

## Muslim Minority in China: Integration or Separation?

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the Muslim minority in China, their presence, integration, the challenges from which they suffer and the way to deal with such teething troubles. In this paper, we argue that Muslims in Chinese Inner Mongolia has been integrated successfully into China. Besides providing insights into their presence and well-being in China, their integration into mainstream Communist China is the focal point of interest. Muslims in China has been living as minority communities for centuries. We must emphasize here that, there will be occasions when we mention Muslims from other areas in China away from Inner Mongolia for cross-purpose contextualization. The commonly held view, especially by Western scholars, is that the Muslim populace in China has resisted their integration into Chinese society in toto. This is a fallacy that needs to be addressed. There are millions of Muslims of different sects who live across the Chinese mainland, the majority of whom have been living for ages in harmony with their fellow citizens. However, there are many grievances in the Muslim community that have existed for decades and seemingly no plausible solutions looming on the horizon. The methodology we will be using throughout this paper is the analytical-qualitative approach. Using available archival, research data as well as relevant studies and media reports, we will start by giving a general background on the geographical demographics and characteristics of the area and its people. We will move on to discussing the daily life practices of the Muslim community, such as crafts, social life, literacy and religion. Then, we will conclude by giving an overall view of the position of the Muslim community in their motherland China, how to enhance the mechanisms that can facilitate active integration into Chinese society and the extent of suffering from repression and injustice in their homeland.

**Keywords:** East Turkestan, Han, Hui, Minority, Mongolian, Muslims, Sino, Xinjian, Uighurs.

## الأقلية المسلمة في الصين: اندماج أم انفصال؟

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**المستخلص:** يتناول هذا البحث وضع الأقلية المسلمة في الصين، يبدأ البحث بدراسة الوجود الإسلامي في الصين مروراً بأحوال المسلمين المعيشية والاقتصادية هناك، ثم يعرج البحث إلى الأوضاع السيئة التي عانت منها الأقليات المسلمة في الصين خلال العشرة عقود الأخيرة انتهاءً بجرائم التمييز العنصري والديني الذي يمارس ضدها والذي ارتفعت وتيرته في العشرة أعوام الأخيرة. كما يرصد البحث جرائم التمييز العنصري والديني التي تمارس ضد الأقليات الأخرى في الصين، وينهي الباحثان بحثهما بتوجيه رسالة إلى المجتمع الدولي لحثه للاضطلاع بدوره فيما يتعلق بالعمل على وقف هذه الحملات المنهجية ضد كل الأقليات في الصين وليس ضد المسلمين فقط.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تركستان الشرقية، هان، هوي، الأقلية، المنغولية، المسلمون، الصين، شينجيانغ، الأويغور.

## 1.0 Introduction

China has 23 provinces, four municipalities directly under the Central Government, five autonomous regions and two special administrative regions. Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region lies along China's northern border. Established on May 1st, 1947, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was China's first autonomous region for minority people. With its long history, Inner Mongolia is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization. It is dotted with cultural sites going back to the Paleolithic Era—the Dayao Culture, the Culture of the "Hetao People," the Hongshan Culture, the Xiajiadian Culture and the Jalai Nur Culture. There are numerous sites bearing witness to prehistoric human activity—a Paleolithic Era stone implement making site, the earliest stone wall in China and rock engravings in the Yinshan Mountains. History has seen a succession of ethnic groups on this land—Xiongnu (Huns), Donghu, Xianbei, Wuhuan, Chi-le, Turks, Dangxiang, Qidan (Khitan), Nuzhen (Jurchen), Mongols and Han Chinese, all of which contributed to a rich and colourful Chinese culture. In particular, there was the unification of the various Mongol tribes by Genghis Khan during the 13th century when the Mongol people came onto the world stage, adding a further splendid chapter to the annals of the Chinese nation and its culture.

