Chinese Islam in the Nineties: A View of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

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1 Introduction

The worldwide Islamic resurgence in recent decades has captured the attention and imagination of both the media and populations in the West. This Western observation of, and at times preoccupation with, the seeming rise of Islam after a period of relative dormancy has been focused very much on events in the Middle East. The ongoing conflict and more recent moves towards peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours is a major focus of attention, as are events within the Arab world related to the clash between rising Islamic radicalism and governments of a more nationalist, secular bent, such as Egypt and Algeria.

The attention of the Muslim world itself has also been focused on such events. Indeed, the Islamic world may be seen as a large arena, with the spectators aligned in rows at ever increasing distances from the centre, but with the attention of all focused on that central stage ie the Middle East. This has the effect of placing certain actors, such as the Israelis and the Palestinians, under continuous scrutiny, while other member groups, such as the Muslim communities on the geographical periphery of the Muslim world, receive considerably less attention from their Muslim confreres or the world at large.

Yet there is much to be learned from events on that periphery. Indeed, the Islamic revival in recent decades has not limited itself to the Middle East. The world has witnessed in recent times conflict between governing authorities and radical Muslim groups in areas as distant from the Middle East as Malaysia and the Southern Philippines. However one Muslim region which continues to rest in the shadows of international attention is represented by those areas of the People's Republic of China (PRC) where Muslims are found in significant numbers.[1]

1.1 Brief Historical Background to Islam in China

Islam reached China from the Middle East and Central Asia in the early centuries of Islam. A number of military clashes occurred between Muslim armies from the Middle East and forces of the Tang Dynasty (7th - 10th centuries CE), including the defeat of the Tangs at Talas in 751 CE. The entry of Islam to Western China was facilitated by the existence of the Silk Road, a trade route which had been established much earlier in the first centuries of the first millennium CE and which stretched from the area covered by the present day city of Xi'an in the East to Rome in the West. This trade route wound its way through the rugged terrain of Central Asia, to Persia, the Fertile Crescent, leading to the shores of Asia Minor and on to various points in the Roman Empire. This route had been established during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). Such trading contacts facilitated the entry of Islam to the region of China, and one can trace influences upon Chinese Islam in examining archaeological artefacts uncovered in Western China. Museums in this region, such as that housing an excellent collection in Guyuan, present an array of artefacts from the early Islamic world, including swords, gold-plated silver goblets, gold wedding rings, coins and other items deriving from Islamic Persia, Afghanistan, and other areas of Central Asia.

By the time of the late Tang Dynasty, the overseas trade of China was largely in the hands of Muslim Persians and Arabs[2], and the later Mongols who dominated China also engaged foreigners, including many Middle Eastern Muslims, in a type of international civil service to govern the Chinese[3]. Religious pluralism was allowed to flourish under the Mongols and religious establishments, including those of the Muslims, were granted exemption from taxation[4]. Foreign trade for China continued to be carried out largely by Central Asian Muslims engaged by the Mongol overlords, and Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveller and writer, recorded that mid-14th century China contained significant numbers of Arabs resident in that country[5]. These influences led to a substantial process of conversion during the first half of the second millennium CE, especially during the period of the Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644)[6].

Relationships between the minority Muslim community and other Chinese communities were not always to be harmonious, however. There were several periods of open revolt, especially during the centuries of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), such as the abortive Muslim revolt in Chinese Turkestan in 1758-59, the rebellion in Gansu in 1781, and the widespread sporadic Muslim revolts against the Qings in Sinkiang during the period 1855-1873.

Thus by the time of the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Muslim communities, though comparatively small in number, had been firmly established as part of the Chinese multicultural scene for almost one thousand years. The communist authorities were concerned to establish national stability and to avoid the communal disputes which had plagued relations between the State and minority groups in the past. In this context, the communist authorities took a range of steps, including the establishment of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in its provincial planning, with this region being accorded a measure of autonomy in recognition of the fact that it housed a significant minority group; i.e. the Muslim Huis.

1.2 Population Distribution

The Chinese Government conducted a nationwide census in 1990, which revealed important information about the size of the various Muslim minority groups in the PRC. Ten of China's minority nationalities are predominantly Muslim. The census provided the following numbers for each of these groups: Hui (8.6 million); Uygur (7.2 million); Kazakhs (1.1 million); Dongxiang (375,000); Kyrgyz (375,000); Salar (88,000); Tajik (33,500); Uzbek (14,500); Bonan (12,000); and Tatars (4,873)[7]. Thus Muslim nationalities accounted for 17.6 million people, or approximately 1.75% of China's population.

