Islam in China

Lena Scheen

Terrorism, war, refugees, niqab, Syria, ISIS or Daesh. It is hard to find a recent newspaper article on Islam that does not contain one of these words. But how often do we read about the twenty-five million Muslims living in China? Ever since the first Muslim traders arrived in the Chinese Empire over 1400 years ago, Muslims have played an important role in Chinese history. For this first issue of China Connections—a series on China’s role to the world and hosted by the Asia Research Center (ARC-FD) at Fudan University and the Global Asia Center (GCA) at NYU Shanghai—we invited four scholars to write about their research on Islam in China. Together they explore questions such as: Why did the Qianlong Emperor issue an imperial edict to conduct an empire-wide investigation of Hui Muslim communities in 1781? How did a small town in Yunnan Province become a center for Islamic learning? And how do its current residents deal with the haunting ghosts of 1600 Muslims killed in 1975? How does institutionalization play a role in the unification of the spatially dispersed and ethnically diverse Chinese Muslim communities? And how does a Chinese Muslim studying in Egypt experience the Arab Spring? It is through these stories of cultural exchange, conflict, and integration that we hope to provide a deeper, more layered understanding of Islam today.

ON 29 MAY 1781, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-95) of China issued an imperial edict to conduct an empire-wide investigation of Hui communities. The order was in response to the ‘Fanhui’ rebellion (also known as the ‘Salar Rebellion’) by the Hui minority in Gansu province. It was immediately passed down to the lowest levels of Qing government and detailed reports were sent to the governors or governor-generals of the eighteen provinces (‘China proper’) for investigation and then made known to the Emperor. The results of the investigation provided the Qing state with a renewed understanding of the Hui landscape of its empire and constituted the basis for future policymaking towards the Hui.

The ‘Fanhui’ rebellion was inspired by Ma Mingxin (1719-81), a native of Gansu and a Sufi leader who had introduced the ‘new teaching’ to the region following his return from several years of study of Jakafi Sufi practices in Yemen. In a simplistic view, ‘Fan’ is a term often associated with non-Han populations neighboring ‘China proper’, while the term ‘Fanhui’ in this context mainly refers to the Salar, a Turkic Muslim group in Gansu. The introduction of new elements into Islam triggered dissent and even violence among adherents of different and competing Islamic teachings. However, the prime cause of open conflict between the new-teaching ‘Fanhui’ and the Qing state was the Qing state’s inconsistent legal implementations and misconceptions over peoples classification during the transitional period when the regions that used to be ‘Fan’ were becoming an administratively part of ‘China proper’ as a result of the QIng westward expansion in the eighteenth century.

After the rebellion, the ‘new teaching’ was labeled as a ‘heterodox teaching’ (huaxiao) by the Qing state. On 29 June 1781, the Qianlong emperor issued another imperial edict in order not to cause further disturbances. During the investigation, anyone involved with the ‘new teaching’ would be seized immediately, interrogated strictly by provincial governors or governor-generals in person, and punished severely. Under this climate of suspicion, the investigators devised and deployed various strategies to access and probe into the Hui communities. For example, a Governor of Henan province selected local officials who, dressed in Muslim attire, had to go undercover among the Hui community. In another instance, a Governor-general of Shunian brought in for interrogation as many as nineteen senior Hui residents from the provincial capital and its suburbs and four ‘headmen’ (xiangbao) selected by local officials and responsible for maintaining public safety as well as managing secular matters. Secret investigations into various Hui communities throughout the province were made afterwards to testify their testimonies.

The main goal of the edict was to find out whether there existed any positions or titles such as ‘imam’ (zongzhangjiao) and ‘imam-superior’ (zongzhangjiao) among the Hui communities, and, if so, to abolish them in an effort to prevent further disturbances. During the investigation, the Hui in ‘China proper’ turned out to be mostly peaceful, law-abiding, and not infected by the ‘new teaching’. This little-studied yet pivotal episode opens a rare window onto the Hui landscape in Qing China and offers a unique insight into the ways in which the Qing state perceived, identified, and managed the Hui. One striking feature found in the official reports is that, not distinguished from the Han, the Hui were all registered as ‘commoners’ (man or qingren) into the boojie system, an instrument of social ordering implemented by the Qing. However, although the Hui and the Han fell under the same legal category, by employing various investigative methods, Qing investigators still found their ways to single out and identify the Hui, evident by the number of Hui households and mosques they kept record of in their reports. In the very process of exhaustively searching for and recording the quantities of Hui households and mosques at every corner of ‘China proper’, the Qing state envisioned the Hui communities in its various provinces as belonging to a same group, one that the state could keep monitoring ever since.