According to Gladney (2003, p. 452), Islam in China has been primarily propagated over the last 1,300 years among the people now known as "Hui". He states that according to the reasonably accurate 1990 national census of China, the total Muslim population is 17.6 million including Hui (8,602,978), Uyghur (7,214,431), Kazakh (1,111,718), Dongxiang (373,872), Kyrgyz (373,65), Salar (87,697), Tajik (33,538), Uzbek (14,502), Bonan (12,212) and Tatar (4873). Hui speak mainly Sino-Tibetan languages; Turkic-language speakers include the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tatar. The combined Turkic-Mongolian speakers include the Dongxiang, Salar and Bonan. Many human rights organizations have been reiterating the fact that Chinese authorities have been repeatedly abusing human rights in predominantly Muslim regions of Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai. Muslims in Xinjiang, for example, have been banned (according to Sophie Richardson) from giving their babies Islamic names and from time to times police officers visit Muslim families to check whether they abide by the newly-introduced laws of forcing Muslim to assimilate into Chinese way of life and become less Islamic (Sophie Richardson, 2018). It is apt here to refer to the fact that it is not only Muslims who are suffering in China, other religious groups, mainly Christians, suffer as well. In this regard, there are many reports of apprehensions, abuses and repression against Christian minority in China. For example, international news outlets reported that human rights violations against Muslims in China coupled with similar abuses against Christians in China. The year 2018 witnessed the most dangerous attacks so far against Muslims and Christians. Thus, in December 2018 Chinese authorities banned some Christian Churches from offering their services to the public and demolishes some others in different parts of the country (Javier C. Hernández, 2018). According to Russell Goldman, early in 2018 Chinese authorities "demolished one of the country's largest evangelical churches this week, using heavy machinery and dynamite to raze the building where more

than 50,000 Christians worshiped" (Russell Goldman, 2018). More than ten thousand Christians were detained by Chinese authorities only in 2018 (Mimi Lau, 2018).

## 2.0 Methodology

The research on Mongolian Islamic issues grew more complicated when the historical record was shrouded in mystery due to the existence of some archival records that remained prohibited from public view and scrutiny. This is especially true when the archives contain information that is considered a state secret. In such cases, literature simultaneously does what it does best, providing insights into experiences on a human scale that stirs us emotively with complexity and depth that historical accounts alone rarely achieve and also serving as a metaphor for the "unknown". The authors wish to emphasize they are privy to any special knowledge, and the goal of this paper will be to raise what the authors consider important questions and not to provide ground-shaking answers to them. Secondary data is used here for research because of the following reasons. First, there is a lot of useful information available from government databases and reports, previous research literature, the press, and the Internet. Secondly, obtaining secondary data is relatively less expensive and time-consuming (Zikmund, 2003, p. 136). The researchers were also aware of the disadvantages of using secondary data, such as the challenges of accuracy and data transformation (ibid). In order to minimize these issues and ensure that accurate and updated information has been used, the researchers were meticulous with the choice of secondary data sources and verifying their validity and relevance.

## 3.0 Discussion

Our aim here today is to reflect rather broadly upon issues of diversity and hybridity, and in particular to reflect upon attitudes to the diverse and hybrid nature of the issues rather than venturing into the knotty problems of definitions, or boundaries, or indeed the theoretical paradigms expounded by particular schools or particular thinkers. There is a public discourse, which highlights the diversity in terms of equality, provision, treatment and opportunity according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity. The assumption of cultural continuity, that there is a core Mongolian Muslim culture that can be preserved in a single reproducible form, is an ingredient in the establishment of the essentialism necessary for the defender viewpoint.

Cosmo (2010, p. 14) states that in Eastern Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, agriculture existed long before the Xiongnu period. He adds that various groups especially non-Chinese people such as the Rong, Di and Huu were often portrayed in the traditional historiography of ancient China as greedy, aggressive and acquisitive (Cosmo, 2010, p. 1). The farming systems which evolved at the lower levels were adapted to the drier environment. They entailed the construction of furrows wherever possible, but

many of the customs which were central to the organization of the highland furrows were forgotten. He also highlights that Mongolian Muslims practiced intensive agriculture.