With regard to the most populous of the various Muslim groups, the Huis, their numbers are spread throughout China, though a substantial group resides in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. In 1988, the population of Ningxia stood at 4,150,000. Of this number, approximately thirty-two percent (1,238,000) were Muslim, around sixty-seven percent

(2,731,000) were majority Han Chinese, and the remainder comprised various other minority groups[8].

The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is divided into two prefectures and sixteen counties. The Muslim population is more concentrated in the central and southern counties of Ningxia; i.e. Jingyuan (where they represent around 97% of the county population), Haiyuan (approximately 70%), Xiji, Guyuan and Tongxin counties.

2. Islamic Practice in Ningxia

The Hui emergence as a distinct group was consolidated during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and subsequent Ming period. During this period, the Hui spoke a variety of languages - Arabic, Persian, and the Mandarin language of the majority Han Chinese - but gradually the Hui assimilated to the ways of the Han, especially in the area of language, with the result that eventually the Hui came to speak Mandarin as their mother tongue[9]. This tendency towards assimilation to Han ways has been a cause of criticism of the Hui by their co-religionists among other minority nationalities in China. Nevertheless, it has also enabled the Hui to act on many occasions as a mediator between Han China and the various Muslim minorities.

Like the majority of Chinese Muslims, the Hui are predominantly Sunni, though Shi'ite influences can at times manifest themselves[10]. Moreover, Sufi mystical orders have exerted a strong attraction for Chinese Muslims, including the Hui. The most influential of these orders have been the Naqshbandiyya, Qadariyya and Kubrawiyya[11].

Though the Hui represent a part of the Islamic mosaic of China, their practice of the faith, and the social context in which they locate Islam, makes their Islamic profile distinctive in both Chinese and world Islamic terms.

2.1 Mosques: Form and Function

Mosques in Ningxia exist in abundance. Whether found in County capital cities, townships or in remote villages, there are certain characteristic features which mark Chinese mosques as unique.

The roofs of mosques typically represent a range of architectural styles. All display the characteristic Islamic crescent, usually placed on the most prominent point of the roof. Many also include a dome or domes, creating the Islamic roof profile so characteristic of the Middle East. However, all will also include the pointed roof-ends reminiscent of Buddhist pagodas which are so typical of Chinese architecture. This serves to remind the faithful that although the origins of the religion lie elsewhere, the framework in which they worship is firmly grounded in Chinese tradition.

Mosque walls are typically made of brick, or mud-brick in the case of village mosques. These walls will often include engraved inscriptions, sometimes in Arabic but usually in Chinese. The walls are often also adorned with the beautiful wooden lattice work which typifies other Chinese architecture.

Within the prayer hall of the mosque itself one is again struck by the combination of styles. The walls usually display an array of wall hangings, made of woven material or paper. These depict exhortations to action by the faithful, may be either in Arabic or Chinese, and include messages such as the Islamic witness[12] and calls to spread the faith around the world. The floors are covered by a combi-

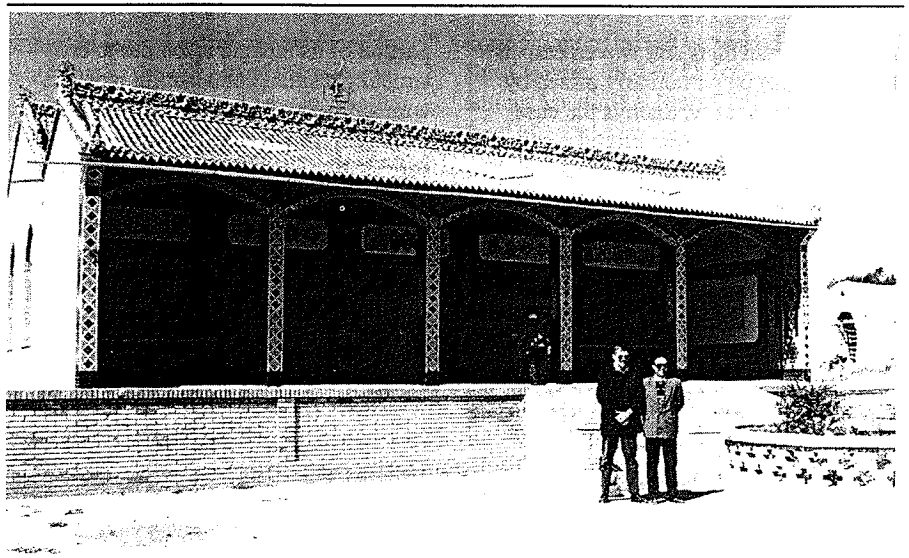

Fig. 1. Exterior of Bai Tang Mosque

Fig. 2. Interior of Bai Tang Mosque, showing the mihrab

nation of rattan mats and woven carpets; the latter may be particularly prized by the local community. Such is the case with the beautiful carpet placed just in front of the *mihrab* [13] in the Great Mosque in Tongxin County Centre. The local community proudly points out to the visitor that this carpet is valued at 170,000 Renminbi[14] and was presented as a gift to the mosque by the Government of Saudi Arabia.