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References

1. “Boojie was a system under which households were regimented into nested decimal groupings of ten, one hundred, and so on for purposes of assigning collective responsibility in public security and other matters and for fixing personal responsibility for the group on a single ‘headman’ at each level of the hierarchy.” Rowe, W.T. 2001. Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 388.
CONFERENCES IN CHINA

Qiaowei WEI (the challenge of vanishing heritage in our globalizing world. The audience was given the opportunity to engage with these famous archaeologists, Lothar von Falkenhausen, and Colin Renfrew, to share their experiences on archaeology with students, and the general public. After the public lectures, the audience was given the chance to ask questions about the latest research and developments in the field.

The Shanghai Archaeology Forum, which takes its mission to “Concentrate on Asia, Focus on Hot Issues, Congregate Elites, Promote Interactions, Enhance Cooperation and Seek Consensus” seriously. It endeavors to build an interactive platform for multi-sided communication amongst academic, political, commercial, and press circles that will exchange significant problems both in Asia and the world will be discussed comprehensively and profoundly, so as to seek consensus on Asia’s economic, political, and cultural issues. Shanghai Forum opens application to the world. Many well-known think tanks, universities, media and other organizations apply to host roundtables every year.

Over the years, numerous political dignitaries, distinguished scholars, and business leaders have been invited to share their thoughts and wisdom at Shanghai Forum, including Chen Zhili (former Vice Chairman of the NPC of China), Cheng Swee (former Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC of China), Lee Kuan Yew (former Prime Minister of Singapore), Han Seung-soo (former Prime Minister of Republic of Korea), Shaukat Aziz (former Prime Minister of Pakistan), Robert Alexander Mundell (known as the “Father” of the Euro, 1999 Nobel Laureate in Economics), Robert Shiller (2013 Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics), Vladimir Yakunin (President of the Russian Railways), and Robert Zoellick (former President of the World Bank Group). Shanghai Forum also receives strong support from the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the Shanghai Municipal Government.

Shanghai Archaeology Forum

13-17 December 2015, Shanghai
http://shanghai-archaeology-forum.org/

The Shanghai Archaeology Forum (SAF) is a global initiative dedicated to promoting the protection, preservation and utilization of the world’s archaeological resources and heritage. The 2015 SAF was co-organized by the Shanghai Academy, the Institute of Archaeology at CASS, Shanghai Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage, and Shanghai University. The forum aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of the field of archaeology and the protection of cultural heritage for our common future. To celebrate the excellence of the participants and their work, the SAF Awards were presented to those individuals and organizations that have achieved distinction by making major discoveries and establishing innovative, creative and productive work in the past three years. The World Archaeology Keynote Lecture Series presented case studies illustrating key issues such as diverse forms of extraction and cultural identity, the complexities and ambiguities of cultural identities and power relations, the active roles of indigenous agencies, practice and ideology in structuring colonial interaction, cultural persistence and the importance of historical contingency and local context.

The Public Archaeology Lecture Series promoted public awareness and knowledge of the ever-increasing wealth of archaeological finds. The Public Archaeology Lecture Series invited three important archaeologists, Charles Higham, Lothar von Falkenhausen, and Colin Renfrew, to share their experiences on archaeology with students, and the general public. After the public lectures, the audience was given the opportunity to engage with the archaeologists, discussing archaeological findings, as well as their concerns on the appreciation and protection of cultural diversity and the challenge of preserving heritage in our globalizing world.

Shafhian’s Muslim communities and trans-local connectivities: observations from the field

Hyeju (Janice) JEOG

I REACHED SHADIAN TOWN after a three hour drive from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, China. As I stepped out of the car in the chill of a late November night, the site of Shadian’s magnificent Grand Mosque and the call to night prayers reminded me that I was in a zone quite different from Kunming.

Shadian has ten mosques, with the Grand Mosque - modelled after the Great Mosque in Medina - completed in 2009 - as its symbol. Almost ninety percent of Shadian’s fifteen thousand residents is Muslims, belonging to the minority Hui community. However, Shadian is also known for the so-called Shadian Incident of 1975, in which villagers forcefully opened closed-down mosques during the last years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This ‘incident’ killed 1,600 people at the hands of the People’s Liberation Army. “The old Islamic schools in Shadian used to have various literary, ritualistic, and educational institutions, but everything has been burned,” lamented my informant, Mr. Ma. Across the Mosque was the Islamic Culture and Arts Center that exhibits and sells Xin-Sino-Islamic artworks. Within a few blocks of the Grand Mosque, one sees a mix of forward-looking aspirations and painful memories, reflecting a continuous history of repression and resilience in Islam in China.

