Familiar Strangers

Lipman, Jonathan N.

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SOJOURNERS IN TANG-SONG CHINA (618 – 1279)

How the Muslims Came to China

Muhammad had the power to create Heaven and Earth. . . . He divided the moon into two and put it together again. . . . This was in 621, 4th year of Wu-te [Wude]. The imperial order was thereupon given to Ou-yang Hsun [Ouyang Xun], a shuai keng-ling [shuai gengling] (keeper of the clepsydra) to engrave in seal characters coins for the Commencement of the (Islamic?) Era, in order to record the extraordinary feat. After this, (T'ai-)tsung dreamt that he met a saint and waking up frightened he then sent several missions to the (saint's) land. The saint then ordered his disciple Saad Waqqas to bring the Qur'an in 30 volumes comprising 114 sura and 6,666 verses to offer the emperor. . . . T'ai-tsung edited it and promulgated it throughout the empire, and the faith flourished in China.¹

The T'ang emperor (T'ai-tsung) dreamt that a turbanned man chasing a phantom appeared to him in the palace. . . . The Interpreter of Dreams said: “The turbanned man is a Hui-hui (Muslim) of the west. In Arabia is a Muslim king of great virtue. A great sage is born, with favorable omens.” A general Hsu Shih-chi [Xu Shiji] stepped forward and said: “Send an ambassador across the western frontiers to the Muslim king, and request from him a sage to be sent to deal with the threatened evils, so that the country may be kept at rest.” The great officer Shih T'ang [Shi Tang] was sent as ambassador. Three religious leaders were sent back to China.

¹ Zhengjiao si bei ji (1670) by Ting Peng (jinshi 1655), trans. in Leslie, Islam, 72. For citations on Ting Peng, see Leslie, Islamic Literature, 81–82. The stele is preserved at the Fenghuang mosque in Hangzhou.
with him. . . . Two died on the way, only Ko-hsin [Gexin] arrived. Ko-hsin told the emperor of the heaven-sent Fu-erh-ko-ni [Fuergeni, Ar. furqān] (the Qur'an), and reproved him for being an idolator. The emperor finally offered to appoint Ko-hsin as President of the Board of Mathematics.

**Tang and Song Foundations**

We have no historical evidence that Sa’ad Waqqas, the Prophet’s maternal uncle, actually traveled to China, and the Tang Emperor surely neither edited the Koran nor tolerated being reproved as an idolator. But stories such as these, popular and never refuted within Sino-Muslim communities, place Muslims in China very early in Islamic history. It is likely that Muslims did come to China as political emissaries and merchants within a few decades of Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina in 622. They joined large numbers of non-Muslim Central and West Asians already resident in the Tang empire’s trading centers. For six centuries thereafter Arabs and Persians—called Dashi and Bosi respectively—played significant roles in China’s economic life, especially along the Silk Road in the northwest and in the port cities of the southeast coast. Only many

2. Leslie translates furqān as Koran, but it often has the more general meaning of “sacred scriptures, divine revelations,” and would thus include the Old and New Testaments.


4. The most thorough English-language scholarship on early contacts between Muslims and China may be found in Leslie, *Islam*, chapters 4–7, with the materials on Arab embassies to the Tang in chapter 4. In chapter 8 he summarizes the legendary accounts current among Sino-Muslims from the Yuan dynasty to the present day.

5. Apart from Leslie, Tazaka Kōdō (Chilgoku ni okeru), Zhang Xinglang (Zhong-Xi), and Yuan Ch’en (*Western and Central Asians*) have done extensive work on Muslims in pre-Ming China, and many contemporary Sino-Muslim scholars have also pored over the difficult primary texts.

6. The term Bosi presents problems in this context. Though Sino-Muslim scholars unhesitatingly identify “people of Bosi” as Persian Muslims, it is likely that many of them were Manichaecs, Mazdaists, or Nestorian Christians well into the Islamic era. This type of terminological confusion continued as late as the Mongol period, when the Nestorian Aixie was identified as a Huihui. Even in Persia Muslims and non-Muslims lived side by side for centuries after the Muslim conquest; it is certainly likely that they did so in distant China, where the pressure to convert to Islam was considerably less. Much of the controversy surrounding the term Huihui stems from the gradual conversion of the Uygurs (to whom it first applied) from other religions to Islam, a process that took centuries and confused the terminology of contemporary texts.

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centuries later, after the Mongol conquest, did they attain to ranks as
exalted as president of the Board of Mathematics.

Much of their trade was carried on in the guise of “tribute” (Ch. 
*gong*), luxury goods delivered directly to the Chinese court by both
legitimate and falsely credentialed representatives of Muslim rulers. The
Chinese official histories list dozens of caravans arriving in Chang’*an*
and Kaifeng, where they received free lodging, luxurious entertainment,
and benevolent gifts usually reported as exceeding in value the “tribute”
they had brought. “Tributary” missions could not remain in China for
extended commerce but rather returned home, usually within a few
months, bearing their profits and the Chinese emperor’s largesse. Modern
historians correctly suspect the rhetoric of tribute, surmising that
the commercial functions of such missions were known and expected
among both Chinese and foreigners. 7

Some foreign traders, however, came to China to stay awhile. Seafar­
ing Muslims lived as far north as Yangzhou, at the intersection of the
Yangzi River and Grand Canal, while Silk Road merchants could be
found as far east as Kaifeng, the northern Song (960–1127) capital. Few
became participants in Chinese politics or society, in part because the
state acted to segregate them. In Chang’an, Guangzhou, and other
major cities, all foreigners were required to live in separate wards, to
trade in specially established markets, and to restrict their intercourse
with Chinese. The Tang government sometimes prohibited or discour­
gaged these male foreigners from marrying Chinese women or wearing
Chinese clothing. 8 Muslims remained sojourners, obvious and clearly
designated by state and society; they were granted a measure of legal
and administrative autonomy within their carefully delineated settle­
ments, but they were not supposed to mix with the local population.
These regulations, however, did not prevent some Muslims from study­
ing Chinese, intermarrying, and remaining in China for long periods.
Though we can only speculate about their relations with local people,
there can be little doubt that some of them settled, found wives (Mus­
lims or converts) among the other immigrant groups or locals, and

7. Yang Huaizhong, “Tangdai de fanke,” 53, for example, straightforwardly identifies
“tribute” as a commercial transaction. Fletcher, “China and Central Asia,” 215–16, con­
cludes that tributary relations served a domestic propaganda purpose but often consti­
tuted a cover for interstate trade. Hevia, Cherishing men, section 1.3, summarizes the
historiographical importance of the tribute system in conceptualizing the Qing empire.

8. Ouyang, Xin Tang Shu 182.6b–7a records the order of Lu Jun, governor of Lingnan
at Canton, that foreigners and Chinese could not intermarry (Ch. Fan Hua bu de tong 
hun), in order to prevent conflict.
created mixed communities unified by Islam, by their “foreignness,” and probably by use of Persian as a \textit{lingua franca}.

Throughout the Tang, Five Dynasties (907–60), and especially in the Song period (960–1279), Muslim import-export firms maintained more-or-less permanent residences or representatives in Chang’an, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, Kaifeng, Yangzhou, and Guangzhou, and possibly in other cities as well. They dealt in a vast variety of commodities, and their numbers were not small. For example, Tian Shengong’s soldiers killed thousands of Dashi and Bosi at Yangzhou in a Tang battle against local rebels. When Huang Chao’s rebel army took Guangzhou in 879, they are reported by Arabic sources to have massacred tens of thousands of foreign merchants, many of them Muslims.

China’s imports of spices and herbs, rhinoceros horn and ivory, and precious stones—all light, expensive, and rare, and therefore appropriate for long-distance trade—lay largely in Muslim hands. The official history of the Song dynasty includes the stories of a number of Arab merchants who traded at Guangzhou as well as lists of Arab products presented to the throne as gifts. Foreign merchants paid taxes and enriched the state; fragrances and spices from the west altered tastes and changed customs; and medicaments from western Asia entered the Chinese market in considerable numbers. Frankincense (Ch. \textit{ruxiang}), a fragrant resinous gum used as incense, achieved particular popularity at court, where the emperor sometimes ordered hundreds of frankincense candles lit. Pu Luoxin, a Muslim merchant who brought large quantities of the precious commodity to China, received an official title for his achievement.

The precious cargoes of Muslim caravans and ships did not go untaxed or unregulated by the Chinese government. The state monopolized some cargoes—iron, agate, coral, and especially frankin-

9. Bai Shouyi, \textit{Zhongguo Yisilan}, 134–69. Another list of the products sold by foreign merchants in the southern Chinese markets may be found in Hirth and Rockhill, \textit{Chou Ju-kua}. Zhao’s mid-thirteenth century book, drawing heavily on the \textit{Lingwai daida} of Zhou Qufei (1178) and lightly on the \textit{Pingzhou ketan} of Zhu Yu (early 12th cent.), accurately describes many peoples and places between southeast China and the Mediterranean, precisely the world linked by Muslim Arab and Persian traders.

10. Abu-Zaid of Siraf reported that 120,000 foreign merchants were killed by Huang Chao, while the later Mas’udi claimed 200,000. See Levy, \textit{Biography}, 109–21, for an analysis of the Arabic sources.

11. For example, Tuo, \textit{Song shi} 490.17a. The section on Dashi includes stories of the merchant Pu Ximi and the rich gifts he presented to the throne.