As we look into the subject of Muslim Chinese integration into the Chinese Society, the human rights issue cannot be ignored. Sanders (1992, p. 516) states that Mongolian lawyer Badzarsad commented that under Article 16, Mongolian citizens “enjoy rights and freedoms inconceivable a couple of years ago”. The sentiments of Sanders are echoed albeit remotely by Israeli (1981, p. 902) who states that among the minorities in China, national or otherwise the thirty million or more Muslims stand out as a unique case for good reasons. First unlike other minority groups, such as the Mongols, the Tibetans, and the Zhuang, the Muslims are not concentrated in any particular province. Citing Articles 4 and 6 of UN regulations, Sullivan (1988, p. 488) stipulates that States “are required to “make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation” and to take other effective measures to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion or belief”. This is clearly what is not happening in China. We anticipate that the situation will worsen if no measures are taken to make sure that everyone, not only Muslims, have their freedom to choose their own religious preferences and have their human rights respected. In line with Hung (2010, p. 400), it might be pertinent here to refer to the fact that as early as 1949 Chinese authorities started to crack down on any form of religious practices by banning what they termed “secret societies and superstitious sects”. By “secret societies and superstitious sects” the Chinese government meant all religions, whether it was Islam, Christianity or Judaism.

### 3.1 Trade within Mongolian territories

The integration of Chinese Muslims can be traced within the parameters of trade but let us first consider the foreground to this discussion. Mongolia consists mainly of a high plateau at the eastern end of the belt of open grassland or steppe which stretches across most of Asia between the latitudes of forty and fifty-degree north. Peers (2015, p. 27) observes that equally important was the role of long-distance trade. This not only supported the city states of the silk road which connected China and the Mediterranean but diffused precious metals and other goods among the nomads as tolls of tribute, or by stimulating demand for horse hides and other local products. The tribute exacted from China by nomadic invaders often included items like silk and gold (Peers 2015, p. 31). This referred to the form of trade that was carried out within the Mongolian territory. The pattern of trade as enumerated above was repeated with varying degrees as each town or village presented their own specialty of merchandise for trade.

Allsen (2001, p. 37) states that he even knows something of the individual merchants who made use of these impressive ships to bring East Asian wares to Iran. While as a field researcher he calls them ‘individuals’ these were actually Muslim traders. It is clear that Muslim traders played an active role in trade. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Shaikh al-Islam Jamal al-Din Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Tibi the Mongol’s superintendent of taxes in Southern Iran and Iraq ran an extensive

transcontinental trading operation from his base on the island of Qais in the Persian Gulf. This successful enterprise in the words of Vassaf, "was so managed that the produce [biza'at] of remotest China was consumed in the farthest West (p. 42). From other literary sources we know that the produce conveyed to Iran included spices, copper, sandalwood, pearl and other jewels. Textiles of course were also major item of import.

Commerce in Mongolia was a very important occupation and the Mongolian Muslims acquired a reputation for prowess in business negotiation. The trade and commerce included large scale and small-scale operations within and outside Mongolia. In the past and even present times, the large-scale business endeavors can be associated with the city of Hot and other parts of Mongolia and beyond. This involves paths strewn across the desert that became popularly known as the silk road trade routes. Items traded on a large scale were cattle, sheep, goats, rice, pepper and locally produced salt. They also traded hand-made embroidered caps and gowns. Traditional medicine such as herbs, roots, and leaves were also sold. Mongolian Muslims also mobilized items (for sale) from the southern part of Mongolia and beyond. Nowadays trade links echoing modern time changes are opening up in Mongolia and the world at large where the world is now a global village; and Mongolian Muslims are quick at seizing such opportunities to their advantage. In recent times, trade with far distant places have taken a new trend due to the current wave of modernity and technology. Means of transportation have greatly improved and goods may be conveniently conveyed by road, rail, sea and air. Internet business is also gaining ground speedily.

Economy is influenced by what an individual does to earn a living. Mongolian Muslims are industrious people and idleness is not tolerated amongst them. Below is an overview of this sector. Looking at Farming, in layman terms, farming is the occupation of tiling the soil in order to grow crops. The Mongolian Muslims practice two methods of farming which are traditional and mechanized. We will briefly discuss these methods below.