The Great Mosque in Tongxin is undoubtedly one of the principal Islamic landmarks in Ningxia. Built during the Ming dynasty and renovated during the Qing dynasty, it is the largest and oldest mosque in Ningxia. It is located within a compound which is elevated above the surrounding countryside and which therefore captures the attention of Tongxin residents both as they arrive in the city and as they move within the city precincts. The compound itself consists of three parts: the mosque with the adjacent student dormitory and religious leader's residence, the yard of the compound and the area where the ritual ablutions are performed prior to prayer. Just outside the compound is found the Muslim cemetery, which itself contains an impressive shrine amidst the various graves. The Tongxin mosque serves as a prime focal point for all Ningxia Muslims, as well as an important centre for study of the Hanafi school of Islamic Law which predominates in Ningxia.

In addition to the large mosques situated in the cities, one finds mosques of varying degrees of beauty even in the most remote villages in Ningxia. An example is that found in the village of Bai Tang in Guyuan County. Though the village itself is very poor and lacks some of the most basic civic and health services, the community has devoted a significant portion of its meagre resources to constructing a small but beautiful mosque, with adjacent residential quarters for the local religious leader. The mosque and its surrounding area is kept meticulously clean, and represents the most splendid building in the village. The *mihrab* is bedecked above with various signs, including a large sign in Chinese calling for Islam to be spread throughout the globe. The floor is covered by a collection of rattan mats and beautifully woven carpets.

Similarly, the village mosque in the very poor village of Qingyangquan in Tongxin County has received priority in the community's allocation of its limited resources, though it is much simpler than that in Bai Tang. The floors are covered mainly by rattan mats, and few signs are displayed on the walls. Nevertheless, it occupies a position of prominence within the village location, and resources have been devoted to constructing residential quarters adjoining the mosque to allow for the stationing of a religious leader in the community.

The prioritising of the mosque in receiving meagre village resources reflects the fact that the mosque is the centre of each Hui community. The religious community, or *Jiaofang*, is the basic unit of Hui society, and is organised around the mosque, which functions as both a site for worship, and also as a venue for significant public gatherings of many varieties, be they economic or social in nature. This is a characteristic feature of Hui society.

2.2 Community Participation and Support

Community support is vital for both the establishment and maintenance of the local mosque and its services, whether at city, township or village level in Ningxia. Each family in village communities and also those members of the Muslim community in larger centres are expected to contribute to the upkeep of the mosque and its religious leader. In some communities, this takes the form of a cash contribution; in some instances this may be as high as thirty Renminbi per family member at intervals according to the need of the mosque and its religious leader. In other instances in village settings, community support for the mosque and its religious leader may be in the form of a grain contribution of one kilogram of grain per family member per annum or very poor families may be able to meet their obligation towards the maintenance of the religious leader by hosting him to dinner on a monthly basis, or more frequently if possible. At the village and township level, mosques thus receive a significant proportion of their funding from the community.

In return for these contributions from limited resources, community members receive a range of services from the mosque and its religious leader. These services include instruction in the Islamic sciences, guidance and counselling, and of course organisation of worship services. The principal service, the Friday noon prayers, receives the full participation of men in the respective community, though women also attend as observers. In the case of the larger mosques, the Friday prayers thus provide a venue for the gathering of large numbers of Muslims. The Great Mosque in Tongxin attracts around six hundred worshippers to its Friday prayers, with even larger numbers attending services held to commemorate the special feast days, such as the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the feast of the Sacrifice[15]. Nevertheless, it is in the village communities that worship services can be considered to attract the highest proportion of local Muslims. In the larger urban centres, where populations are more mixed between Han and Hui Chinese, the level of observance among Muslims is lower due to a greater level of secularisation among urban Chinese.

2.3 The Religious Leader

Thus the Islamic leader, or Ahung (Imam), attached to mosques in Ningxia is dependent for his sustenance to a large degree upon the local Muslim community. While there are significant numbers of Ahungs available for the Ningxia Muslim community, in certain areas Muslim communities are served by itinerant Ahungs, owing to the unavailability of a resident religious leader or the inability of the community to fund a full-time Ahung. In remote areas, there is an average of one mosque per administrative village[16]. Where a mosque does not have its own resident Ahung it will draw on the services of an Ahung who is responsible for covering a number of different areas.