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—so they could be sold only to government officials, with whom the Muslim merchants could not bargain as they might in an open market. Commodity taxes, assessed in tax warehouses at the port of entry, ranged from one-fifteenth to two-fifths ad valorem and constituted a considerable portion of state revenues, especially after the Song loss of north China to the Jin invaders in 1127. Officials in southern ports and in the northern cities used both specially assigned imperial household funds and their own personal capital to purchase the Muslim merchants’ stock at low prices, sometimes for delivery to court, sometimes for resale and private profit. Foreign merchants also had to use a portion of their goods as gifts to both local and metropolitan officials to ensure prompt processing of paperwork and uninterrupted permission to trade.

Despite this regulation of their commercial activities, Muslims resident in China under the Tang and Song nonetheless controlled their own community life under Muslim officials who received imperial patents of office. Their neighborhoods, called “foreigners’ quarters” (Ch. fānfang), resembled the foreign concessions of the nineteenth century.14 Muslims had the extraterritorial right to be tried under Muslim law for offenses against other Muslims committed in China, and the community’s judge (Ar. qadī) was recognized as a legitimate community authority by the state. Few Muslims became ordinary subjects before the late Song; as far as we know, neither they nor the Chinese state desired their acculturation or assimilation.

Tang and Song regulations left Muslim sojourners free to dress, eat, and pray as they pleased. They retained their native languages, though they must have learned Chinese for their work in the markets (or from their Sinophone mothers), and they practiced Islam without engaging in any missionary activity. The few who became literate in the Chinese classical canon received notice in the imperial histories, and only one Muslim obtained an imperial examination degree under the Tang.15

Until the mid-Song, virtually all Muslims in China considered them-

14. Warned by an unpublished essay by Dilip Basu, I have chosen to translate this usage of fān not with the conventional “barbarian” but with the less pejorative “foreigner.” A debate has recently begun over the evolved historical meanings of this term, with both “foreigner” and “vassal” receiving support.

15. Li Yansheng, a Dashi, is credited with having obtained the jinshi degree in the Tang (Zhang Xinglang, Zhong-Xi, vol. 3, sec. 2, 232–3). Zhang cites the Quan Tang wen as the source for his story, noting that after residing in China and intermarrying with Chinese, some foreigners may be “scoured and washed” sufficiently by Chinese literary culture to become capable of Chinese scholarship.
selves, and were considered by the Chinese, to be temporary residents rather than permanent settlers.¹⁶

**The Beginnings of Belonging**

By the late twelfth century, however, some Muslims had been living in China for generations and occupied a special status. Included among the *tusheng fanke* (native-born foreign sojourners) or *wushi fanke* (fifth-generation foreign sojourners), they were allowed to intermarry and to purchase land for mosques and cemeteries in the port cities.¹⁷ The southern Song (1127–1279) government even made provision for foreign merchants to take official positions; after living in China for three generations, a foreigner could marry an imperial princess if at least one member of his household possessed an official title. Many contemporary Chinese Muslim communities claim Tang origins for their mosques and cemeteries—Sa’ad Waqqas is supposed to have built the Huaisheng Mosque at Guangzhou—but, based on a summary of inscriptions and West Asian sources, Donald Leslie concludes that we cannot reliably date the first mosques in China before the Song. Given the size and duration of their communities, Guangzhou, Yangzhou, and Quanzhou probably had Muslim graveyards and mosques in the Tang, but the sources do not yet allow us to be sure.¹⁸

Though they had been importers and caravaners on a large scale during the first half of the dynasty, Central Asians seem to have become less influential in north China after the mid-Tang, for the Silk Road trade was interrupted by numerous wars and invasions of northern peoples. Nonetheless, the Song history *Zizhi tongjian* (Comprehensive mirror for aid in government) tells of foreigners, probably Muslims, who lived in Chang’an for forty years, married local women, and did not want to return to their homelands.¹⁹ We know that in times of relative peace travel could be fairly smooth between China and Persia, for as early as the Arab conquest, non-Muslim Persian refugees found their way to the Chang’an region, where they were allowed to settle. In

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¹⁷. These titles are attested in the *Song huiyao jigao* (Zhiguan sec.), according to Bai Shouyi, *Zhongguo Yisilan*, 134.
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The Northern Song Karakhanid "tribute" missions had to be reminded to return home from Kaifeng.20

The gradual Islamicization of the Central Asian Turkic peoples affected Eastern Turkestan after the eleventh century, as the Kashgar region became the focus of power struggles among Muslim rulers.21 Despite these alarms and Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongol encroachment, however, some of the trade routes remained open. Xining (in modern Qinghai), for example, became a major entrepot when the Tanguts of the Xixia kingdom interrupted the main Silk Road, and Didao (now Lintao), in modern Gansu, was home to hundreds of foreign merchants. Muslims in Hezhou, later to become the "Little Mecca" of Gansu, probably built their first mosque in the Song period. Even after the fall of the northern Song, Muslims remained in north China under Jurchen rule; as early as 1228 a Mongol regulation protected the temples of Fengxiang, in southwestern Shaanxi, including a dashiman mixiji (Per. danishmand, Ar. masjid), a Muslim mosque.22

We know that by the end of the Song, Muslims had become a common part of the economic and social world in Chinese cities that were connected to international trade. Many knew Chinese, understood the marketplace, and intended to remain in China. Muslim trade provided a share of the empire’s tax revenues and brought valuable goods both to court and to public markets. In addition, Persian and Arab merchants brought technology—cotton processing and glass-making, for example—to their host culture, while providing the Middle East with Chinese advances in the manufacture of porcelain and paper. A more complex and less understood exchange took place in the realm of medicine, for Arabs and Persians brought new materia medica to China and contributed both to the techniques of healing and to the pharmacopoeia.23

Though never subject to specific legal discrimination, Muslims were evaluated negatively both as foreigners and as merchants, a degraded class in Chinese social theory. Neither they nor their religion attracted

22. The inscription may be found in Cai Meibiao, Yuandai baihua, 5. The Chinese transliteration dashiman for “Muslim clergy” is analyzed in Poppe, The Mongolian Monuments, 83. I am grateful to Thomas Allsen for this reference.
23. The complex vocabulary of both pharmacology and botanical taxonomy has prevented me from analyzing the primary sources. Yang Huaizhong, “Dui Huihui yaofang,” 224–28, gives a brief synopsis of texts.
positive attention from the Chinese elite—only one reasonably accurate account of Islam appeared in Chinese in the Tang-Song period, Du Huan’s *jing xing ji*.24 The words *fan*, *hu*, Dashi, Bosi, and the like, though they may be translated as “foreigner” without any particular negative connotation, certainly could carry the stigmatic nuance of nasty foreign flavor. At the same time, Chinese eagerly sought to purchase and profit from the spices, jewels, aphrodisiacs, and other exotica transported from afar by the foreign merchants. Muslims, on the other hand, gradually found China to be a good place to do business and to set up households. Since few women made the sea voyage from Dashi or Bosi, most of the merchants married Chinese women, who converted to Islam and laid the foundation for permanent Sino-Muslim communities all over China by teaching their children to speak local dialects of Chinese.

**MUSLIMS IN YUAN CHINA (1279–1368)**

Ahmad Fanakati, Finance Minister: Four Portraits

A Saracen, named Achmac, a crafty and bold man, whose influence with the Grand Khan [Qubilai] surpassed that of the others... It was discovered... that he had by means of spells so fascinated His Majesty as to oblige him to give ear and credit to whatever he represented... He gave away all the governments and public offices... Besides this, there was no handsome female who became an object of his sensuality that he did not contrive to possess... He had sons to the number of twenty-five, who held the highest offices of the state... Achmac had likewise accumulated great wealth, for every person who obtained an appointment found it necessary to make him a considerable present.25

24. Du Huan was captured by the Arabs at the great battle of Talas (751) and taken westward to the Middle East. He returned by sea to the southeast coast of China over a decade later. His original text has been lost, but extracts, including his description of Islam, may be found in the *Tong dian*, compiled by his uncle, Du You. Leslie (Islam, 21–22) has translated the relevant sections; for a Sino-Muslim evaluation, see Yang Huaizhong, “Songdai de fanke,” 128. Zhao Rugua also described Islam, granting it only a brief paragraph in his section on Dashi (Hirth and Rockhill, *ChlW ju-kua*, 116).

25. Marco Polo, *Travels*, 275–76. It is almost certain that Marco Polo was present in Khanbalik when Ahmad served as finance minister and when he was assassinated.
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The Emir Ahmad held the vizierate with honor for nearly 25 years. . . . he was extremely cautious and alert.26

When Ahmad died, Shizu [Qubilai] still was not entirely aware of his debauchery, and he ordered the Zhongshu not to interrogate his wives and children. Inquiring of Boluo, he then learned of all his crimes and evil. Greatly angered, he said, “Wang Zhu’s killing him was truly an act of sincerity!” He ordered [Ahmad’s] grave opened, the coffin ripped apart, and the corpse displayed outside the Tongxuan Gate, allowing the dogs to tear his flesh. The officials of all ranks all observed and declared themselves delighted.27

Summing up Ahmad’s life, he served a definite positive function in government finance in the period of Yuan Shizu’s process of unifying the nation and stabilizing the situation. . . . But when it comes to his using official power [for private purposes], hiring his cronies, plotting for his private gain, and taking advantage of the powerless, he must be counted among the evil members of the feudal bureaucracy.28

Ruling China: The Semu and Mongol Hegemony

The transcultural power of the thirteenth-century Mongol conquests brought to China an influx of Muslims of many professions and cultures, not just as traders or brokers but also as conquerors and governors, artisans and architects, scientists and tax farmers. Unwilling to allow their newly subdued Chinese subjects to govern themselves, Ögödei, Möngke, Qubilai, and their successors created an intermediary bureaucracy of non-Chinese administrators and merchants collectively

26. Rashid al-Din, a great Middle Eastern chronicler and intellectual, was born in 1247 and thus was contemporary to Ahmad’s service to Qubilai (Rashid al-Din, The Successors, 291–92).

