

Benevolence for Obedience:

Policies on Muslims in Late Imperial and Modern China

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In telling the story of Islam in China, scholars have tended to depict the historical encounter of China's Muslim population with the social, political and cultural forces of Chinese state and society in terms of either "conflict or concord." This generalization, which reduces a complex and nuanced history to a simple binary, is flawed not because it is completely untrue, but rather because its truth is incomplete. Chinese Muslims' responses to the social and cultural context in which they live have been diverse and multifaceted, and the phenomenon of Islam in China is no more a monolith than either of the two great, multifaceted civilizations that lend it its name. In late imperial China, within the same century, albeit at different ends of the Empire, examples of both types of Muslim response to Chinese hegemony were witnessed: intellectual rapprochement and armed rebellion. In between those extremes, however, we see varying degrees of Muslim assimilation to the norms of Chinese society and a variety of positions adopted by the imperium and officialdom *vis-à-vis* the Empire's Muslim subjects. In many ways, this pattern is repeated in the People's Republic of China (PRC) today.

The story of Muslims' relations with the Chinese state, whether in imperial times or today, has been shaped by the vicissitudes of Chinese history, as well as the global history that has brought different peoples into contact with one another. It must, therefore, not be viewed synchronically. Nor can we overlook the geographic complexity behind this story; all histories (like all politics), no matter how global their consequences, are, after all, local.

Islam first arrived in China during the Tang dynasty (618-906), brought by merchants and mercenaries. Since that time, Muslims have established a permanent minority presence in the country, required to acquiesce to government authority as well as social and cultural forces. However, there have been instances of Chinese Muslim uprisings and even armed rebellion over the long history of Islam in China. The fact that Chinese Muslims, both in the past and today, demonstrate a variety of social, political, and religious perspectives, which are largely determined by historical and geographical factors, serves to remind us of the tremendous diversity within Chinese Islam, from one region to another. The treatment of Muslims by various Chinese governments also reflects the fluctuating state of affairs of different epochs, ranging from suspicion and persecution, to benign indifference, to expressions of outright political benevolence.

After nearly a millennium of naturalization on Chinese soil, the Muslim population of China, enhanced by periodic waves of immigration from the central Islamic lands, reached a point of cultural critical mass, following a familiar pattern in an ethno-religious minority's response to rival pressures. The urge to assimilate in order to survive and be accepted into the mainstream society competed with an impulse to assert a distinct religious and cultural identity to save the community from being inundated and washed away by the mainstream. The intensity of these rival pressures has varied from period to period and from region to region, resulting in greater or lesser degrees of acquiescence or resistance to assimilation.

There is, nevertheless, some continuity to the story. A Muslim population (of indeterminate size),* ethnically and linguistically Chinese, and scattered across the country in both rural and urban areas, traces its roots back to various tides of Muslim

*Overall population figures for Muslims in China are elusive and vary according to source. According to PRC government sources, about 2% of China's approximately 1.3 billion people are classified as Muslim (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/ch.html>). That would make the overall Muslim population of the PRC somewhere around 20-25 million, though some non-governmental estimates reach upwards of 50 or even 100 million.

migration and intermarriage with non-Muslim Chinese. These people, called the Hui and categorized officially by the Communist government as one of the minority nationalities of the People's Republic, exhibit great diversity in terms of religious practice and integration into the cultural mainstream of Han Chinese society.**

Tracing the historical pattern of Chinese Muslim naturalization under rival pressures leads us to examine cultural and intellectual trends among a highly assimilated Chinese Muslim intellectual elite of the 17th–18th centuries, who attempted to express the teachings of Islam in the classical Chinese idiom of Neo-Confucianism. The period was marked socio-politically by the transition from the toppled Ming dynasty (1368-1644), a native Chinese regime, to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), established by Manchurian invaders from the North.