In the past, according to field researchers, traditional farming was practiced with the use of crude farming implements. These included hoe, rope, axe, sickle, cutlass and knife. However, it is important to mention that farming activity and use of implements was carried out in different ways based on the soil structure. While many books on Mongolian Muslims have continued to depict them as using crude farming implements, the truth of the matter is that many households have embarked on mechanized cultivation. The mode of mechanized farming is heavily reliant on the use of mechanized implements such as tractors, combine harvester and threshing machines. In this type of farming, modern techniques are applied to boost yield and improve the quality of the farm produce. A Variety of fertilizers and improved crop germination methods are also used. Under this type of farming method, vast land is cultivated within a short time span, which is time, cost and energy efficient in addition to good and healthy farm produce.

Nowadays, the application of these modern techniques is extended to dry season farming in which dams and other sources of water are utilized for irrigation. Through such technological

advancement, the Mongolian Muslims are benefiting a lot in terms of creating job opportunities, reducing idleness and minimizing poverty and hunger; thereby boosting the economic well-being of those who live near such regions. Cosmo (2010, p. 14) observes that in Eastern Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, agriculture existed long before the Xiongnu period. Such non-Chinese people as the Rong, Di and Hu are often portrayed in the traditional historiography of ancient China as greedy, aggressive and acquisitive (Cosmo 2010, p. 1). According to an Arabic commercial handbook dating to the late ninth century, the Middle kingdom sent silk, aromatics, porcelains, paper, ink, saddles, cinnamon to the Muslim worlds (p.12). On some coins there are Arabic formula "Qa'an/the Supreme (p. 26).

### 3.2 Crafts and Occupation

This area of economy involves artisanship or craftsmanship in which an individual is trained to acquire some skills or is guided to explore his potential to the fullest in certain arts. This largely depends on the availability of raw materials for whatever craft or occupation exists in the region. Some of these include fishing, hunting, weaving, smithing, tanning, wood carving, and pottery. Apart from artifacts and merchandise produced, some artisans produce traditional medicine for certain ailments. Each of these traditional crafts and occupations have a distinctive culture associated to those who practice it which are preserved and followed diligently.

However, this area of economy faces serious setbacks and challenges. Nowadays not many youth engage in the various skilled works (mentioned above) due to a number of reasons. The various field research reports attribute factors that belittle the Mongolian Muslims such as a lack of interest in learning. It should be categorically stated here that there are pertinent factors supporting this trend. The first is the time factor due to youth attending one form of schooling or the other (Western, Qur'anic and Islamiyya). For this reason, apprenticeship even where practiced; it is on part-time basis. The second factor is that, there are other opportunities facilitate the economic well-being of these youth more efficiently. Speaking of the inequality and the lack of religious freedom for the Muslim minority in China, Zang (2011, p. 141) argues that this has resulted in many clashes and uprisings in the regions with a Muslim majority and that this will continue. Zang refers to the 2009 clashes in Ürümchi (Ürümqi) which she attributed to "Uyghur-Han income inequality" (ibid). Furthermore, we agree here with Zang, that inequality in finding jobs, the lack of education and freedom will result in more clashes and will force more ethnic Muslims to join the forces of radicalism and separatism (Ibid, p. 142).

### 3.3 Social Culture

Gladney (2003, p. 451) states that "many of the challenges China's Muslims confront remain the same as they have for the last 1,400 years of continuous interaction with Chinese society but some are new as a result of China's transformed and increasingly globalized society. The Mongolian Muslim social culture revolves around the concept of communal effort and tradition. This hinges on cooperation among

members of the society where what befalls one (person) also affects every community member. To this effect, collective effort and approach are most often followed to tackle such problems in the interest of all (members).

There are also communal ties. The baseline in this relationship is the fact that the individuals concerned were born and raised in the same environment under the care and guidance of elders in the entire community. For this reason, the Mongolian Muslims consider a town's man as brother or sister in certain situations. From what has been said about social set up among the Muslim Mongolian people, one can figure out the significance of leadership and the level of discipline and close-knit social ties among members of a community. This facilitates a communal desired goal. This way, the set up in Mongolian Muslim society is configured in such a way that people are related in one way or the other. For this reason, heads are always put together towards achieving a common goal for the betterment of the community and society at large.

### 3.4 Literacy

Mongolian Muslims use Arabic script as well as the pinyin. Long contact between the Arabs and the Mongolian Muslims through trade links, exploration and propagation or spread of Islam resulted into the Arabic writing systems apart from the Pinyin. Evidence of contact (between Arabs and the Mongolian Muslims) can be dated back to the 9th century. By the 15th century, the Arabic writing system was well established. The Arabic writing system was used to record the Mongolian language and several other written histories.