Shadian’s trans-local networks in history

Islam in Yunnan expanded during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), when Sayyid Ajjal Shams al-Din from Bukhara (current Uzbekistan) was appointed as the provincial governor, promoting both Islamic and Confucian institutions. According to Mr. Ma, “he also built aqueducts, without him you would not see present-day Yunnan”. Following waves of Muslim settlement into the town since the thirteenth century, Shadian became a part of caravan trade routes between Yunnan and Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and India. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, trade became so important that, just before the Chinese communist victory of 1949, around 700 out of Shadian’s 980 families, had two to three horses conducting commerce across northern Thailand and Myanmar.

In the first half of the 20th century, Shadian also emerged as a significant center for Islamic learning. For example, of the thirty-three students from China who studied in Cairo’s al-Azhar University in the 1930s and 1940s, five came from Shadian alone. They were heavily sponsored by Bai Liangcheng (白亮诚, 1893-1965). A scholar and an official, Bai Liangcheng founded the Yufeng Elementary School in 1914, one Islamic Girls School, and several Islamic periodicals. The old Yufeng Elementary School now displays an exhibition on Bai Liangcheng and Shadian’s notable Muslims. Here I learned that Bai also initiated industrialized tea commerce based in Yunnan’s tea-rich regions. Two lines of imported technology and machinery from Japan and India, he constructed a large-scale tea factory, creating more local jobs and producing of the most famous international forums held in Shanghai. The forum aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of the field of archaeology and the protection of cultural heritage for our common future. To celebrate the excellence of the participants and their work, the SAF Awards were presented to those individuals and organizations that have achieved distinction by making major discoveries and establishing innovative, creative and productive work in the past three years. The World Archaeology Keynote Lecture Series presented case studies illustrating key issues such as diverse forms of extraction and cultural identity, the complexities and ambiguities of cultural identities and power relations, the active roles of indigenous agencies, practice and ideology in structuring colonial interaction, cultural persistence and the importance of historical contingency and local context.

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References


Islam in contemporary China: an overview

Juming WANG

CHINA IS HOME to a large Muslim population. According to the Islamic Association of China, the country has over 25 million Muslims, 40,000 mosques and more than 50,000 Madhahib, a Persian term for the Islamic clerics who serve the scattered communities all over the country. Every year, more than 10,000 Muslims make their pilgrimage to Mecca, while - over the past thirty years - nearly 12,000 Muslim students have completed their Islamic studies abroad and another 100,000 have studied Islam in the modras (religious school) in China. All these figures show that Islam has undergone a revival since the late 1970s. In just thirty years’ time, it has transformed from an underground religion into an Arab-style religion that is officially recognized as one of the five religions in China (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism). Whether wearing their long robes, turbans, or hijabs, Muslims can be found all over China, from the big cities of Beijing and Shanghai to the island of Hainan, from Inner Mongolia in the north to Yunnan in the south, from the western border of Tibet to the eastern coastal region. However, more than half of the Muslim population lives in Northwest China, particularly in the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, the vast region where 23,000 mosques serve 6 million Muslims, including Uygur, Kazak, Kirghiz, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Salar, Hui, Dongxiang, and Ba’er. Islam is also flourishing in the academic world: there are more than sixty Islamic periodicals, Muslim professors and scholars teach and research Islam in various universities or research institutions, and many conferences, workshops and forums on Islam are held all over China, often sponsored and organized by Muslim elites.

The three pillars of the Islamic network in China

However, although China has more Muslims than any Arab country, they are in fact still a vulnerable minority in Han-dominated China. While Muslims profit from government policies giving preferential treatment to ethnic minorities (‘affirmative action’) and officially enjoy freedom of religious practice, they are supervised carefully and restrictions remain in place over the activities of mosques, religious ceremonies, religious organizations, etc. In order to maintain their Islamic tradition and to uphold their monotheistic identity, it is important for the widely dispersed Muslim elites to build a strong network in and outside of China. Three Islamic institutions form the backbone of this network. Firstly, the mosque plays a central role in the Chinese Muslim community. Besides its religious function as a place of worship and prayer, it also serves as an educational center, and a focal point for the spread of the Islamic faith through sermons, seminars, and classes. Secondly, the school (madrasa) inroads into the audience who needs them the most.

1. The Newsletter

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China Connections continued

Shanghai Forum

28-30 May 2016, Shanghai
http://www.shanghaiforum.fudan.edu.cn/en

The Shanghai Forum, launched in 2005, is known as one of the most famous international forums held in Shanghai. Co-hosted by Fudan University and Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, and undertaken by Fudan Development Institute (FDI), the Forum is a non-governmental and non-profit academic organization, which holds an annual symposium each May in Shanghai. This year's theme was “Economic Globalization and Asia’s Choice – Interconnectivity, Integration and Innovation: Building Community of Common Destiny in Asia.”

