accused *Ikhwan* reformers of failing to go far enough in their reform of Chinese Islam and of making compromises with Chinese culture. The *Salafiyyah* promoted a return to the purity of the original Medinan community by initially seeking to create an Arabic-speaking community in southern Gansu whose inhabitants would relive the experience of the Arabic-speaking Muslim community at the time of the Prophet. The Communist Party was and is concerned with the un-patriotic nature of *Salafiyyah* teachings, and has sought to maintain strict control over this group. For this reason, it is difficult to gauge its strength in China today or the extent to which its radical, *Wahhabi*-inspired teaching has been maintained.

*Salafiyyah* mosques remain open in the town of Linxia and adherents continue to dress in a distinctly Arab style for prayer. *Salafiyyah* theological students interviewed in 1993 and 1996 were persuaded that the Sufis in the region were not true Muslims; that a pure Islam required a population literate and conversant in Arabic; that Hui people must spend time in Saudi Arabia, the only country where there is authentic Islam; and that a situation where women were in positions of power in politics and commerce was inappropriate in a Hui town like Linxia, though acceptable in other parts of China. These discussions with *Salafiyyah* followers regarding the theological and social implications of Islam indicate that many of the radical beliefs of the *Salafiyyah* have survived the last fifty years largely intact, and in fact have received fresh impetus in recent years with the greater freedom for Chinese Muslims to make the *Hajj*. In informal interviews, *Salafiyyah* theological students were asked about whether there were any political implications arising from their understanding of Islam.
All interviewees stated that they were unwilling to discuss such matters with non-Muslims.

On the periphery of the Chinese cultural world, an overtly Islamic and foreign expression of Sino-Muslim identity was able to develop, inspired by the Wahhabis. In the heartland of the Chinese civilization, however, where Muslims have always been a small minority, Sino-Muslim identity had to be expressed in a manner less likely to draw suspicion. Thus it was that the increased communication with the outside world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to a different development in Sino-Muslim communities along the east coast. Yet, even in these areas where Muslims were more well-versed in Chinese culture and philosophy and also under tremendous Chinese pressure for acculturation, Sino-Muslims sought renewal of their communal identity through reference to new philosophies from the Middle East, and not from within China.

Sources from the early twentieth century point to the decisive influence of Hajji 'Abd er-Rahmān Wang Haoran, Akhund of Beijing's influential Oxen Street Mosque, in the transfusion and development of modernist Islamic concepts in China. In 1906 Wang went on the Ḥajj to Mecca. Rather than returning immediately, he spent nearly two years studying and traveling in the Middle East, primarily in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Returning to Beijing in 1907, Wang used his influential position in Oxen Street to implement reforms of Hui cultural, educational and religious life in Beijing. According to a 1936 biographer, it was primarily Wang's influence that led to the massive reform and expansion in Hui education and to the renewed interest in Muslim translation, publishing and research during the Republican period.

Wang and other east coast Hajjis and students who visited the Middle East and India during this period sought to end the endemic violence between sectarian groups within the Muslim community by paring back Islamic practice and belief to its essential elements, namely the five pillars. The reform activity within the Hui community that drew its inspiration from the ideas of Wang Haoran have come to be known by scholars as the New Culture Movement. When Wang returned to China in 1907, he brought with him two Ottoman bureaucrats, Ḥājjā Ḥāǧīz and 'Alū Riza, an inspector of primary schools. ‘Alū Riza's presence was to be important to the future development of Muslim education in China. Little has been said in Chinese sources about the degree of influence these two men had on the reform of the Islamic institutions that Wang initiated. One can presume that to have encouraged them to make the long journey from the Anatolian peninsula, Wang must have been deeply impressed by his observations of
Ottoman institutions. Certainly Wang's time in the Middle East was crucial to the modernist Islamic concepts he developed within China.

Conclusion

For the Hui, post-Mao China is similar in a number of ways to the early republican period: a greater freedom to interact with Muslims beyond China's shores, a gradual decentralization of political control and the collapse of the dominant state ideology. These factors, along with the less repressive religious atmosphere in China today and the possibility of overseas Muslims visiting the Muslim communities in China, are contributing to yet another reassertion of Hui identity in China. Even casual visitors to the Muslim towns of Gansu and Ningxia are struck by visible signs of Islamic renewal, such as mosque construction and the return to traditional dress.

The revival of Islam in Hui-dominated areas of China is not an isolated phenomenon and can be validly interpreted as either part of a worldwide Islamic revival or as one aspect of the overall resurgence in religious practice in China itself. Both factors are certainly at work here. Knowledge of both is necessary in unraveling the implications for China's future of a newly confident Hui community. Recent events involving the Falungong Movement on the one hand, and the encroachment of separatist Muslims from Central Asia on the other, show Beijing's extreme sensitivity to religious movements operating outside the strict control of the government. With an eye to Chinese history, the Communist party is probably most wary of militant sectarian movements which, whether Buddhist, Muslim or quasi-Christian, did so much to weaken the Qing Dynasty.