27. This final judgment may be found at the end of Ahmad’s biography in Song, Yuan shi 205.1b–6b, in the “Depraved Ministers” section. The Yuan shi was, of course, written in the Ming period by servants of the dynasty that had driven the Mongols out of China.

28. Bai Shouyi, Huizu renwu zhi (Yuan dai), 51–63, citation at 63. Rossabi, Khubilai Khan, 178–84, attempts an even-handed assessment, concluding that Ahmad probably was no worse than other officials of his day, regardless of ethnicity or religion, and that Chinese historical sources and Marco Polo’s account all carry a distorting grudge, the former because of Ahmad’s foreignness, the latter because of his religion.
known as semu guan (officials of various categories.)\textsuperscript{29} The Venetian Catholic Marco Polo was such an official, but the majority of them were Central and West Asian Muslims.

Charged with keeping the peace and collecting revenues, as well as with distributing goods, these outsiders earned an unsavory reputation among the Chinese but established themselves as permanent residents. Reserving the highest positions for themselves and the semu, the early Yuan monarchs prohibited indigenous Chinese from holding the highest offices—darughaci (provincial commander), for example. Dozens of Muslims held ministerial-level offices during the early Yuan, among them the exceptionally successful Sayyid Ajall Shams ad-Dîn (Ch. Sai Dianchi), whose tenure as governor of Yunnan, following a series of high appointments in the capital, established a permanent Muslim presence in southwest China.\textsuperscript{30}

Muslims monopolized or dominated some academic and economic fields within the Yuan bureaucracy. The offices responsible for astronomy, medicine, manufacture of weapons (especially catapults and other siege engines), and foreign languages all had large contingents of Muslim scholars and technicians. The Persian Jamāl ad-Dîn, for example, brought designs for the latest astronomical instruments from Persia and constructed an observatory at Beijing, thereafter becoming Qubilai's favored calendrical scientist.\textsuperscript{31} Middle Eastern, especially Persian, astronomy (called "Muslim" in China) became an integral part of Chinese

\textsuperscript{29} Because the characters used for semu can also mean "colored eyes," many Chinese and non-Chinese writers have mistaken this term for a comment on the appearance of these Central Asians. The Yuan period texts make it abundantly clear that semu is an administrative term, not a physical description.

\textsuperscript{30} Endicott-West, \textit{Mongolian Rule}, is a monograph on the office of darughaci and its centrality in the Mongol administration of China. The author concludes that the term, which she leaves untranslated, evolved over the course of the Yuan period and thus has no single English equivalent. It always indicates a local or regional governing official whose duties might comprehend both military and civil functions. As the most unambiguously successful and high-minded Muslim semu to achieve office under the Yuan, Sayyid Ajall has been the subject of extensive research by Sino-Muslim scholars, e.g., Yang Huaizhong, "Sai Dianchi"; Bai Shouyi, \textit{Zhongguo Yisilan}, 216–98; and "Sai Dianchi Shan Siding," in Bai Shouyi, \textit{Huizu renwu zhi (Yuan dai)}, 12–27. Recent English notices include Rossabi, \textit{Khubilai Khan}, 201–3; Leslie, \textit{Islam}, 80, 83–85; and Armijo-Hussein, "The Sinicization and Confucianization." For two generations Sayyid Ajall’s descendants continued to hold positions of trust in the Yuan administration, especially the governorship of Yunnan; many contemporary Yunnanese Muslim families trace their ancestry to Sayyid Ajall’s lineage.

\textsuperscript{31} Jamāl ad-Dîn and a Chinese, Guo Shoujing, prepared a calendar for the Yuan court as well as building an observatory. On Jamāl’s life, see Yang Huaizhong, "Zhongguo kexue," 205–23.
court life from the late thirteenth century until it was eclipsed by that brought by the Jesuits nearly three centuries later. During the successful invasion of north China by a mixed Mongol-ethn Chinese army, two Muslims constructed the ballistae that enabled the Mongols to take Xiangyang (then in Henan, now in Hubei). At the Yuan capital special academies were established for the teaching of Persian and other Central Asian languages.

Acting not only as scientists and officials of the dynasty but also as commercial entrepreneurs, Muslims became ortaq, corporate partners with their Mongol overlords, to concentrate and export Chinese goods and import foreign commodities through the open trade routes of the interconnected Mongol empires. These servants of the Yuan enjoyed political and economic advantage in their intimacy with the Mongol court, including direct investment by Mongol princes, loans from government revenues, and even tax-free status under Qubilai and his immediate successors, so they branched out into every region and province of China. Coming primarily from Central Asia (Chinese sources specifically mention Khwarezm and Samarkand) as well as Dashi and Bosi, and dealing not only in luxury goods but also in foodstuffs, salt, and livestock, they multiplied the Muslim presence in China in numbers and in scope. Since their activities included not only commerce but also tax-farming, even rural Chinese knew them—and all the semu guan—as objects of scorn, contempt, and fear.

Like some, but not all, of the foreign sojourners of former dynasties, the Muslim semu and ortaq of the Yuan intended to remain in China. Within two or three generations they learned Chinese, and some became well-known literati in the Chinese style. Muslim poets, painters, and civil officials of high Confucian learning may be found in the cultural history of mid- to late Yuan China. Though Donald Leslie discounts the degree of acculturation of Muslims to China during the

32. The technical language and texts of Yuan-Ming Islamic astronomy have been masterfully explicated in Tasaka (Tazaka), “An Aspect.”
36. Ch’ en, *Western and Central Asians*, 121, 162–63. Biographies of Yuan Muslim literati may be found in Bai Shouyi, *Huizu renwu zhi (Yuan dai)*.
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Yuan, the Muslim *semu* soldiers, merchants, and officials certainly established permanent residence, albeit usually in separate quarters from their Chinese neighbors. In the Gansu corridor, the crucial transportation and communication link with Central Asia, the Mongols settled large numbers of demobilized soldiers as agricultural colonists on the fields of fled or dead Chinese farmers.37 Even artisans brought from Central Asia established themselves in proximity to Chinese, but in clearly defined and “different” towns or settlements.38 Whether they studied the Confucian classics or not, many of the Muslims who lived in China had every intention of remaining in the service of “their” Mongol dynasty, and their wide distribution and broad range of occupations laid the groundwork for the following centuries of Sino-Muslim acculturation.

*Changing Roles, Changing Images*

Before the Yuan, antipathy for Muslims among the Chinese followed conventional formulae of Civilized-Us contrasted to Barbarous-Them. Outlandish and distant, the Muslim merchants who sojourned in the Silk Road towns and the southeast coast ports could not have been familiar to more than a small minority of Chinese. During the Yuan, however, *semu* status gave Muslims a special position in Chinese society that made them both familiar and antagonistic to the indigenous people, especially to the elites who would ordinarily have undertaken political and social leadership themselves. Muslims functioning as officials and as merchants enriched themselves and their families, monopolizing many kinds of power that foreigners had not held under the Tang and Song—power that had been reserved for the upper classes of Chinese society, those responsible for committing China’s history and attitudes to writing. We must, therefore, attend with a grain of salt to complaints about Muslim culture or behavior, at the same time noting that the antagonism becomes particularly powerful when non-Chinese people dominate China.

The four portraits cited above of one of Qubilai’s highest officials, the Central Asian Finance Minister Ahmad Fanakati, demonstrate this histo-

37. Gao Zhanfu, “Yuandai de Gansu.”
38. Rashid al-Din (*The Successors*, 276) reported a Samarkandi town called “Sinali” or “Simali,” complete with Central Asian gardens, on the road from Daidu (Khanbalik, Beijing) to the Mongol khans’ summer palace north of the great wall. The *Yuan shi* (122, in the biography of Hasanna) states that three-thousand “Huihui artisans” were settled there after Chinggis’s and Ögedei’s Central Asian conquests. For a Sinological explication of this community’s location and character, see Pelliot, “Une ville musulmane.”
riographical problem. Ahmad (Ch. Ahema) served as an advisor and administrator to Qubilai for twenty years. His performance in office, described as reasonable and honorable by Rashid al-Din, brought him the enmity of many Chinese, and he was excoriated after his death for venality, excessive sexual appetites, nepotism, and corruption of all kinds. Marco Polo, too, records an entirely negative portrait in his *Travels.* Some sources report that when Ahmad was assassinated, the people held a festival, drinking and singing for three days. Following his death, Ahmad’s reputation was slandered by his enemies at court, and Qubilai condemned him to posthumous disgrace and his family to punishment. But all of our sources are sufficiently biased that we cannot judge fairly what his achievements and crimes may actually have been.

Modern Sino-Muslim scholars also have a hard time with Ahmad, for their Chinese-language sources tend to judge him harshly, while Sino-Muslim solidarity would call for a more positive moral evaluation. A recent biographical dictionary praises his skill as finance minister in managing the monopolies on salt, tea, wine, vinegar, and metals and in setting up a system of adequate emoluments for officials. The anonymous author also delineates the delicacy and difficulty of being a finance official under a conquering foreign power. On the other hand, Ahmad’s corruption, nepotism, and alienation from fellow officials, especially the Chinese, bring him harsh criticism, as seen in the portrait above.