Muslims in the Early Qing

The second Manchu dynast, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722), sought to establish political hegemony and assert the new dynasty's cultural legitimacy for disparate constituencies. The Emperor and his successors strove to project an image of culturally coherent sovereignty, despite their foreign origins, over an ethnically diverse empire, held together by traditional Confucian ideas of moral order. This socio-political situation provided an opportunity for other communities in China to follow the Manchu example. Among them, Chinese Muslims expressed their beliefs and collective identity as being not only unthreatening to Chinese culture and society, but, moreover, completely consonant with the teachings and values of the dominant

**The Hui are one of ten Muslim minority nationalities (*Shaoshu Minzu*) in the PRC. The others (Uighur, Kazak, Dongxiang, Kirghiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Bonan, and Tatar), are not ethno-linguistically Chinese; they all speak Turkic (or other Altaic) languages. According to Chinese census statistics, approximately 91.5% of China's people are members of the Han majority nationality, leaving all minorities to round out the population at 8.5%. Of the official estimate of 20-25 million Muslims, nearly half are Hui with an estimated 45% comprised of the Uighur population, and roughly 5% belonging to other Muslim minority nationalities. While those proportions are credible, the overall number of Muslims in the PRC is disputed.

Confucian intellectual and cultural paradigm. In this way, the early Qing period witnessed a great flourishing of Chinese Islamic literature and communal pride among the more assimilated Muslim communities of central and eastern China.

Chinese Muslim scholars, beginning in the late Ming and continuing into the early Qing period, produced a body of literature collectively called the *Han Kitab*, a name that evokes both sides of their dual heritage: the Chinese word *Han*, referring to the Chinese language, and the Arabic word *Kitab*, meaning “book”. Quite aptly, the term refers to a literary corpus devoted to explicating Islamic belief and practice in classical Chinese, highly evocative of and influenced by Confucian thought. The *Han Kitab* literature was intended for a dual audience: first Sinicized (and Sinophone) Muslims and then curious non-Muslim literati. Their use of Neo-Confucianism to translate the tenets of Islam reflects the authors’, and their primary audience’s ethnic and cultural simultaneity.

Many of the *Han Kitab* authors were politically astute and sensitive to the interests of their community. Muslims in China, then as now, have lived under non-Muslim jurisdiction, free to apply Islamic law within the usages of individual or communal religious practices, as far as government indulgence would allow. Yet obedience to government regulations was motivated not only by fear of reprisals for disobedience or loss of religious rights. Muslims who have regarded China as their home have also assimilated the traditional Chinese reverence for state authority. The Chinese Muslim literati shied away from discussing potentially controversial subjects, focusing instead on topics that were easily aligned with mainstream Chinese culture and could help grant legitimacy to Islam. One of the major topics on which they focused was the origin of Islam in China, which they recounted in narratives that explained and justified the existence of their community. One such narrative highlights the *Han Kitab* view of the position of Islam *vis-à-vis* imperial authority.

The *locus classicus* of this origin narrative is a 17th century work called the *Huihui Yuanlai*, or “The Origin of the Muslims,”

attributed to Liu Sanjie. It recounts a story involving the Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649) of the Tang dynasty (618-906), who had a dream in which a monstrous entity threatened his realm. In the dream, the Emperor beheld a bearded, turbaned man who was able to quell the monster. The Emperor's advisors told him that the dream depicted a great "Sage" in the West. The Emperor dispatched emissaries to fetch the Sage and bring him back to China. The Sage, none other than the Prophet Muhammad, declined to go to China himself, but sent a delegation led by his close companion (and maternal uncle), Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. According to the Chinese Muslim tradition, the Prophet's delegation remained in China, where they served the Emperor and helped pacify the Tang Empire. The historicity of this oft-repeated Chinese Muslim legend is highly doubtful, yet its mythic message is clear: Muslims were sent to China on a divine mission, and by remaining there have contributed to the peace and prosperity of the country. As Liu Sanjie writes: "We have dwelt peacefully in China and have brought perpetual tranquility. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the Emperor of the Tang for his ritual solemnity and proper treatment; even today we safeguard the state, without moving anymore."¹

The *Han Kitab* literature reflects a positive attitude towards imperial authority. Liu Zhu (ca. 1660 – ca. 1730), son of Liu Sanjie and the most prolific *Han Kitab* author, in his renowned work on Islamic ritual law, the *Tianfang Dianli*, affirms a simultaneous allegiance to the ideals of the Confucian social hierarchy and the duties of Islam, which he presents as being synonymous:

This is the Teaching of the Five Ethical Relationships. In Islam, they are also called the "Five Accomplishments." Now, the proper relationship between sovereign and subject completes the state... When these Five Standards are completely cultivated the Way of Man is made complete.²

For the Muslim literati of China, an integral part of one's religious duties was obedience to a righteous ruler. According to this

view, Chinese Muslims were obligated to show loyalty and obedience to the Emperor.