The Ahung must be sufficiently versed in Arabic to lead the worship services in that language. However, for the benefit of his constituency, he often translates the prayers into Chinese after initially pronouncing them in Arabic. This is especially the case in remote areas of Ningxia. Apart from his responsibilities in leading worship, the Ahung devotes a significant proportion of his time to providing instruction to children who are sent by their parents to the mosque to learn the Qur'an. This study may take several forms. It may be individual; one informant related that as a child he had received individual instruction for three months in reading the Qur'an from his local village Ahung. The Ahung's teaching methods were of interest: using the scapula bone of a cow in place of a blackboard, the Ahung would write a verse of the Qur'an which the student was then required to memorise.

When the student had successfully mastered the verse in this way, the writing was erased from the bone and replaced by another verse which in turn the student repeated after the Ahung. Though both boys and girls studied with this particular Ahung in this way, the ratio of boys to girls was heavily weighted towards the former[17].

The Ahung resident among the Qingyangquan community indicated in interview that he himself had acquired his knowledge of Arabic and the Qur'an by studying at the mosque in the Haiyuan County centre under the resident Ahung there. The Qingyangquan Ahung, a young man in his twenties, reported that he provided instruction in the Qur'an and Arabic to a group of twenty children from the village for eight hours per day. Many students would study with him for several years, with this instruction representing an alternative system of education available to children whose parents could not afford to pay the tuition fees levied by the mainstream education system. The tuition in Arabic and the Qur'an at the Qingyangquan mosque was provided by the local Ahung free of charge[18].

In addition to providing religious instruction and leading in worship services, the village Ahung has a range of other functions, both in the religious domain, but also in overseeing aspects of general community welfare. He witnesses Hui weddings and presides over funerals, where the Ahung ensures that the body of

Fig.3. Ningxia muslim boy preparing for lessons in qur'anic recitation at Qingyangquan mosque

the deceased is wrapped in a white cloth and buried promptly without a coffin[19]. The Ahung is also responsible for giving a name to newborn children soon after birth[20].

Though there is some inter-county movement by the Ahungs in Ningxia, mosques in Ningxia especially in remote locations are typically staffed by an Ahung who comes from the local region. However, at the provincial level and even at the level of the county urban centre, some Ahungs are not native to Ningxia but have come from the broader Chinese Muslim community.

2.4 Education Programs

With regard to the educational process which Ahungs must go through in order to be properly qualified to practise their profession, the first step occurs with training during childhood in Arabic and the Qur'an, as described above. At this stage, the child may not know he wishes to become an Ahung, but when this latter decision is made, the path is quite clearly defined.

The aspiring student will attach himself to one of the principal mosques in Ningxia, such as the Great Mosque in Tongxin. This mosque includes dormitory facilities for around fifteen students, who undertake a course of study lasting at least four years, but in some cases extending up to seven, in order to gain a qualification as an Ahung. Days are spent in study and reflection; the day commences with a period of worship, and is followed by many hours of tuition in Arabic and Persian languages and the Islamic sciences, with a special emphasis on the Qur'an and its commentaries. A facility with Persian is required in order to be able to access some of the principal Qur'anic commentaries written in that language. In order to gain entry to this program of study, students should have already completed a period of secondary studies and demonstrated their capacity for further education.

At the Tongxin mosque, the teaching staff are most commonly drawn from Chinese specialists, though guest teachers pay occasional visits from countries as far afield as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Japan, and the USA. The duration of the study program is determined by the individual progress of each student. Upon successful completion of the end of course examination, the student graduates and has several options available to him. He may choose to take up a position as an Ahung in a village mosque, and is now qualified to do so. Alternatively, if a student has performed satisfactorily in his study program at the mosque, and has good Chinese, Arabic and Persian language skills, this study program may serve as a pre-requisite for further studies in a specialist tertiary institution, such as the Arabic Language College in the Tongxin County centre. This College offers intensive preparation in Arabic, Persian and Islamic sciences, and after four years of study, the graduate is entitled to automatic employment in the Government bureaucracy as an interpreter or in other specialist functions. Alternatively, a graduate from this College may seek a position as a religious leader in one of the more prestigious mosques in one of the larger urban centres in Ningxia or elsewhere in China.