Apart from targeting specific individuals such as Ahmad for opprobrium, Song loyalists and anti-Mongol polemicists wrote texts that have become famous for their vilification of the *senu,* especially the Muslims, calling them the Mongols’ trusties and a gang of uncivilized, immoral savages. The authors of these texts neither knew nor cared much about Islam, but they had suffered an unprecedented loss of influence and prestige, and their critiques go far beyond the rhetoric of the literate center and the civilizable savage. Passages from the *Guixin zazhi* of Zhou Mi, the *Xin shi* of Zheng Suonan, and the *Zhuo geng lu* of Tao Zongyi, all Yuan period compilations, describe Muslims as lacking the

39. For a detached analysis of sources, see Franke, “Ahmed.” Translations of a number of sources on Ahmad’s assassination may be found in Moule, *Quinsay,* 79–88, including a reconstruction of the process of posthumous punishment meted out to Ahmad’s corpse, family, and estate after Qubilai discovered his “crimes” from Boluo (Pulad Aqa).

40. Polo, *Travels,* 275–78. This chapter was omitted from virtually all manuscripts of Polo’s work, surviving only in Ramusio’s version. Despite its obvious biases, it seems as accurate an account of Ahmad’s assassination as we have, though all versions differ considerably in their details.

rudiments of morality, decency, and personal hygiene. According to Zheng, “Even when they bathe, the Huihui still stink.” Tao quotes a satirical poem—“Their elephant noses all gone flat, their cat’s eyes dulled, all their hopes for a long life gone . . . Alas! When the tree falls, the monkeys scatter”—to illustrate the fate of the bestial Muslim semu at the inevitable defeat of their Mongol guardians. Here we find, for the first time but not the last in China, Muslims described as irremediably Other not in the language of Confucian benevolence toward lesser beings but rather in the stark discourse of racism. We will find, with all due irony, that this form of distinction—they cannot be at all like us, for they are incapable of wenhua (literary culture)—increased as Muslims became more acculturated to China.

In historical circumstance, however, the Yuan monarchs did not uniformly favor their Muslim servants but kept them under careful constraints. Angered by the unwillingness of some Muslim guests to eat his “unclean” food, Qubilai himself promulgated an edict forbidding Muslims to slaughter animals in the Muslim fashion, requiring instead that they use the Mongol method. Circumcision and the taxation of religious institutions and teachers—whether Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, or Christian—also became contentious issues between Mongols and their semu subjects during the 1280s. But whatever their internecine conflicts, for the first decades of the dynasty Muslims, Mongols, and other foreigners controlled and milked the Chinese economy, dominating the Chinese while gradually becoming acculturated to local ways.

The Muslims, even more than their formerly nomadic overlords, began to belong in China during the mid-fourteenth century. In those decades of violence and lawlessness, Muslims all over China organized or joined local self-defense corps as well as armies loyal to the dynasty. When the Mongols were driven out in the 1360s by rebels under the

42. Franke, “Eine mittelalterliche chinesische Satire,” 202–8, translates Tao’s ridicule of the Huihui in its entirety. The original text may be found in the Congshu jicheng (Assembled collections), no. 220. See also Leslie, Islam, 92–93, for brief translations.
43. Rossabi, Khubilai, 200–201, notes the anti-Muslim edict of January 27, 1280, recorded in both the Yuan dianzhang and the Yuan shi. Rashid al-Din’s version of this edict and its revocation some years later may be found in Successors, 293–95.
44. Leslie, Islam, 88–91.
45. One such Muslim self-defense corps, branded a “rebel” army by official histories, took a prominent role in Fujian until it was wiped out at Xinghua in 1366. Maejima, “The Muslims in Ch’uan-chou,” concludes that local enmity against these Muslims, perceived as violent and unreliable, sealed the fate of the southeast coast communities under the Ming.
Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–99), many Muslims chose to stay. Indeed, many chose to fight on the side of the indigenes, and Zhu’s commanders may have included a fair number of former *semu*: Chang Yuqun, Lan Yu, Ding Dexing, Mu Ying, and many others are unambiguously claimed as Muslims by Sino-Muslim scholars. Not remarkably, these “meritorious ministers who founded the state” (Ch. *kaiguo gongchen*), whether Huihui or not, hailed mostly from Anhui, Zhu Yuanzhang’s own province, not from the more obviously “Muslim” southeast coast towns or Silk Road cities. The presence of Muslims—for there were certainly some, even if their commanders were non-Muslim—in the Chinese armies that drove the Mongols northward presages a gradual, but palpable, change in the condition of Muslims in late Yuan and Ming China. Originally *fanke* foreigners and then *semu*, they became Huihui, familiar strangers who came today and stayed tomorrow, ordinary but different.

**BECOMING NORMAL IN MING CHINA (1368–1644)**

Mongols and *semu* who live in China may marry Chinese [women] but may not marry from among their own kind. There are Chinese who do not wish to marry Huihui or Qipchaqs, so these *semu* are not included in this prohibition.

Huihui are shaggy with big noses, and Qipchaqs have light hair and blue eyes. Their appearance is vile and peculiar, so there are those who do not wish to marry them. Mongols and *semu* may not marry their own kind. . . . but the Qipchaqs and Huihui are the vilest among the *semu*, and a Chinese will not want to marry them. They may marry their own kind. . . . Allowing them to marry each

46. Their biographies may be found in Bai Shouyi, *Huizu renwu zhi* (Ming dai), including the location of their homes in Anhui. There is considerable doubt among non-Muslim scholars as to the “Muslim” identity of most of these generals, but Sino-Muslims assert their “Huiness” unequivocally. Tazaka, *Chūgoku ni okeru Kaikyō*, 861, for example, questions not only Chang Yuqun’s identification as a Huihui but that of many others as well. F. Mote, in Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary*, 1079–83, indicates that we have no evidence that Mu Ying was born a Muslim, and the story of his adoption and upbringing in Zhu Yuanzhang’s intimate circle certainly indicates that he was not raised as one. The biography of Lan Yu (788–91) also does not mention that he might have been a Muslim, and Mote’s article on Chang Yuqun (115–20) concurs with Tazaka regarding his Muslim identity: “This is not verifiable in any source.”

47. *Da Ming lü ji jì fù*, lü 6:11a.
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other is in sympathy for their [possible] extinction [should they not be allowed to do so]. There is strictly no prohibition against a Chinese marrying a Huihui or Qipchaq [should s/he wish to do so].

Islam and Muslims

Based on the wide distribution of Muslims in China under the Yuan, the evolution of the Sinophone Muslims during the succeeding Ming dynasty took place in a bewildering variety of contexts. Many claims have been made regarding the relationship of Muslims in China to the Ming state, but few have solid grounding in historical sources; they reflect anachronistic political controversy more than careful research, which must be local rather than generalized. From the beginning of the Ming, when armies under Zhu Yuanzhang drove the Mongols out of China proper, concern about relations with peoples and states along the northern and western frontiers marked Ming politics, and Ming attempts to acculturate resident “aliens” demonstrate both fear of Others and confidence in the civilizing power of Chinese culture. Zhu Yuanzhang had Muslim commanders in his army, and may have had at least one Muslim wife, but the dynasty he founded neither entirely acculturated its Muslim subjects nor eliminated anti-Muslim prejudice in China.

Ming emperors employed Muslims in high office, including a large number of scientists in the government agencies responsible for astrology, the calendar, and the interpretation of omens. Following on the service and success of Jamal ad-Din under the Yuan monarchs, the Qintianjian (Bureau of Astronomy) had a special section for the study of Muslim calendrical science, and a Chinese-language Huihui tianwenshu (Book of Muslim astronomy) remains extant. In addition to describing

48. Da Ming li jijie fuli, fuli 6:36b.

49. Hajji Yusuf Chang has long claimed that Zhu Yuanzhang was himself a Muslim, but historians have not generally accepted his argument. On the basis of her surname (Ma), or on claims made by “unofficial histories” (yeshi, an often gratuitously salacious genre), one of Zhu Yuanzhang’s senior wives is said to have come from a Muslim family (Rossabi, “Muslim and Central Asian revolts,” 180–81).

50. Leslie, Islam, 106. Ho, “The Astronomical Bureau,” notes the parallel establishment of Chinese and Islamic astronomical offices under Zhu Yuanzhang and his successors, but does not credit the Muslim astronomers with any greater skill than their Chinese counterparts. Indeed, he attributes the construction of the Yuan period astronomical instruments entirely to Guo Shoujing, ignoring Jamāl ad-Din. For a less ethnocentric view, see Tasaka, “An Aspect,” 127–40, in which are translated Ming Taizu’s (r. 1368–1398) encomiums to the Muslim astronomers and their texts.
specially designated “Muslim” work-units in the sciences, Sino-Muslim scholars also claim Muslim origins for many Ming civil officials and famous intellectuals, including Hai Rui, Ma Wensheng, Ma Ziqiang, and the iconoclastic literatus Li Zhi, originally from Quanzhou.\textsuperscript{31} Such attributions are all suspect if we take “Muslim” to be a \textit{religious} category, for they tend to be based on surname and/or place of origin and thus on a definition of “Huiness” appropriate to the \textit{minzu} paradigm. Many of these men, especially Li Zhi, left not a trace of Islamic origins or religion in their writings or in their biographies, so the attribution of Hui status reveals in the twentieth-century claims both an anachronistic desire to have well-known coreligionists and the consciousness of profound acculturation among upper-class Ming period Sino-Muslims.