In terms of honoring the throne, Liu Sanjie actually mentions the Kangxi emperor in the *Huihui Yuanlai*. He frames the story of the Tang Emperor's dream within another story about a meeting between the Kangxi emperor and a Muslim general, Ma Jinliang. As the story goes, the emperor was returning from one of his imperial tours of inspection and stopped overnight at the general's headquarters. The two men spent the evening discussing Confucian philosophy. The emperor then questioned the general about his religion, asking him why his ancestors had first come to China. The general had to confess his ignorance of this history. The emperor responded by handing him a book about Islam.³

The Kangxi emperor is depicted as both cultured and learned in the Chinese tradition, a tacit endorsement of state orthodoxy. The Emperor is also shown to be a ruler concerned with the affairs of his people and sensitive to the diversity of cultures in his realm, even an advocate for Islamic learning among his Muslim subjects. Again, the historicity of this encounter between the Kangxi Emperor and General Ma is doubtful,⁴ yet the story's portrayal of the emperor is based on historical realities, like the fact that he was known to have amassed a collection of foreign religious texts.⁵

An astute politician, the Kangxi emperor was well aware of the value of maintaining good political relations with friendly Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims on the western frontier of the expanding Qing Empire. It was from among the Muslim population in the vicinity of Hami, Turkestan, that the early Qing rulers "drew the additional military strength to conquer and control Central Asia," particularly to wrest it from the grasp of the Mongol Khan, Galdan.⁶ The Kangxi emperor did not underestimate the value of Muslim cooperation, nor the potential for Muslim unrest; anti-Qing hostility had plagued the dynasty soon after its establishment, and would again be a source of trouble for Kangxi's successors as they tried to exercise control over the Turkic Muslim-dominated lands in present day Xinjiang

Province. Thus, the attitude of the Kangxi court towards Muslims in the realm alternated between paternalistic solicitude and cautious circumspection.

From 1646-1648, Muslim rebellion in Gansu province had threatened the nascent dynasty's territorial integrity under Kangxi's father, the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644-1661). Consequently, the Kangxi emperor inherited a persistent concern over the outbreak of Han-Hui quarrels that could destabilize frontier territories. This concern helped shape early Qing ethnic and religious policies, as summarized by historian Donald Leslie: "Autocratic rule was to be tempered by imperial benevolence; and religious freedom was allowed so long as it did not interfere with good order and obedience to the state."⁷

The Kangxi emperor was sophisticated in his understanding of ethnic politics, and did not make the mistake of painting all Muslims with the same brush. Chinese Muslims were to be distinguished from the Turkic Muslims, most notably the Uighurs, who resided on the Central Asian frontier. (Indeed, even today, the ethnic Chinese Hui commonly distinguish themselves from these Turkic Muslims, whom they regard as un-Chinese, unruly, even uncivilized despite their common bond of Islam.) But even among Sinophone Muslims, there were distinctions; Chinese Muslims in Gansu and other western provinces were far less Sinicized than those living in central and eastern provinces, the cultural heart of China. The emperor was able to discern a difference between "good" and "bad" Muslims. And the highly urbane, acculturated *Han Kitab* literati assisted in the promotion and maintenance of their positive image by flattering the throne and supporting the regime, as in this passage from a preface by Yang Peilu to Liu Zhi's *Tianfang Dianli*, in which he praises the Kangxi emperor's handling of the annexation of Hami:

The sage Son of Heaven has presided over the Empire for forty-eight years.⁸ Virtue covers the realm, benefiting areas both inside and outside China. The Emperor first installed a ruler in Hami, thereby giving

that country a new lease on life...our Emperor's way of showing kindness to people from far-off lands...Thus, it may be said that Muslim people heard about and admired the Emperor's reputation for righteousness...⁹

Evidence of the Kangxi emperor's tolerant disposition towards his law-abiding Muslim subjects comes from various sources. First, we see from his personal writings that he was aware of Islam as one of many faiths in the world and of Muslims as one people among many:

Every country must have some spirits that it reveres. This is true for our dynasty, as for Mongols or Mohammedans, Miao or Lolo, or other foreigners. Just as everyone fears something, some snakes but not toads, some toads but not snakes; and as all countries have different pronunciations and different alphabets:¹⁰

An Imperial Edict dated 1694, prominently displayed on a plaque at the Niujie (Ox Street) Mosque in Beijing, reveals the Kangxi Emperor to have been rather well informed about his Muslim subjects:

We have reviewed the great customs and classics of the Han and Hui people, from ancient times until today, and have found that from the beginning they are both on the magnificent Way. (By contrast) the seventy-two sects have been cultivating Immortality or striving to become Buddhas,¹¹ corrupting the truth and leading people astray, with lawless heterodoxies of all kinds springing up all over. What has already passed we shall not prosecute, but in the future, the violators will be summarily executed. The Han Chinese ministers and officials all have their allotted duties and from time to time enjoy the benevolence of the Sovereign,¹² participating in the affairs of court according to the

calendar. On the other hand, the Hui face their Lord and do obeisance to their Sage five times everyday, and certainly do not enjoy subsidies from us, and yet they still know to give honor where honor is due.¹³ And so the Han are not as good as the Hui. Let this be known in every province: If any officials or common people, due to a petty grudge, use some pretext falsely to accuse the Hui religion of plotting a rebellion, the official in charge will execute them first and report to me afterwards. Throughout the realm, the Hui people shall abide by the principles of Purity and Truth, nor would they disobey a command or betray our kind intentions and appreciation of the significance of the Way.

Respect this and comply.¹⁴

While this proclamation can hardly be compared to Constantine the Great's Edict of Milan, and was not even momentous enough in the context of Chinese history to have received much attention in official Qing sources, it was nevertheless of great significance to Chinese Muslims. This is why the community around the Niujie Mosque displayed the plaque so prominently. While all Qing "emperors from 1644 to 1781 issued occasional decrees in favor of Muslims,"¹⁵ these were mostly political proclamations, which rarely made mention of Muslim subjects in such flattering terms. In this regard, the 1694 edict has a couple of precedents from the Ming period. In 1407, the Yongle emperor (r. 1403-1425) issued a decree protecting the Muslims of Quanzhou, Fujian province, threatening those who would "maltreat, insult, cheat or bully" them with severe punishment.¹⁶ However, this decree was issued mostly as a personal favor to his close advisor, the Muslim admiral Zheng He, and it did not reflect any special understanding of Islamic teachings. By contrast, an edict of the Zhengde emperor (r. 1506-1521) praised the "teaching of the Pure and True" (*Qingzhenjiao*, i.e., Islam) for its superiority to Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism in its ability fully to

integrate social and spiritual concerns. However, the edict did not address the place of Muslims in Chinese society *per se*.¹⁷

The Kangxi edict addressed both social and doctrinal matters, demonstrating the emperor's knowledge of Islamic belief and practice as well as his determination to protect the lives and well being of Chinese Muslims. Yet one should not infer that he felt a strong personal affinity to Islamic doctrine or Muslim culture. The edict was surely motivated in part by the need to "juggle constituencies," pitting rival groups against one another as part of early Qing ethnic politics. We may glean from the wording of the edict strong political motivations, probably more concerned with checking the power of Han Chinese officials than elevating the status of Muslims.

The pro-Muslim edict of 1694 probably had very little impact outside the capital. However, the value of this imperial nod in their direction was understandably of great significance to Chinese Muslims, explaining why a tradition of folklore has developed around it. A local Beijing legend tells of how the Capital Prosecutor witnessed what he considered to be strange behavior in the Muslim quarter: throngs of people gathering at night in the mosque. Because this kind of activity was usually associated with seditious, heterodox sects, he concluded that the congregants were up to no good. He supposed that reporting his observation to the emperor would earn him merit at court. His report alleged that the Muslims were plotting a rebellion, inspired by their devotion to a foreign god, under the leadership of the mysterious Muhammad. Sufficiently concerned, the emperor, who was known to disguise himself in commoner's clothes to venture out of the Forbidden City, decided to visit the Niuji district to investigate the charges himself. Upon entering the mosque, he learned that the Muslims were celebrating Ramadan and were gathering for prayer and nothing else. Soon thereafter, he dismissed the official who made the complaint and issued the edict. He reportedly presented a souvenir of his visit (a sedan chair and/or bell) to the Muslim community; he also sponsored the renovation of the Niuji Mosque two years later in 1696.