2.5 Religious Obligations and Customs

With regard to observance of religious obligations among Muslims, the instruction which many Ningxia Muslims receive during childhood includes a focus upon the five basic duties of Islam[21]. Nevertheless, observance of these five duties

as a central part of daily life does not appear to be widespread among the Muslim community at large in Ningxia. Non-specialist Muslims in the community consulted were not able to identify the five duties beyond the first two relating to witness and prayer which they listed as the principle obligations which a Muslim must fulfil. Nevertheless, there is an increasing consciousness of the significance of the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, its cost is prohibitive for most Muslims in Ningxia, especially the large numbers living in rural locations, and thus it is not foregrounded as a concept in their perception of their faith[22]. Though there has been a significant increase in numbers of Chinese Muslims undertaking the pilgrimage, from 19 in 1979 to 6,000 in 1992[23], the proportion of the total Muslim population involved is minuscule.

In the area of more general custom, Islamic practice in Ningxia closely parallels that followed in other parts of the Muslim world. For example, in mixed marriages, it is expected that the non-Muslim will adopt Islam, rather than the reverse. The convert is expected to participate in preparatory courses for becoming a Muslim, which include studying basic Islamic beliefs and practices with the local Ahung.

As is the case with other agrarian communities elsewhere in the Muslim world, gender roles tend to be very clearly defined amongst the Chinese Muslims of Ningxia. Women's participation in worship during the Friday prayers is more as observers, as described previously. Even with regard to participation in the health system, women's roles are largely determined by religious factors. For example, deliveries of newborn babies tend to be performed among the Muslim communities by the village midwives, rather than the village doctor, who is more commonly male. This is less common among majority Han Chinese communities, who are less resistant to male village doctors performing this particular task. The same constraint prevents many Muslim women residents in villages from choosing to give birth in better equipped township hospitals, because of the lack of control they will have over selecting the gender of the hospital staff delivering the baby.

Muslim communities in villages are very open and hospitable towards foreign visitors, and typically react quite openly to questions about their faith. Likewise, foreign visitors are welcome to view and photograph mosques. Though this is also the case in other parts of the Muslim world, Chinese Muslims, especially those in the more remote areas, are either unaware about or unconcerned with certain constraints existing in other parts of the Muslim world, such as that requiring entrants to the mosque to take off their shoes before entering the worship hall[24].

2.6 Islamic Materials and Resources in Ningxia

The student of Islam, whether an aspiring Ahung or student destined for other appointments, depends for his Islamic materials and resources upon a range of generalist shops dealing in Islamic matters at various points throughout Ningxia. A perusal of several of these shops revealed that a range of materials were held, as follows:

a. *Books*. As would be expected, each collection contained copious quantities in several editions of the Qur'an. This was available both in all Arabic format as well as in bilingual editions, in Arabic and Chinese[25]. In addition to the text of the Qur'an, the shops examined also contained sets of complete recordings of the Qur'an on cassette.

To complement this central work, various commentaries upon the Qur'an were available for purchase. These included the multi-volume commentary entitled *Fī ẓilāl al-qur'ān* (Under the Shade of the Qur'an) written by the twentieth century radical theologian Sayyid Qutb, who was executed for subversion by the Egyptian Government of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966. Another commentary which appeared to be popular was *Tafsīr Hussainī*.

In addition, there were various books in Arabic devoted to other Islamic sciences, including *Kitāb al-ma'ānī* (The Book of Meanings), *Qiṣāṣ al-nabī Muḥammad* (Stories of the Prophet Muhammad), *Durrat al-nashaz* (Pearls of the Heights), *Kitab al-kabā'ir* (The Book of Sins), and *Asās al-'ulūm* (The Foundations of Knowledge). These holdings demonstrate an interest on the part of the local Muslim population, particularly the specialists, with works addressing the three principal focuses of the Islamic sciences: theology, law and narrative. These works in Arabic were supplemented by various works in Chinese also dealing with matters such as the basics of Islam and the four schools of law in Islam.

Finally, the shops consulted all contained within their collections a three part series on Arabic language, a locally produced bilingual work with exercises in Arabic and grammatical explanations in Chinese which appears to be a standard text used in Arabic language classes throughout the autonomous region. One shop in Guyuan County centre indicated that it regularly provided copies of this text for use in classes in the Arabic Language College in Tongxin.

b. *Other materials*. In addition to book holdings, which appear to be drawn upon more by specialists among the Chinese Muslim community, the shops in question also sold other items of more general interest among the Ningxia community. These included the characteristic white hats worn by both male and female Muslims in Ningxia; posters of various shapes, sizes and motifs of the type on display in mosques but also visible in private homes; woven prayer carpets; pieces of crockery, such as teapots, bearing Islamic phrases in Arabic; knives with Arabic inscriptions on the handles, and a range of other assorted items.