But neither courtly connections nor acculturation of China’s Muslims could entirely prevent discrimination. Local officials, overwhelmingly non-Muslim, often mistreated Muslims before the bench:

A Muslim [family] of Hanzhong [Shaanxi] had been reformed [honest subjects] for several generations. At that time [one of them] had a dispute with a Chinese man and brought a suit before the magistrate. The magistrate accused [the Muslim] of crime and, on his own responsibility, sent troops to arrest him. The Muslim was furious and escaped to the mountains. [Despite the intercession of Kang Lang, a local gentryman, the official insisted on attacking the Muslim but failed to take him.] Kang Lang continuously tried to persuade the Muslim to be appeased. [Finally], the Muslim said, “You, sir, know our oppression, so I bind myself [for punishment at your disposal]. If it had been the governor, I would simply have been killed.”\textsuperscript{52}

Very few Muslims were lucky enough to have had someone like Kang Lang as an ally. Unstable economic conditions in many parts of China, increasingly strict commercial regulation in frontier regions, and localized communal conflict all contributed to the impoverishment of Muslims in the mid- and late Ming. Incidents of “Muslim banditry” and Muslim-related social unrest were reported from Yunnan to Gansu to Shandong.\textsuperscript{53} In official communications, including the annals of the

\textsuperscript{31} Biographies of all of these and more may be found in Bai, \textit{Huizu renwu zhi (Ming da)}.
\textsuperscript{32} Examples of arguments on their Muslim origins may be found in Pei Zhi, “Hai Rui,” 274–75; and Ye Guoqing, “Li Zhi,” 276–84.
\textsuperscript{52} Tazaka, \textit{Chūgoku ni okeru Kaikyo}, vol. 2, 1195–96.
\textsuperscript{53} In official communications, including the annals of the

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central government, Muslims who engaged in illegal activity were clearly distinguished as different from ordinary Chinese, and they were treated with special harshness.\footnote{tazaka, Chūgoku ni okeru Kaikyō, vol. 2, 1230, n76, cites the Veritable Records from the Jiajing reign for use of the term Huizei, “Muslim thieves,” and also of terms such as “perverse Muslims.” In the same note, he claims that the character for Hui  временно was enriched with a component meaning “dog”  временно during the Ming period. The causes of Muslim violence in China, usually laid either to “fanatical followers of Islam” or to the oppressive policies of the Manchu Qing, must thus be sought in more complex understanding of specific local and regional contexts.}

As an illustration of the relationship between the Ming court and its Muslim subjects, let us consider the statute cited above preventing non-Chinese in China from marrying within their own communities, requiring them instead to intermarry with the Chinese. This regulation, entirely opposite to the Tang and Song restrictions on intermarriage, demonstrates the powerful effects of the Mongol conquest and a new attitude toward outsiders: since foreigners, especially former \textit{semu}, might be dangerous, they must be subdued by incorporation, by conscious sinification, through constant exposure to Chinese culture in the intimate family circle and through genetic incorporation into civilized China. Originally designed to promote acculturation of the Mongols and \textit{semu}, the statute has often been cited as proof of Ming harshness toward non-Chinese. Though the exclusion of the Huizhi and Qipchaqs by virtue of their “vile and peculiar” appearance does allow for endogamous marriage among them, the wording of the statute hardly bodes well for social relations. Neither consistent persecution of Muslims nor liberal ethnic policy informed Ming relations with the Muslims and other resident outsiders, and a great deal of research will be necessary before we can draw firm conclusions.

During the Ming the Muslims of China proper (including the northwest and southwest) found their connections with the western regions (the Muslim lands of Central and West Asia) to some extent controlled and limited by the Chinese state, a development that must have contributed to their acculturation.\footnote{The much more complete acculturation of the Chinese Jews seems to have stemmed, at least in part, from their lack of contact with coreligionists outside China after the fall of the Yuan. Leslie, \textit{The Survival}, presents a narrative of the Jews of Kaifeng, summarizing (p. 52) that the community acculturated completely because of its small size and isolation from other Jews. Pollak, \textit{Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries}, 337 ff, reaches the same conclusion, with a more complex texture.} Both for revenue enhancement and for frontier security, Ming policy makers found it advantageous to attempt control over all communication on both China’s landward side and the
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South China Sea lanes. The Ming did not restrict Islam per se, but rather worried about Muslims as a potential fifth column for invaders from Central Asia. Chinese Muslims were accused of trying "to evade the commercial regulations of the court or planning raids on unguarded Chinese border settlements," the one from within China, the other from outside, confirming an intimate relationship between Muslims on the two sides of Ming China's Central Asian frontier.56

During the early years of the Ming, the Chinese were indeed in grave danger from Central Asia, though they probably did not know either its extent or its immediacy. Tamerlane, familiar to both Zhu Yuanzhang and his son, the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–24), did not find the language of the tribute system quaint or amusing; rather, he saw the embassies from Nanjing, demanding submission to the Ming emperor's all-embracing authority, as galling and provocative. The Ming emperors were neither Muslims nor militarily powerful enough to make such claims. As early as 1395 Tamerlane determined to avenge the insulting implications of the Ming communications, but the conquests of Asia Minor and India came first. Finally, in 1404, he impounded the Yongle emperor's ambassadorial caravan of eight hundred camels, raised a giant army, and prepared to conquer China. Fortunately for the Ming state, Tamerlane died before launching his invasion, but his son, Shahrukh Bahadur, would consent only to an equal exchange of embassies, not to the formal language of submission and tribute demanded by Ming theory. And the Yongle emperor, wary of Central Asian Muslim power and eager for the goods (especially horses) of the overland trade routes, did not press the issue and agreed to address Shahrukh as a political equal.57

In the aftermath of Tamerlane's demise, trade and "tribute" missions moved continuously between China and Herat, Samarkand, and particularly Turfan, whose population converted to Islam during this same period.58 By the 1450s Turfan's caravans to Beijing, which had been

57. Fletcher, "China and Central Asia," 206–26, esp. the translation of Yongle's letter to Shahrukh, 212–14. Tamerlane's military capacities and organizational skills are described in detail in Manz, The Rise and Rule; Manz calls the plan to conquer China "the greatest exploit of his life" (73). We know a great deal about Tamerlane's reception of the Yongle emperor's 1404 embassy because, happily, the Spanish ambassador Clavijo (an indefatigable diarist) arrived at the same time and observed the court with a shrewd diplomat's eye (Le Strange, Clavijo, esp. chap. 12). Fear of Tamerlane also played a role in Ming China's treatment of its domestic Muslim communities; see, for example, Dazai, Shina kaikyōshi, chap. 5.
58. This summary is based on Rossabi, "Ming China."
dominated in the Yongle period by Buddhist envoys, were undertaken by Muslim merchants. They continued, even as the Muslim rulers of Turfan took and held Hami against Ming counterattacks, until the Ming established an economic blockade in the 1490s to force the Central Asians into proper submission. That plan did cause the Turfan rulers temporarily to deal more cautiously with the Ming court, but they never gave up Hami. This struggle concluded in Turfan's favor in the early sixteenth century, with Hami's final inclusion in Turfan's realm and Ming acquiescence in frequent Muslim trade and "tribute" missions to Beijing, where they made sensational profits. Despite the Ming court's efforts, trade flowed from northwest China to the Ferghana Valley, via Hami and Turfan, and Sino-Muslim merchants certainly took advantage of their position as bilingual middlemen on that route.

The Chinese merchants, among whom were many Sino-Muslims, also gained the final advantage in the frontier tea-for-horses trade, which the Ming rulers instituted to ensure a steady supply of warhorses, a commodity China never managed to produce for itself. The foreign demand for tea gave the Ming state some leverage, and an official monopoly kept the private merchants out for the first half of the dynasty, but frontier wars and corrupt administration gave merchants increasing room to buy and sell. By the end of the sixteenth century the government regulations lay in ruins, and the Qing conquests finally incorporated the markets for tea and the pasturelands of Mongolia and Central Asia into the empire, along with a brand-new set of problems.

On the seacoast, too, where Muslim merchants had played a dominant role since the Tang period, the Ming both used the expertise of Muslims and tried to restrict their trade. The most famous genuine Muslim of the Ming period, the admiral-eunuch Cheng Ho (born Ma He), certainly came from a Muslim family of Yunnan. Zhu Di, then prince of Yan and later to be the Yongle emperor, called him to service at the age of twenty and used Cheng Ho against rebels in his home province. "Since Cheng Ho [Zheng He] was pre-eminent among the eu-

59. A recent communication from Ruth Meserve indicates that many factors must be blamed for this remarkable failure in a scientific culture that had produced an advanced agricultural technology. Among them are conservative and often incompetent administration of the imperial stud, inappropriate pasturing and penning arrangements, unwillingness to invest in expensive breeding stock rather than battle-ready geldings, and certainly the nomads' reluctance to supply a potential enemy with so important an advantage as quality horseflesh. The subject deserves serious study.

60. Rossabi, "The Tea and Horse Trade." The same transformation of imperial commerce into private trade may be observed in Ming maritime commerce. See below, n65.
nuchs for both good looks and sagacity, the emperor Ch'eng-tsu [Yongle] appointed him to be principal envoy and commander-in-chief of six great naval expeditions which sailed to the 'Western Ocean' between 1405 and 1421. Yongle’s successor ordered Zheng on a seventh voyage in 1430. Zheng’s Muslim upbringing may well have influenced the emperor’s decision to use him in this office, as was the case in the appointment of the Persian-literate Ma Huan to be his assistant on three of the last four expeditions.

The enormous power projected by Ming China under Zheng He’s command into the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, as far as the Red Sea and Malindi, brought wealth, new tributaries, rare and costly trade goods, and exotic animals to court. Perhaps most important within China, the voyages created a profound sense of the Yongle emperor’s legitimacy. Foreign rulers from all along the Arab-Persian trade routes sent representatives to Nanjing, then to Beijing (Yongle moved the capital in 1421), receiving valuable gifts in return for their “tribute.” In addition to material wealth and exotica, Zheng He’s expeditions brought knowledge back to China, awareness that the people of a huge sweep of the world believed in the Huihui religion. The second-hand impressions of South and West Asia recorded by Tang and Song port officials could now be replaced by first-hand accounts, written in Chinese by men who had actually traveled, traded, negotiated, and made war far from China’s shores. From Quanzhou to Aden and beyond, they found Muslims. Members of Zheng’s crew went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and their accounts describe accurately the Ka‘aba, Muhammad’s tomb, the Zamzam well, and other holy sites of Islam.