This legend may be based on actual events, which are chronicled in an essay about Qing government policy towards Muslims by Li Xinghua.¹⁸ If so, it portrays the extent to which the early Qing rulers, especially the Kangxi emperor, regarded the Muslims as an important political constituency. Moreover, the fact that the story is so widely disseminated among and oft repeated by Chinese Muslims reflects how important it was to their own sense of legitimacy. The edict has provided two important affirmations for the Muslims: that they are not a heterodox threat to Confucian orthodoxy and civil society, and that their existence in China is valid and valuable. That the Kangxi emperor would deign to visit the mosque and then proclaim the virtues of Islam was precisely the kind of official recognition that Chinese Muslims increasingly sought in order to confirm their legitimacy and secure a safe position within Chinese society, even as popular sentiment among many Han officials and laypeople remained less friendly.

The search for a safe niche within society by acculturated Chinese Muslims was necessary because they lived as a minority amidst a majority that did not perceive them as fully Chinese. Popular prejudices maintained an undercurrent of anti-Muslim bias that exists in China even today. The official views held by the various governments have tended to be more nuanced, but among Chinese officials there have always been suspicions of sedition on the part of ethnic minorities, and even more so on the part of non-Confucian (or today non-Communist) religious communities, whose unusual beliefs and customs have been thought to carry a threat to moral order and state authority.

The Kangxi Edict of 1694 is one of the clearest expressions of the early Qing official policy on Islam, which was tolerant yet insistent on civil order and state orthodoxy. This stern demand for order, tempered by paternalistic benevolence has been succinctly paraphrased: “‘They are our children’—but they had better obey the law!”¹⁹ The edict shows that Chinese Muslims during this period were afforded considerable rights under the aegis of the emperor, who wisely discerned between unwarranted anti-Muslim prejudice and persecution by local

officials on the one hand, and genuine threats to state stability represented by disobedience on the other.

The Kangxi emperor's policy of distinguishing among constituencies and offering benevolence in exchange for obedience makes obvious political sense in a multicultural empire ruled by an ethnic minority dynasty. Thus, it became the model for Kangxi's immediate successors. His son, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722-1735), issued four edicts concerning Muslims from 1724-1730, and while they may not have been very flattering of Islam, which he said "offers nothing worthwhile," he still maintained that "there is no reason to forbid or drive [it] out."²⁰ In 1729, his edict averred that the "Hui people...are all children of our country" and "cannot be regarded as separate. As long as they peacefully keep their customs, they are not to be compared with traitors, lawbreakers or those seeking to delude and lead people astray."²¹ A 1730 edict recognized the merits of good Muslim subjects: "There is no lack among them of loyal servants of the country," but it also warned that if "the Hui people indeed transgress, laws and statutes exist under which they will certainly be punished."²²

The limits of imperial tolerance were tested under the Qianlong emperor (1736-1796), whose reign implemented a military occupation of Xinjiang and put down significant Muslim-led rebellions in the 1780s. In the midst of the rebellions, the emperor made a sweeping generalization about Muslims in an edict declaring, "These sort of people put violence before everything and have no loyalty to the state."²³ A 1781 edict took a more nuanced stance, returning to the Kangxi-era distinction between lawless and law-abiding subjects, describing the Muslims of the Chinese interior (as distinguished from those in Xinjiang) as "being really no different from the native [Han] inhabitants. There are good and bad among them."²⁴ A 1782 edict warned of overly constraining Chinese Muslims in the practice of their religion, and expressing sensitivity to the condition of "good" Muslim subjects: "If there is excessive inquisition and interference, then law abiding Hui people will be

deprived of peace of mind,” potentially leading to “immense trouble.”²⁵

The Qianlong court, obviously aware of the need for a nuanced policy, recognized the differences among various Muslim groups. We should note that the Muslim rebellions against the Qing dynasty of the late 18th and 19th centuries in northwestern China were largely based on local disputes, sometimes among Muslims (both Hui and Uighur) and sometimes between Muslims and non-Muslims. When Muslims rose up against imperial authority, it was often because they felt bullied by local officials who abused their authority to side with local non-Muslims in acts of anti-Islamic bias. Even in these latter conflicts, Muslims could often be found siding with the authorities against other Muslims. So we must not imagine a unified Islamic front against the regime, nor should we forget that most of the disputes at the heart of the rebellions were based on local economic and civil issues.