Thus these shops serve as general stores, providing a wide range of materials for use among both the specialists in the Ningxia Muslim community as well as the broader society itself. Staff in the shops indicated that members of the general community provided a continuous supply of clientele, especially for the assorted items, but also for some of the books, particularly the Qur'an, a copy of which was reportedly held by most Ningxia Muslim households.

3. Ningxia and the World Islamic Resurgence

3.1 The Nexus between Islam and Communism

The relationship between the Muslim community and the Communist authorities of the PRC since 1949 has been characterised by periods of stability interspersed with periods of communal strife. During its forty-five years of existence, the Communist government has from time to time expressed a desire to preserve the rights of the more than fifty minority groups in China and to provide them with certain advantages to ensure that they do not suffer from their minority status. In the case of Hui Muslims, the Chinese Government established the

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region as a device to protect them from being submerged within the much larger Han community. It also took specific measures designed to win Muslim support, not only among the residents of Ningxia but also among Chinese Muslims in other locations. The authorities stimulated the formation in 1957 of the China Islamic Association, an officially sanctioned umbrella body which has served as an interface between the government and the Islamic Community, and which has official endorsement to oversee Muslim affairs, co-ordinate publication of Islamic literature, and arrange for the training of Muslim leaders and Ahungs. In this latter context, the government, through the Islamic Association, has provided assistance to the Chinese Institute of Islamic Theology, which has as its principle purpose the training of Islamic scholars who will serve Muslim communities around China[26].

An autonomous region in the PRC, such as Ningxia, derives certain advantages from this status not accorded to fully fledged PRC provinces. The advantages available to minorities in such regions include the following:

a. They are free to have up to three children, whereas majority Han Chinese are limited to the one child per family regulation determined by the national government[27];

b. They can gain entry to Chinese universities with a lower entry mark than that set for Han Chinese[28];

c. They benefit from a tax waiver during the first five years in establishing private enterprises;

d. They are given tax relief on agricultural produce[29].

With regard to the interface between the Communist authorities and the Islamic worship community, the national government allows a measure of autonomy, up to a point. There are no restriction on the number of mosques within a given area; the number will depend upon the respective community's wishes and its capacity to support the mosques and attached Ahungs. Though it is largely the community's responsibility to provide the sustenance for the Ahungs, in the case of some Islamic leaders in the larger cities in Ningxia, the government contributes to their salary. Moreover, as seen previously, the government guarantees employment for graduates from the Islamic stream of education in Ningxia, such as the program at the Tongxin Mosque followed by the Arabic Language College, in the same way that employment is guaranteed to university graduates from the mainstream education system.

Nevertheless, the government maintains a watchful eye on the activities of the Muslim community and its leaders, especially with regard to the level of material and financial support expected of the community by its religious leaders. The government has created coordinating committees at the county level to monitor the level of support exacted from peasants by Islamic leaders, as a device to ensure that the religious institutions do not squeeze the peasants too hard by expecting unreasonable or burdensome contributions.

Indeed, many Muslims are also members of the Communist Party, and in order to advance within the bureaucracy, membership of the Party is virtually mandatory. This parallel membership in what appear to be two mutually exclusive groups suggests several factors:

a. Those Muslims with dual membership see no clash in such an arrangement, which itself suggests that their understanding of the basic duties and beliefs of Islam is superficial;

b. Islamic revivalism from outside China, which would be opposed to basic tenets of the Communist ideology, is still slow to filter in at this stage of the development of the PRC;

c. The government still maintains a tight control over Muslim activity at the macro level to ensure that it operates in a way which is consistent with general national government policies and ideologies[30].

3.2 Recent Problems Among Chinese Muslims

The relationship between the communist authorities of the PRC and its Muslim subjects has had a chequered history, and it would be useful to briefly examine a series of incidents since 1990 which point to the changing nature of the relationship between Chinese Muslims and their communist government.

In 1990 a series of riots occurred in the Province of Xinjiang, which borders the Islamic republics of central Asia, formerly belonging to the now defunct USSR. Reports in the media indicated that this trouble in Xinjiang was aided and abetted by activists based in Turkey, with the riots being directed against ethnic Han Chinese resident in Xinjiang. The problems in Xinjiang in 1990 were evidently not resolved, as it has continued to represent a hot bed of resistance to communist authority. Reports from diplomats indicate that around one dozen bombs were detonated in various parts of Xinjiang during the summer of 1993, with these bombings killing a number of Han Chinese. Responsibility for these incidents was laid at the feet of the East Turkestan Party (ETP), a separatist group which wishes to break away from the PRC. The government of the PRC expressed concern at what they termed "hostile foreign forces" which had infiltrated the region; this referred to accusations that the ETP was based in Turkey and funded by sympathisers in neighbouring Kazakhstan. During 1993 the government of China approached Turkish and Kazakh authorities in an attempt to contain the activities of the ETP, evidently without success. Media reports indicate that the government of the PRC is concerned at likely connections between the ETP and international Mujahedeen groups which have provided arms to Chinese Muslim resistance groups. During 1993, the communist authorities responded to the emergency in Xinjiang by sending troops to that region to protect Han Chinese from attacks by local Muslims.