62. All of these may well have been intended by the monarch; scholars disagree as to their validity or balance. See the brief summary of arguments and motivations in Mills, *Ma Huan*, 1, n1. For an example of the importance of foreign embassies, and foreign relations in general, to the establishment of dynastic legitimacy, see Toby, *State and Diplomacy*, chap. 3.
63. That knowledge is presented, by category and location, in a compilation of primary texts, Zheng and Zheng, *Zheng He*. Among many scholarly efforts to compile the knowledge gained by Zheng He, Mills’s *Ma Huan* is outstanding in English; Xu Yuhu, *Ming Zheng He*, studies Zheng in a conventionally Sinocentric style.
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Muslims in China and Ming Limits on Foreign Trade

After the 1430s, however, the Ming government no longer saw value in these expensive, expansive voyages, either as political propaganda or as covert trading expeditions. They ceased, and both the exotics and the knowledge faded rapidly from Chinese consciousness. Though briefly revived by the Jesuit presence in the late Ming, Chinese scholarly comprehension of and interest in the “western lands” never achieved so high a level until the nineteenth century’s pressures forced the gates, confronting China with a world ill-remembered and utterly transformed.

Despite both popular and official Chinese prejudice, the Ming period actually saw resident Muslims forging stronger and more durable ties with China. Sometimes confined by restrictive travel regulations, and clearly belonging to China by social process, many Sinophone Muslims became even more intimate with their native land by intermarriage or by adoption of Chinese children. Both processes increased their numbers while linking them ever more closely to China. Sino-Muslim communities, with the social cohesion typical of minorities in polyethnic societies and in conformity with the charitable requirements of shari'a law (Islam’s comprehensive code), provided mutual aid and solidarity that promoted survival in bad times and continuity under acculturative pressures.

Intermarriage almost always involved a Muslim male taking a Chinese wife, who converted formally to Islam and became a member of the Muslim community. Very rarely was a Muslim female allowed to be given in marriage to a non-Muslim, for strong community pressure and Muslim law forbade “losing” a daughter to the outsiders. As noted above, the presence of many Sinophone women, however sincere their Islamic conversion, forwarded the acculturation process (precisely as the Ming statute intended) by making Chinese the language of home for Muslims in

65. The causes for the cessation of the voyages are explored by Haraprasad Ray in *Trade and Diplomacy*, with his conclusions on pp. 135–37. He believes that the voyages, which had begun as expressions of imperial strength and as military efforts, gradually became trading missions over the course of the Yongle period and lost their purpose when private traders filled the commercial roles they had played.

66. Muslim conformity to the duty of charity, enjoined by Muslim law, was attested even by admiring non-Muslims. Yan Congjian’s *Shenyu zhouci lu*, published in 1574, 11.4b-20a, contains a lengthy section on “Mecca and Medina,” most of which deals with the Sino-Muslims; at 11.6a he praises their community-mindedness and willingness to support one another in need. Leslie, *Islam*, 113, cites Lang Ying’s *Qixiu leigao* (16th cent.) to the same effect: “They aid equally those who come from elsewhere.” These passages have a very different tone from the Tang-Song exotica or the Yuan period anti-Muslim polemics cited above.
China. A third process, conversion of Chinese adults to Islam, also increased the size and diversity of the Muslim communities, though it was not nearly as common as intermarriage or adoption. To enhance their chances of success in commerce, which in some parts of China was dominated by Muslims, to obtain the benefits of a widespread network of traders and caravaners, Chinese became Sino-Muslims by a religious act and joined the Huihui.

Muslim adaptation to China lay primarily in the realms of material culture and language, as the Ming state enhanced the ordinary acculturative pressure on minority communities by attempting to shut off communication with the “homelands” to the west and south. Tamerlane and his successors in Central Asia, pirates of many peoples off the east and south coasts, and a weakening central state all contributed to a less aggressive, more defensive posture that included restriction of commerce and travel by China’s peripatetic Muslims. The Ming controls succeeded primarily in the southeast, where Muslim communities found themselves increasingly isolated, both by Ming policy and by their Chinese neighbors’ hostility in the wake of the late Yuan Muslim uprisings. In the Yangzi region, to take an extreme example, late Ming Muslim families wrote Confucian-style clan genealogies to honor their ancestors in the Chinese mode. These documents reveal the Islamic practice of these acculturated Muslims to have been degenerate; their ties with the Muslim world outside China had been completely severed.

Responses and Resistance to Acculturation

What people call xiaojing was originally a kind of pinyin using the Arabic alphabet. . . . Most mosque teachers [in China] were illiterate in Chinese, but they were very skilled in representing sounds with Arabic. So when they were studying, if they needed to make a comment in the margin of their text or record a note, the only reliable means for them to do so was xiaojing. . . . And its use

67. Rossabi, “Muslim and Central Asian Revolts,” 186, notes a number of Muslim cross-border raids (from Turfan, primarily) and Muslim uprisings during the Wanli era (1572–1620), and reports that Ming officials believed these to stem from poor economic conditions in the northwest. Ming over-regulation of merchants exacerbated the problem and may have led directly to raids on frontier towns.

68. Nakada Yoshinobu, “Chiigoku Musurimu.” It comes as no surprise that the most heavily acculturated of the Sino-Muslim communities studied by Dru Gladney (Muslim Chinese) lived in Fujian.
was not limited to the scripture hall. . . . People who had received a mosque education, whether they worked as religious professionals or not, could still use this pinyin for recording accounts, writing letters, or noting events. To this very day there are still a few people who continue to use it, especially in Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai.69

**Belonging: Gedimu and Jingtang Jiaoyu**

Until the seventeenth century virtually all Muslim communities in China focused their communal life around the local mosque. No institutionalized Muslim authority existed above the local community, though outstanding individuals did emerge as supralocal leaders through Islamic scholarship, religious charisma, accumulation of wealth, or success in the examination system.70 Local mosques linked themselves to other communities informally by bonds of shared Muslim identity and minority position, of commerce, and of language—the Huihuihua patois, which inserted Arabic and Persian locutions into the local vernacular.71 Largely self-governed, the mosque congregations differed from non-Muslim communities in the centrality of their religious institutions and the potential for intercommunity connections created by religious identity.

Most Muslims lived almost entirely within such congregations and networks, meeting non-Muslims only at market. They were not supposed to eat with non-Muslims or marry their children outside the community, effectively blocking two crucial social communications. Depending on their leaders to mediate between them and the state, they nonetheless spoke to one another in Chinese, used the same vernacular as their non-Muslim neighbors (with Huihuihua additions), dressed similarly, and prepared their food similarly, though it had to be ritually pure (Ar. halāl, Ch. qingzhen). The Muslims of China thus asked the

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69. Feng Zenglie, “Ming Qing shiqi,” 244. Prof. Feng (who died in 1996) kindly sent me a copy of his 1982 unpublished essay dealing entirely with xiaojing, “Xiaoerjin' chutan.”
70. Biographies of leaders of many kinds may be found in Bai, Huizu renwu zhi (Ming dai), but, as noted above, readers should be aware that the “Muslim”identification of some, if not many, of the men included in the collection has been disputed. Sino-Muslim scholars’ inclusion of an individual in the Hui minzu may indicate nothing more than descent from at least one Muslim, or someone with a Muslim name, and cannot tell us much about that person’s involvement or faith, if any, in Islam.
71. Feng Zenglie, “Ming Qing shiqi,” 217–51, gives many examples of jingtangyu that use both Arabic and Persian vocabulary and, occasionally, grammar.
inevitable question of cultural minorities: How can we cope with the acculturative pressures of the majority, the desire of the Others to have us conform to their ways, while still remaining ourselves and affirming as positive those characteristics which differ? Some of their answers may be found in the strategies of Muslim leaders as they planned for Muslim, community, lineage, and personal success.

Every congregation needed a house of prayer, ranging from a small village’s single room in a private home to a wealthy trading center’s elaborate set of buildings. These mosques needed religious professionals to perform many crucial functions for the congregation (see plate 9). They led the communal daily and weekly prayers, gave the Friday sermon, represented the community to the state’s local officials, taught ritual rectitude and sacred languages, and interpreted and enforced Muslim law. Taken together, these roles transcended those of conventional non-Muslim Chinese religious figures. Even the ritual and mediational functions of the Confucian scholar-gentry did not extend to conducting funerals for villagers or praying for sons at the behest of barren women, as Muslim congregational leaders routinely did. Only in Chinese sectarian organizations do we find such intimacy between congregation and leader, one reason why the imperial court and its officials often looked upon Islam as perilously close to heterodox Buddhism or Daoism.

Before the advent of Sufi orders in northwest China, all mosques chose their own religious professionals, including the *imām* or *ahong*, through a council of elders. Selected by the community for their age, high social or economic status, or relatively high level of Islamic knowledge, the elders maintained the functional unity of the local congregation, exercising secular and administrative power in the management of communal property—especially land donated to the mosque in pious endowment (Ar. *waqf*)—and in the selection of the religious functionaries.