Muslims and the State in Post-Dynastic China

In the 20th century, after the fall of the Qing dynasty and the restoration of Han rule, the Republic of China followed the Kangxi emperor’s policy of recognizing the importance of Muslim contribution to China when the government included the Hui (along with the Han, Manchurians, Mongolians and Tibetans) among the core peoples of the new republic. The People’s Republic’s ethnic policies are far more complex, and at their inception were largely based on categories and ideas borrowed from Stalin’s Soviet Union. The PRC Constitution, which articulates the equality of all of China’s nationalities, was also modeled after the 1936 Soviet Constitution. However, it contains one important difference directly related to ethnic policy: the Soviet Constitution (on paper, at least) gave republics the right of secession, whereas the PRC Constitution strictly forbids it. As Article 4 explicitly states:

The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the

relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.***

The emphasis on obedience to the law and acquiescence to government authority is unequivocal.

Similarly, with regard to religion, the PRC Constitution guarantees religious freedom to its citizens. Just as in imperial times when "virtually all...Sino-Muslims...shared a strong sense of *belonging* in China and of the Qing state's legitimacy,"²⁶ most Hui today understand that their fortunes are inextricably bound to those of mainstream Han society. For the protection of their religious rights, they rely most on Article 36 of the Constitution:

No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state.

It has therefore behooved Chinese Muslims to make sure that their customs be perceived as "normal religious activities,"

*** The question of secession is not applicable to the Hui, though it is especially germane to the situation of the Uighurs of Xinjiang, whose population (like the Tibetans) includes significant separatist factions seeking independence from the PRC. Many of these factions are secular, though some are religious, with connections to militant Islamist movements in neighboring countries, including Afghanistan. After September 11, 2001, the PRC government embraced the language of the "global war on terror" in order to justify cracking down on Uighur separatists, who are portrayed in the Chinese media as terrorists.

A number of Uighur Chinese citizens were taken into U.S. custody in Afghanistan and have been held at Guantanamo Bay. Today, the question of their fate, whether or not the U.S. can return them to Chinese jurisdiction, where they will almost certainly face capital punishment as traitors, continues to be debated.

a euphemism for toeing the party line, obeying the law and otherwise avoiding actions deemed threatening to national unity and state stability.

Since the Constitution was first ratified in 1954 and then updated in 1982, there has been very little change in the language outlining official PRC policy on religion. With specific regard to Islam and Muslims, the Communist government has proudly publicized gestures of tolerance and benevolence in a series of White Papers over the past two decades, including how many mosques are maintained in the country; how many government-trained imams are serving; and, especially, how many Chinese Muslims have been permitted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca each year.²⁷ Such statistics are certainly intended to promote good will among China's Muslim population, but also have value beyond China's borders. Celebration of Beijing's generosity to its Muslim citizens is also used to impress foreign Islamic nations, including regimes that supply oil necessary to China's economic growth, with the picture that the PRC treats its Muslims well and respects Islam.

Both the Constitution and White Papers dealing with matters of religion and minority rights affirm religious tolerance within a context of tight government control. Even when specific language intended to show the government's appreciation of each religious community's distinctiveness is invoked, it is overshadowed by platitudes asserting the duty of each community to subjugate its beliefs and practices to the interests of the state:

It is traditional for Chinese religious believers to love their country and religions. The Chinese government supports and encourages the religious circles to unite the religious believers to actively participate in the construction of the country. The various religions all advocate serving the society and promoting the people's well-being, such as...Islam's "praying to Allah to give great reward in this world and hereafter."²⁸