The year 1993 also witnessed disturbances among Muslim groups in the western province of Qinghai. Massive street protests by thousands of Muslims in Xining, the capital of Qinghai, resulted from the illegal publishing by a local publisher, the China Times Publishing Company, of a comic book from Taiwan entitled **A Swift Turn in Thinking**. This book depicted Muslims in prayer beside a pig. The protests in Qinghai overflowed to neighbouring regions, including the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu, Shaanxi and Sichuan. In response to these events, Muslims in Qinghai formed themselves into a group called the Qinghai Muslim Anti-Humiliation Committee which was promptly banned by provincial authorities in early September 1993. These authorities followed up this banning with raids on mosques, and there were violent clashes between police and rioters. The authorities in the province accused the Committee of illegal fundraising and incitement to protest. Although the provincial authorities issued a public

apology, arranged for the dismissal of the head and deputy head of the publishing company and banned the book, the situation remained tense for some time.

In mid-November 1993, matters came to a head once again with the publication of a newspaper article in Qinghai's capital which was entitled "The Woman Who Recites the Scripture and the Dog Who Listens to It". This precipitated a public demonstration which disbursed after police and army warnings. The licence of the newspaper containing this article was withdrawn and the editors were interrogated by police.

In response to these ongoing problems, the President of the China Islamic Association, Ilyas Shen Xiaxi, who was China's most senior Muslim, spoke out against the unrest by Muslims, blaming it upon agitators. He warned Muslims against using mosques to oppose the communist party[31].

These events point to the tenuous nature of relationships between certain groups of Chinese Muslims and the communist authorities. Nevertheless the degree of resistance to communist control does not appear to be uniform throughout the Chinese Muslim community. It would appear that separatist tendencies are much more pronounced in the western provinces which border the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union, while communities in regions such as Ningxia which are somewhat more remote from external Muslim groups may be less prone to communal problems at this stage. Nevertheless, the problems centred upon the provinces of Xinjiang and Qinghai in recent years did overflow to the southern counties in Ningxia, with several being closed to foreigners for several months in late 1993 during the height of the disturbances.

4. Conclusions

Islam has been a part of the Chinese multicultural landscape for around one thousand years. Unlike the case of the Moghul emperors in India, Chinese Muslims were never strong enough to constitute a governing dynasty in their own right[32]. Nevertheless, Muslims in China were an integral part of the worldwide Islamic community through trade and religious contacts for centuries, until the period of relative isolation after the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

It has been seen that Chinese Islam is distinctive in certain ways. This is well demonstrated in the architecture of the many mosques which exist throughout the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The Muslim community has become largely self-sufficient through its relative isolation from the rest of the Muslim world during the last forty-five years. It has developed an active education system both for young children and adults which ensures a minimal level of understanding of the faith among members of the general community, and provides a degree of specialist training for those wishing to become religious leaders. Community support for this education process, and indeed for the broad activities carried out by the mosque, is essential.

Chinese government policy has effectively served as a type of cocoon to prevent Chinese Muslims from experiencing the same degree of instability which has characterised certain Middle Eastern Muslim communities, such as Iran, Egypt and Algeria during the last twenty years. Nevertheless, the early signs are there that this cocoon-like environment will not endure forever. The troubles experienced in various parts of Muslim China in late 1993 point to Muslim sensitivity which is reminiscent of that found elsewhere in the Muslim world. The existence of the writings of leading radicals of the modern era, such as Sayyid Qutb, for sale among the general Muslim community also suggests the beginning of a process which may lead to instability in the future. Moreover, the Chinese government's own policy of slowly opening the county to economic and social reforms suggests that though Chinese Muslims have been somewhat sheltered from the dynamic of Islamic revivalism elsewhere in the Muslim world until now, the future may bring substantial changes and may lead to a reintegration of Chinese Muslims within the broader Islamic world in terms of religious and political currents and countercurrents.