Religious professionals, holding credentials from Chinese or Central Asian seminaries, traveled from post to post through a network of advertising and recruitment. Their contracts, and those of their assis-

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72. Feng Jinyuan, “Zhongguo Yisilanjiao,” 144–46. Most Chinese Muslims refer to Islamic teachers as *ahong*, from the Persian *ākhānd*, rather than *imām* or *mawla*, though both of those words are known and used in northwest China; the latter term, *manla* in Chinese transliteration, generally refers to a student in a *madrasa* (religious academy). Famous or especially erudite *ahong* receive higher titles, as do the leaders of Sufi orders.

73. Feng Zenglie, “Ming Qing shiqi,” 223–28, discusses the organization and functions of a large Gedimu mosque community in Xi’an as an example of a fully formed set of local functionaries and institutions.
tants, stipulated a period of employment (which was sometimes for life), after which they could seek another job or renegotiate the relationship. Thus, local elders governed and represented their own congregations, which collectively employed the *ahong* and/or *imām*. Respected and obeyed, but not necessarily permanent members of the community, the religious professionals carried the charisma of Arabic and Persian learning and served as ritual leaders and judges. In a small village a single *ahong* might work alone, teaching the small children their Arabic prayers and conducting life-cycle rituals. In a large city or county town a mosque (perhaps one of many) might employ an *imām*, several *ahong*, a *khatib* (preacher), a muezzin to announce the prayers, and a number of religious teachers. Whatever the size, this type of independent mosque organization, with its two distinct types of leadership—lay elders and religious professionals—came to be called Gedimu, from the Arabic *qādīm*, meaning “old.” It contrasted sharply with new Muslim institutions, the Sufi orders, which arrived in northwest China in the seventeenth century.\(^74\)

During the mid- to late Ming some Muslim communities began to feel that their children were not receiving adequate Islamic education—the acculturative pressure to educate children in the majority culture and language had considerable power—and so some professional educators undertook to systematize the Islamic curriculum. Now called *jingtang jiaoyu*, “scripture hall education,” this Arabic and Persian schedule of lessons had some Chinese flavoring (see plate 10). Modern Sino-Muslim scholars usually associate *jingtang jiaoyu* with Shaanxi province and with the name of Hu Dengzhou, one of its formalizers.

Hu came from the Wei valley of Shaanxi, where hundreds of thousands of Muslims lived in the market towns and villages of a prosperous region. After going on the pilgrimage to Mecca, he decided that Chinese Muslim life had deteriorated, especially in fundamental Islamic knowledge, and he opened a religious school. We can speculate that by the mid-sixteenth century, when he flourished, many Chinese Muslims could no longer understand Arabic or Persian and had to have the sacred texts explained to them in Chinese. Indeed, by this time purely Arabic inscriptions had disappeared, replaced first by Arabic-Chinese texts and then by steles entirely in Chinese.\(^75\) Inscriptional evidence indicates that many generations of Sino-Muslim teachers trace their

\(^74\) Feng Zenglie, “Gedimu’ bayi.” For a general description of this form of community organization, see Ma Tong, *Zhongguo Yiislān... shilue*, 119–27.

\(^75\) Feng Zenglie, “Ming Qing shiqi,” 222.
intellectual and curricular tradition to Hu and his disciples. He is also credited with regularizing the financing of tuition, room, board, and study materials for his religious students, some of whom lived in his home on a work-study arrangement.

Hu and his followers taught a fairly orthodox Islamic curriculum, innovating only in the relative shallowness of the Arabic and Persian knowledge expected of their students. Rather than using the Koran itself as a text, they selected two dozen or more passages as a primer (Ch. Haiting) of Koranic Arabic; only after completing that text would students begin the study of the complete Koran. In addition, they used an elementary Islamic studies textbook called Zaxue (Diverse studies), which included prayers, presumably in Arabic, and Persian texts on faith, ablutions, worship, fasting, marriage, funerals, and festivals. One modern scholar speculates that this book dated from the late Yuan period, when Persian was still a Muslim lingua franca in East Asia.

Though we still lack text-based study of this reform movement, the main innovation of jingtang jiaoyu seems to have lain in the use of Chinese phonetic pronunciation of Arabic. Though students still learned the holy books in the original Arabic orthography, they were taught to recite them with Chinese sounds. Thus the Arabic salām (peace) came to be pronounced with three Chinese syllables—sa liang mu. No original texts from the Ming period have been published, but colleagues in Shaanxi inform me that students, especially in the more Chinese-literate Xi'an community, actually represented Arabic using Chinese characters.

The written transliteration cannot have been widespread, however, since most northwesterners could not read or write Chinese. Indeed, that inability led to a second Sino-Muslim invention, xiaojing—the first pinyin, or systematic alphabetic representation of Chinese. In the mid- to late Ming Sino-Muslim males educated in the mosque or madrasa could read, but generally not compose or speak, Arabic and Persian. At the same time, all of them could speak Chinese, but only a few could read or write it. To answer the need for a usable written language during this period, innovative mosque teachers created an Arabic pinyin for Chinese. Called xiaojing or xiaoerjin, it enabled Muslims who could not read Chinese to represent its sounds in an orthography they knew from their mosque education. They could thus take notes on texts written in languages they could read but not speak or write. Of course this method

76. See, for example, the Xujian Hu Taishizu jiacheng ji, reprinted in Bai, Huizu renwu zhi (Ming dai), 404–7.
suffered from some of the same limitations as any alphabetic representation of Chinese. Dialectal differences among its users would create inconsistencies in representation; neither Arabic nor Persian can represent the tonal structure of spoken Chinese; and the Middle Eastern orthographies cannot distinguish syllabic endings (e.g., xī'an vs. xian). \(^7\) It did survive its limitations, however, and remains extant among Chinese Muslims, though only a few use it regularly. The northwestern Sino-Muslims thus handled their linguistic adjustment to China in two innovative ways: jingtang jiaoyu utilized Chinese phonetics to represent Arabic pronunciation, and xiaojing adapted the Arabic script to represent spoken Chinese. These two methods, taken together, might well symbolize for us the gradual acculturation processes of Sino-Muslims during the Ming period, processes that enabled them to live as subjects of the Ming state, as participants in Chinese culture, and as practicing Muslims.

Both Gedimu mosque structure and jingtang jiaoyu education show little deviation from conventional Sunni, Hanafi Muslim communities elsewhere in the Muslim world. On the basis of current evidence, we can only surmise that more and more Muslims in China had become entirely Sinophone, even in Shaanxi and Gansu. The descendants of the semu Muslims had, after all, been living in China for as long as two centuries by the time of Hu Dengzhou—six to eight generations—and could be expected to acculturate in language as well as in many spheres of daily life. Apart from banditry and evasion of commercial regulations (both common among non-Muslims as well) they do not appear to have engaged in collective antisocial behavior, and they accepted the legitimacy of Ming rule unless it obstructed their business or threatened their survival. Their behavior in the troubled times at the end of the Ming certainly confirms that they considered China to be their home and its politics to be their own.

**STRANGERS IN BAD TIMES:**

**THE MING-QING TRANSITION (1644–50s)**

He Bi, supervising secretary in the Office of Scrutiny of the Board of War, presented a long and important memorial to the throne

\(^7\) Feng Zenglie, “Xiaoerjin chutan,” 16–17. Prof. Feng derives the name for this *pinyin* from the homophonic *xiaojing*, “to digest the scripture,” a northwestern term indicating the written or oral commentaries on sacred texts with which madrasa teachers instruct their students (p. 12). A remarkable example of *xiaojing* is preserved in Forke, “Ein islamisches Tractat.”
about ways to exert local control over that particularly troubled region [Gansu]. He began by praising the speed with which Meng Qiaofang had succeeded, in less than half a month, in recovering the major cities of Gansu by crushing the Muslim rebels. “Subduing such despicable wretches” (xiaochour) was “like catching foxes and rats in your hands”. . . . There was nonetheless the very great possibility that conflict with the Muslims might recur. No one—He quickly added—could disagree with the sage policy of imperial clemency, but it might be pointed out that those who committed such ravages . . . were not all killed. Furthermore, Muslims and Chinese were continuing to live alongside each other in the major cities of the northwest. “Their customs are different and this results eventually in mutual suspicion.” He therefore proposed that a policy of ethnic resettlement be adopted. Muslim communities, he suggested, should be located at least fifty li from the Han zhou [prefecture], xian [county], or wei [garrison] nearest to them, wherever there were secluded areas suitable for colonization. There they should be taken with their families, and transformed from martial horsemen into peaceful peasants.

Forbid them to breed horses or to keep weapons.
Command their religious leaders to take charge,
regulating their movements back and forth. Let them
all cultivate the soil, and so gradually allay their
ferocious natures.79

Taking Sides

The mid-seventeenth century fall of the Ming, with its attendant social disorder, provided an opportunity for Muslims to act violently against the state, should they have reason; they also had to protect themselves and their homes in unstable times. Muslim “rebels” often joined other antistate forces, in some case in ethnically mixed units, Muslim and non-Muslim making common cause in the face of adversity, Ming maladministration, and state violence. Ma Shouying, nicknamed “Lao Huihui” (Old Muslim), a Shaanxi Muslim general, materially aided Li Zicheng in his successful campaign against the Ming in northwest China. Ma came from the same region as most of Li’s generals, and his battle plans did not differ

substantially from theirs; he was fighting a Chinese war, participating in Chinese dynastic upheaval. He obviously did not seek Muslim domination of China or even liberation of parts of China as Muslim territory. Muslim rebels who rose against the Manchu Qing after it defeated Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong (Ma Shouying having died, probably of natural causes, in 1644) also seem to have lacked separatist ambitions.