Shanghai Forum aims to invite three important archaeologists, Charles Higham, Colin Renfrew, to share their experiences on archaeology with students, and the general public. After the public lectures, the audience was given the opportunity to engage with these famous archaeologists, Lothar von Falkenhausen, and Colin Renfrew, to share their experiences on archaeology with students, and the general public. After the public lectures, the audience was given the opportunity to engage with the archaeologists, discussing archaeological findings, as well as their concerns on the appreciation and protection of cultural diversity and the challenge of preserving heritage in our globalizing world.

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References

Shuang WEN
THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA resumed sending Chinese Muslim students to al-Azhar University in Egypt in 1982. A small number of the students are sent by the Islamic Association of China, headquartered in Beijing, and approved by the Chinese Embassy in Cairo. These students can enjoy the benefits of an education exchange agreement between the PRC and Egypt, i.e., they can live in the international student dorms at al-Azhar University and receive a modest monthly stipend. Most, however, travel on their own initiative; they are unable to enjoy the benefits of the education exchange agreement and have to fend for themselves. So when the Arab Spring broke out in January 2011, their lives in Egypt suddenly became uncertain. Below are two snapshots of these self-funded Chinese-speaking Sino-Muslim students.

Nabil
Nabil comes from a pious Muslim family in Henan. He went to Egypt in 2008 to study Islamic law at al-Azhar University, aspiring to become an imam (a Chinese term for imam) upon graduation. Because he did not have much prior knowledge of Islamic studies or the Arabic language, he did not receive a fellowship from the Islamic Association in China. However, he was very driven and passionate about his studies. When the uprising in Egypt erupted, his family members wanted him to return. However, just like many of his fellow Muslim students from around the world, he was excited about the revolution. He saw that people just like many of his fellow Muslim students from around the world, he was excited about the revolution. He saw that people

Khalid
Khalid is originally from Henan as well, but his family is not particularly strict with religious practice. Not being able to pass the exam, let alone enter a degree program. Feeling ashamed and frustrated, he continued his studies for six years. Out of frustration or financial constraints, he dropped out of school, but has managed to keep the restaurant afloat. However, if Khalid returned to China without Arabic language skills or religious training, his employment prospects would be bleak, which was the reason for him to leave in the first place. Khalid found his niche in Egypt, and he has no way of making a living is threatened by the political instability. To leave or to stay, that was a big question for him when I met him in July 2013. In the last years, his name is no news among the university students at al-Azhar University. In fact, a majority of them are like him. Not being able to enter a college in China, they went to Egypt without religious or Arabic language knowledge, or even awareness of what to expect. As a result, they needed to first take prerequisite language classes. However, as the Arabic language is very difficult, most of them cannot pass the language exam after repeated trials, which means they cannot enter the al-Azhar University degree program either. Out of frustration or financial constraints, they drop out of school, but have managed to make the best of their experience in Egypt by finding different jobs to make a living. Some Sino-Muslim students work in marble-making, shoe-making, and plastic recycling factories. Others sell small made-in-China inexpensive products at the Khan al-Khalili market. Some even become door-to-door sales persons or tour guides. For them, Egypt has become a place of survival rather than religious learning.

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Snapshots of Sino-Muslim students living in Egypt

Shuang WEN

ConfereNCes in ChIna

You Must Create?
7-9 April 2016, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

You must create – to be less bored, to be more authentic, to be free in the digital world! These questions were the kickoff of a three-day event of conferencing and site visits held early April in Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

The event took place in the historical juncture when creativity has become the new currency of the global economy. Artists have been known to move from a ‘made in China’ towards a ‘created in China’ country (Keane 2011), to transform creativity and culture into a crucial source for innovation and financial growth as well as part of its ‘soft power’ to both the citizenry as well as the outside world.

“You Must Create?” was jointly organized by the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies, University of Amsterdam and the Department of Humanities and Creativity Writting, Hong Kong Baptist University, as part of the European Research Council funded project “From Made in China to Created in China – A Comparative Study of Creative Practice and Production in Contemporary China.”

The five-year project is led by Professor Jeroen de Kloet (UvA).

Explorations during the event will be organized and developed into an open source set of (audio-visual) materials, scheduled to be published by the Amsterdam University Press in the summer of 2017.

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World Forum on China Studies
20-21 November 2015, Shanghai
www.chinastudies.org.cn/english.htm

Sponsored by the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China and the Shanghai Municipal Government, the World Forum on China Studies is a Shanghai-based biannual academic event jointly organized by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Shanghai Municipal Information Office. Founded in 2004, the Forum is held every two years in Shanghai and has convened seven times including two symposiums. The Forum has served as a platform for distinguished scholars to communicate with each other and explore the past, present and future of China studies. It is also a dedicated platform for presenting the latest China studies while fostering an informed mutual understanding between China and the world.

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