Notes

1. This article presents a report on two visits which I made to the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China in October 1994 and March 1995. I am grateful to Gillian Dawes for providing several of the photos included herein. I am also grateful to Christy Fong, Mai Wong and Catherine Wong of the China office of World Vision International for their patient and excellent interpreting during interviews which I had with various Chinese informants. Last, but not least, I am also greatly indebted to the Chinese informants in the cities, townships and villages of Ningxia who so willingly and hospitably responded to my questions regarding Islamic issues in Ningxia.

2. Reischauer, Edwin O. and John K. Fairbank, 1960, *East Asia. The Great Tradition*, Allen & Unwin, London, p215.

3. Fitzgerald, C.P., 1966, *A Concise History of East Asia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, p72.

4. Reischauer and Fairbank, op cit, p277.

5. Stokes, G. and J. Stokes, 1964, *The Extreme East: A Modern History*, Longman, London, p19.

6. For a detailed study of the attitude of the Ming emperors towards Islam, refer Chang, Haji Yusuf, 1988, "The Ming Empire: Patron of Islam in China and Southeast and West Asia", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXI/2.

7. Gladney, Dru C., September 1993, "The Muslim Face of China", *Current History*, p276.

8. The encroachments upon Muslim majority status by Han immigration witnessed in Ningxia were also felt in other predominantly Muslim regions. The 1990 census demonstrated that by that year Hans had come to represent 49% of the predominantly Muslim province of Xinjiang [ibid, p278].

9. Yin Ma (ed), 1989, *China's Minority Nationalities*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1st edition, p98.

10. This is particularly evident in the domain of story telling, where stories about the fourth Caliph, Ali, are popular among Chinese Muslims. Refer Gladney, p280.

11. Ibid, p277. Levtzion makes a series of interesting observations about the influence of Sufism in China in the context of its international role in his fascinating paper: Levtzion, N., "Eighteenth Century Sufi Orders: Structural and Behavioural Changes" in P. Riddell and A. Street (eds), *Islam: Transmissions and Encounters*, (forthcoming).

12. The Shahadah: "There is no God except for God, and Muhammad is the prophet of God".

13. The indentation in the wall of the mosque to which worshippers direct themselves during prayer, and which itself is directed towards Mecca in the West.

14. US$1 = 7.93 Renminbi as at March 1995.

15. Idu'l-fitr and idu'l-adha respectively.

16. An administrative village consists of an agglomeration of several natural villages. Bai Tang, an administrative village with a population of 1,300, includes three natural villages and is entirely Muslim.

17. The informant in question estimated that the ratio of boys:girls was around 8:2.

18. Students undertaking such studies at local mosques were referred to by my informants as *ma-la-ze*.

19. Yin, Ma, op cit, p98.

20. Although the parents of the child accord this role to the Ahung, he does not serve a wider role in the birthing process. When questioned as to the relevance of the Ahung for providing ante-natal advice, my informants responded with great conviction that this was not the domain of the Ahung; rather they depended in this area on Government funded village doctors and village midwives.

21. These five duties are as follows: pronouncing the Islamic witness, daily prayer, the giving of alms, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage.

22. The cost quoted was 10,000 Renminbi per person. It should be remembered that China as a whole remains largely an agrarian society, and this is particularly the case with some poorer minorities, such as the Muslims. Thus few are able to raise the funds to undertake the pilgrimage.

23. Gladney, op cit, p279.

24. Of the mosques which I visited in Ningxia, it was only in the Great Mosque in Tongxin where I was asked to take off my shoes. I offered to do so in the other mosques, but the response was strongly in the negative, with the local Muslims evidently feeling that it would be an imposition to ask foreign guests to take off their shoes in such a situation. This may well point to the predominance of Chinese over Islamic culture in this particular circumstance.

25. For a fascinating study of the development of a Chinese translation of the Qur'an, refer Israeli, R., "The Qur'an in Chinese", in P. Riddell and A. Street (eds), op cit

26. Latourette, K.S., 1964, *China*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, p8.

27. Han families who live in very isolated rural locations may have a maximum of two children.

28. This is designed to address census statistics which point to generally higher rates of illiteracy and lower access to university education among Muslim minorities compared with the Han Chinese. Refer Gladney op cit, p279-80.

29. Note that this benefit had a precedent, as religious groups enjoyed a similar taxation waiver under the Mongols, as indicated earlier.

30. At the micro level of daily worship, the government does not intrude in the life and faith practice of the Ningxia Muslim.

31. The information contained in the preceding paragraphs is drawn from various reports in the *South China Morning Post* in issues printed in October and November 1993. For a detailed analysis of these recent events, refer Israeli, R. "A New Wave of Muslim Revivalism in China" (forthcoming).

32. Though Chang, op cit, argues that Chinese Muslims exerted a powerful influence on the Ming emperors.