The question of Islam in China and how it has survived for the best part of the millennium, isolated from its Arabian heartlands and frequently persecuted, is not easily answered. It is particularly interesting in light of the failure of so many other religions introduced on Chinese soil. Before the second half of the twentieth century, Buddhism was clearly the only foreign religion in China to have proved more vibrant and enduring than Islam and this, it could be argued, is only because it had undergone a far more thorough process of transformation and indigenization than Islam. Certainly Islam's survival appears to be the exception in the history of religious minorities in China. Christianity, brought to China's shores first by Nestorians and then by Roman Catholics, has twice disappeared before its final and apparently permanent re-arrival. A once flourishing Jewish community has dwindled to an almost completely assimilated community.
of around 400. The only remnant of the Manichaen faith in China is a single building on the Fujian coast.

Understanding the nature of sectarian development in Chinese Islam gives us a clue as to the reason for the religion's remarkable survival in the Middle Kingdom. We believe that two distinctive features of the Hui community have been the underlying reason for its success. First, the establishment of communities where Muslims constituted either a local majority or local minority formed the basis for an ongoing and self-sustaining society. Second, the constant reference to and adoption of developments in the wider lands of Islam provided Muslims with a continuous renewal of their faith. New sources of cultural and religious identification focused not on their geographical homeland, but on their spiritual homelands to the West.

While the first point made above has been widely acknowledged, the second remains open to discussion. The continual process of sectarian development in Chinese Islam, based on events in Central Asia, Persia and Arabia, suggests not so much an inherently factional society, but a continual need to reassert a separate identity. The ability of Sino-Muslim communities to draw inspiration from these sources has allowed the modern Hui to build an identity which is based on a connection to foreign lands. It is interesting to note, by way of comparison, that Donald Leslie pinpoints the obliteration of communal identity in the Kaifeng Jewish community at the time of their loss of the liturgical use of Hebrew, and with it, by extension, a sense of separateness based on a foreign identity.

Barbara Pillsbury, together with many of the missionary scholars before her, documented the fragile and syncretic nature of Islamic communities in the coastal regions of mainland China and in Taiwan. In these regions, a Muslim presence may gradually disappear. The Hui community of Hangzhou, for example, appears to be on the cusp of extinction. While some 3000 Hui are registered as living in the city, the Akhund estimated that no more than 150 worshippers are ever present at services, and then only at festivals when many of the congregation are Turkic entrepreneurs from Xinjiang. Drawn by the twin lures of an assimilative Chinese society around them and the dynamic Protestantism of Zhejiang province, the ancient Muslim community of Hangzhou may not survive more than a generation or two.

But in areas where a 'critical mass' of Hui live and where they have a communal link to the Muslim world, based on Sufism, Wahhabi-style radicalism, modernist Islam, or some new form of Islamic expression, the Sino-Muslim community can be expected to continue to flourish within
China's borders. Having survived the dark night of the Cultural Revolution and the other pressures of Communist rule, the future of this outward-looking community will depend as much on developments in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan as it does on developments in China itself.

Endnotes
1. Islam in China consists of two major divisions: the Hui who are ethnically Chinese and are not attached to any particular territory; they can in fact be found all over China Proper with more concentrations in the Northwest and the Southwest; and the Turkic groups, which constitute the bulk of the Muslims in Xinjiang. This article focuses on the Hui Muslims,
4. Ibid.
5. M Broomhall, op cit, 68.
7. Some of founding myths of the coming of Islam in China are connected with Tai Zong (AD 627-649) and Xuan Zong (712-756) Emperors of the Tang, and during the latter's reign the An Lushan Rebellion unfolded against which Muslim mercenaries are said to have been recruited.
8. See R. Israeli, "Is there Shi'a in Chinese Islam?" in Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, IX, No. 1 (Jan 18, YEAR), 49-46.
17. Ma Tong, op. cit., 279.
18. Ma Tong, pers com.


24. When Ma Wanfu first returned to China, he named his organization *abd al-Sunna* but it soon became known as the *Ikwan*.


26. Adam Rush, one of the present authors, has spent time for fieldwork in the region in the mid-1990s and conducted the interviews.

27. See for instance articles on the New Culture Movement in the collections of source materials compiled by Bai Shouyi and Li Xinghua, cited in the Bibliography.


31. E.g., Huweidi, one of the chiefs of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, visited China in the early 1990s and wrote reports in the Arabic press [see my article on Shi'is where he is quoted].