Conclusion

The laws and policy statements of the PRC follow the tradition of imperial edicts of the Ming and Qing dynasties in their praise of Islam and defense of Muslims from bigotry. However, as in late imperial China, the promise of tolerance and protection under the law comes at the price of submission, first to the state and then to Allah. Hong Yang, a Ningxia-based imam under the jurisdiction of the state-run, Communist Party-affiliated China Islamic Association describes the degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Chinese Muslims: “We’re only free to practice within the boundaries set by Chinese law and policy...But we don’t want to overstep those limits, as that might create conflict and instability for the whole society.” Of his own role, he adds, “If I can serve as a bridge between the government and the people, then that’s a good thing for everyone.”²⁹ Just as official statements from the PRC government echo imperial edicts, so too do the words of a Communist-sanctioned imam echo the tenor of the Confucianized *Han Kitab* authors in their attempt at rapprochement.

In light of the patterns we observe in both the historical and contemporary situation of Muslims in Chinese society, we see that the story of Chinese Islam cannot simply be told in the dichotomous language of conflict versus concord. To provide a fuller understanding of this binary, other binaries are helpful, such as the tension of an ethno-religious minority’s struggle between cultural assimilation and the maintenance of its distinct identity. And as we have seen, this struggle has been shaped by the dispensation of reward and punishment by autocratic regimes, past and present. The “conflict or concord” binary, while genuine, has largely been determined by the top-down transaction of benevolence in exchange for obedience. In the ongoing relationship of Chinese Muslims to state authority, concord prevails when socio-political interests overlap, and conflict erupts when they do not.

Endnotes

- ¹Ma, Kuangyuan. *Huizu wenhua lunji*. Kunming: Chinese Literary Union, 1998, p. 53.
- ²Liu, Zhi. *Tianfang dianli zeyao jie*. Reprint, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Muslim Propagation Society, 1971, p. 7.
- ³Ma Kuangyuan, *Huizu wenhua lunji*, p. 53; translated in Broomhall, Marshall. *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*. London: Darf, 1987, pp. 63-4.
- ⁴Leslie, Donald. *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*. Canberra: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986, p. 119, *op. cit.*
- ⁵Spence, Jonathan D. *Emperor of China: Self Portrait of K'ang-Hsi*. New York: Knopf, 1974, p. 123.
- ⁶Crossley, Pamela Kyle. *The Manchus*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 98, 100, 107.
- ⁷Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p. 122.
- ⁸This preface was, therefore, written in the forty-eighth year of the reign of the Kangxi emperor, 1710.
- ⁹Yang Peilu, "Yang Xu," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang Dianli*, p. a7.
- ¹⁰Spence, *Emperor of China*, pp. 80-1.
- ¹¹This is obviously a general description of the practices of the Daoists and Buddhists.
- ¹²This implies that they receive their wages from the court.
- ¹³Literally, this sentence means that they know to recompense the source, a term usually applied to parents or the sovereign.
- ¹⁴Wang, Xia, ed. *Beijing Niujie Libaisi*. Beijing: China Today Press, 1996, p.40.
- ¹⁵Ben-Dor, Zvi. "The 'Dao of Muhammad': Scholarship, Education, and Chinese Muslim Literati Identity in Late Imperial China." Ph.D. Dissertation, UC Los Angeles, 2000. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2000. 9973172., p. 290.
- ¹⁶This decree, dated June 16, 1407, and signed by the Emperor, appears on a stone tablet outside the Ashab mosque in Quanzhou (See Levathes, Louise. *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-33*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994., p. 148).

- ¹⁷ The edict is quoted in Liu, *Zhi Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu*. Beijing: Chinese Islamic Society Press, 1984., p. 358, and cited by Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p. 114.
- ¹⁸ See Li Xinghua, “*Qingdai Zhengfu dui Yisilanjiao*,” in Yang, Huaizhong, ed. *Qingdai Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Lunji* . Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 1981, pp. 1-8.
- ¹⁹ Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p.122.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- ²⁶ Lipman, Jonathan Neaman. *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1997, p. 132.
- ²⁷ “Freedom of Religious Belief in China,” October 1997. (<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-5.htm>)
- ²⁸ *Ibid.* (<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-1.htm>)
- ²⁹ Lim, Louisa, “Chinese Muslims Forge Isolated Path.” Ningxia: BBC, September 15, 2004. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3656180.stm>)