Early in its reign over China proper the Manchu Qing court ruled that merchants from Turfan and Hami, operating within the rubric of the tribute system, could trade only with selected Chinese merchants and Qing officials, and only at Lanzhou or Beijing. The Manchus also intended to reestablish the tea and horse trade state monopolies of the early and mid-Ming. These political intrusions into Central Asian commerce, resented by the private merchants of the northwest, aggravated an already poor economy and stimulated some Muslims to violence, especially in the Gansu corridor, the vital transportation link between Gansu and Turkestan. The Muslims probably knew that the Manchus were meeting stiff resistance all over China and took advantage of the court's scattered forces.

Beginning at Ganzhou in 1646, Muslims named Milayin and Ding Guodong led substantial armies—government sources claimed one-hundred-thousand soldiers, almost surely an exaggeration—down the Gansu corridor, taking Lanzhou and a number of prefectural towns and laying siege to Gongchang, in eastern Gansu. This could not have been a separatist jihād, for the Muslims and their non-Muslim allies acted in the name of Zhu Shichuan, the former Ming prince of Yan-chang. As Ma Shouying (Lao Huihui) had risen against the Ming and

80. On Ma Shouying, see Ma Shouqian, “Mingdai houqi,” 36–40. Rossabi, “Muslim and Central Asian Revolts,” and Tazaka, “Mindai goki,” cover many of the same texts. We have no evidence that Ma Shouying imbued his wars with any explicitly Muslim content, no talk of jihād or even of shengzhan, its imprecise Chinese translation. When Li Zicheng needed a place to recover from defeat and wounds, he sought out Lao Huihui and stayed with him for months. Indeed, Ma Shouying formally joined Li Zicheng’s army after many years of anti-Ming struggle and took an official title, “Yingwu General of the Yongfu Battalion.” Bai, Huizu renwu zhi (Ming dai), 160. The biographical notice (154–64) contains a detailed narrative of Lao Huihui’s battles and praise for his success in uniting the peoples of various nationalities to fight the feudal Ming.


83. Fletcher, “China’s Northwest,” 30. Qing commander Meng Qiaofang’s report of the Ming loyalist component to this “Muslim” rebellion, and his biography in Qing shi gao, are also cited by Rossabi, “Muslim and Central Asian Revolts,” 191; and Wakeman, Great Enterprise, vol. 2, 800. The original texts may be found in Xie, Qingchu, 268–69, 279–83.
aided other Chinese rebels, so Milayin and Ding Guodong made their rebellious decisions within a Chinese context and enlisted the legitimacy of the Ming ruling house to their anti-Qing cause. Zhu was killed early in the fighting, but the cause did not collapse.

We certainly cannot ignore the rebels’ “foreign” connections to Hami and, more distantly, Turfan. After some months of rebellion, the sultan (governor) of Hami, Sa’id Baba, sent one of his sons, Turumtay, to serve as prince of (rebellious) Suzhou, demonstrating a close link with Milayin and Ding. But we know little else of that connection and can only surmise that political and religious as well as commercial relationships had been forged across the Ming-Hami frontier and that the two sides decided to unite in the face of the usurping Manchus. Fletcher conjectures, on the basis of contemporaneity, that Naqshabandi Sufism might have played a role in linking Suzhou’s rebels to Hami, but he acknowledges a paucity of evidence.

The Qing commander in Gansu, Meng Qiaofang, sent a relief force to Gongchang immediately and broke the siege. The rebels lost ground rapidly, retreating first from Lintao and then from Lanzhou in the face of Meng’s experienced troops, who advanced in three columns to converge on the provincial capital. Though his rear guard took months to clear out the rebel remnants south and east of the Yellow River, Meng’s main force advanced quickly to besiege Milayin and Ding Guodong’s main base at Ganzhou, out in the Gansu corridor. After a sanguinary six-month siege, the rebels negotiated with Meng Qiaofang and surrendered. Milayin obtained an appointment as assistant commander in the Qing garrison at Lanzhou, but both he and Ding Guodong remained in northwestern Gansu.

The rebel alliance had calculated correctly that the Qing army had a great deal to do in early 1649. Within weeks of their victory at Ganzhou, the Qing troops were transferred southward to fight the still-dangerous Southern Ming in Sichuan. Taking immediate advantage, Milayin and Ding’s forces again drove southeastward, taking cities as far away as Lintao and killing Qing officials as they went. Meng Qiaofang again responded rapidly, pushing the rebels back to their Gansu corridor bases and killing Milayin at the beginning of a second siege at Ganzhou. Ding Guodong continued the fight from Suzhou, further west toward Hami, with little hope of holding out

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86. Xie, *Qingchu*, 268.
against Meng's superior army; but anti-Qing forces under Jiang Xiang, far to the east in Shanxi, unintentionally gave the Muslims a few more months of life. Leaving irregulars to hold the siegeworks around Suzhou, Meng spent most of 1649 defeating Jiang, not returning to take Suzhou until December. Upon Meng's victory in that month Ding, Turumtay, and five-thousand followers died at Qing hands, and the Gansu corridor was "pacified."87

Pacification (Ch. shanhou) had to be carefully planned in order to avoid a recurrence of violence. Conventional nostrums of comforting the common people and rewarding the brave and loyal troops could not solve the problems of commercial overregulation and poverty that caused the uprisings in the first place. Milayin's and Ding Guodong's armies had not been simply Muslim rebels—others, including Chinese and Tibetans, had joined them—but the pacification officials nonetheless singled out the Muslims as naturally violent. As we have seen above, He Bi, a metropolitan official, memorialized that segregation of the Muslims from all cultural Others would have the most salutary effect in the long run, for their natures were savage and had to be tamed by long-term exposure to peaceful husbandry.88 The court accepted his argument and authorized the resettlement of the Muslims of the Gansu corridor well away from its cities and garrisons. In addition, trade with Hami was cut off for five years, until that city's ruler sent an embassy to apologize for its role in the uprising.

Though marked as Muslims and thus different from other rebels or heroes, Ma Shouying, Milayin, and Ding Guodong must nonetheless be seen as culturally Chinese.89 Their Sino-Muslim identity had

87. Xie, Qingchu, 268, quotes Meng Qiaofang's Qing shi gao biography: "Our troops took Suzhou, killed [Ding] Guodong, Turumtay, and their crowd, including Hei Chengyin. Beheaded five-thousand. West of the river, all is at peace." Wakeman, Great Enterprise, 823, cites the same passage. This cursorily described slaughter of Suzhou Muslims would be duplicated by Zuo Zongtang over two hundred years later, in 1873.

88. Xie, Qingchu, 282.

89. Their Islamic orthopraxy certainly did not conform to the funerary and other ritual markers that James Watson finds at the core of "Chinese" culture. I would argue, however, that "Chinese" is the only word appropriate to describe the culture of Sinophone people whose homes, sense of heritage, spheres of political action, and patterns of everyday life may all be found within cultural China. "Islamic" culture certainly played a part in their lives, but there are no "Islamic" foods, "Islamic" clothes, or "Islamic" vernaculars outside particular cultural contexts, and this particular cultural context is definitely Chinese. (A useful analogy might be the cultural, political, and intellectual lives of many American Jews, which, though they are not entirely devoid of "Jewish" elements, nonetheless may only be identified as "American.") I would not go
evolved in a lengthy process of mutual adaptation between Muslim
immigrants and Chinese society, a process that had begun in the Tang-
Song, accelerated in the Yuan, and come to fruition in the Ming.
Smooth in neither space nor time, that evolution had created Muslims
whose homeland lay in China, whose language was Chinese. They
were as diverse and contentious as the other Chinese among whom
they lived—Ma Shouying did not lead or represent all the Sino-
Muslims, but only a fraction—and, unlike most of the culturally non-
Chinese peoples of China, they did not occupy large territories along a
frontier.

Concentrated in the northwest, the southwest, and the eastern cities
(for the southwestern coastal communities had declined rapidly with
the closing of the Arab-Persian sea trade by the mid-Ming), Sino-
Muslims had become a ubiquitous, anomalous part of the Chinese
landscape. Normal but different, Sinophone but incomprehensible, lo-
cal but outsiders, they challenged some fundamental Chinese concep-
tions of Self and Other and denied the totally transforming power of
Chinese civilization, couched always in moral terms by the Chinese elite.
As we shall see, the Muslims of the northwest had tenaciously main-
tained their connections with Central and West Asia; the Ming decline
and Qing conquest did not find all of them passive or acculturated.
Some had friends in Hami and were ready to fight. Ironically, given our
usual stereotypes of Muslims, they fought as Chinese in the name of a
Ming pretender to the imperial throne in Beijing. However, we have no
evidence that they constituted any kind of self-conscious entity (e.g., a
minzu) beyond their local communities. No Muslims from elsewhere in
China flocked to Ma Shouying or Milayin's banners, and their commu-
nities remained relatively isolated in their local and regional contexts,
connected only by sojourning merchants and religious professionals
moving from job to job.

For the next century or so, northwest China's Muslims lived in rela-
tive peace with one another, with their neighbors, and with the Qing
state. We cannot demonstrate that Qing resettlement policies kept the
peace, for most of Gansu (not to mention the rest of China) was not

so far as Ma Hetian, Chiang Kai-shek, and others, who have claimed that the Sino-
Muslims are "just Hans who believe in Islam." The Sino-Muslims' own sense of shared
foreign descent militates against such a definition, however dubious that claim might
seem to an academic historian. We must see Sino-Muslim identity as processual and
highly localized, even individual, in its combination of elements at a particular moment
in time. See Watson, "Rites or Beliefs?"
subject to such orders, but Qing officials and garrisons managed to control any trouble that arose, and the various peoples of the northwest found Qing rule, as it gradually expanded westward to include all of what is now Xinjiang, congenial enough to tolerate.