Atwood (2004, pp 255-256) states that the Mongolian empire sparked some of the greatest historical writing in the Islamic world, particularly in Persian and these histories form one of the most important bodies of data and interpretation about the Mongol empire. In his *al-Kamil fi'l Ta'rikh*, which covered world history to the year 1231, Ibn al-Athir described the initial Mongol invasions, viewing them as an unprecedented, almost uncanny, catastrophe to Islam. In 1204, after defeating and conquering the Naiman tribe, Genghis Khan began to adopt the use of the Uygur script to write the Mongol language and ordered the children of the nobility to learn the new script. Called the Turkic-Mongol script, it was the earliest form of the current Mongolian written language. During the period of the empire, official documents, letters, seals and inscriptions on the "Genghis Khan Stone," a stone tablet erected in 1224 and now kept in the St. Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts. On his part, Israel (1981,905) mentions the holiness of the Arabic script that remained central to many and not only to the Chinese-speaking Muslims of the Northwest. Until 1956, the Uighurs of Xianjian used the Arabic alphabet. The Uighurs, the Kazakhs, the Kirghiz and the Uzbeks have evidently incorporated their attachment into their holy script.

### 3.5 Religion

Religion is a way or form of worship. Today, millions of Muslims live in China. They practice Islam as religion which was brought by Prophet Muhammad (as a messenger of God) through angel Jibril. Qur'an is the Divine Book (as well as the primary source of injunctions) and the Hadith is the secondary source of Islam in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an through sayings, deeds and silent approvals of the Prophet Muhammad. Beckerleg (1995, p. 23) says that an "assumption exists amongst anthropologists and development specialists that 'the more a society modernizes the less religious it will become". She adds that religious movements are usually characterized as conservative and the antithesis of modernization, but this is not always the case. Inner Mongolia has always been an area with multiple religions, including Buddhism, (Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism), Taoism, Islam, as well as Christianity (Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox). There are 805 regular places of worship throughout the region—116 for Tibetan Buddhism, 45 for Chinese Buddhism, two for Taoism, 177 for Islam, 159 for Catholics and 306 for protestants. Religious followers number more than 900,000, accounting for 3.7 percent of the population, and there are 4,945 clerics. There are six religious organizations at regional level, namely: the Buddhist Association, the Islamic Association, the Patriotic Association of the Catholic Church, the Catholic Bishops College, the Three-Self Movement Committee of the Protestant Churches, and the Christian Council. There are more than fifty religious bodies at the levels of leagues/cities and banners/counties. The autonomous region has a Buddhist school and a Catholic seminary, in addition to training classes for Christian volunteers. Among the prominent religious figures in the region, two hold posts as members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), ten as members of the CPPCC regional committee. Temples, churches and mosques are to be seen in cities and farming and pastoral areas. Hohhot, capital of the autonomous region, is renowned for ancient monasteries and mosques, which are an important part of this famous historical city. Among them are the Dazhao and Xiaozhao lamaseries, the Five-pagoda Temple and the Mosque.

Atwood (2004, p. 632) mentions Ghazan Khan, the new Muslim ruler of the Middle Eastern Il Khanate who destroyed churches, synagogues and Buddhist temples. In 1313, Ozbeg Khan seized power in the Golden Horde and executed emirs and Buddhist baqshis (teachers) who opposed his Islamization policy. The Mongols not only virtually exterminated Nizari Ismaili believers but sought out and destroyed all copies of their books of which only fragments survive (Atwood, 2004, p. 256). No specific decrees are known for Christian and Muslim clergy, but in 1219 Chinghis Khan spared Samarqand's chief Islamic clergy and their dependents from the general pillage and in 1222 he was inquiring about traditions of Muhammad's life (Atwood, 2004, p. 469). He adds that at the same time, Islam had a significant presence, particularly among the Oirats. Both Esen Taishi and Bunyashiri Oljeitu Khan converted to Islam (Atwood, 2004, 408). Allsen (2001, p. 11) states that almost all of the major religious movements originating in the Middle East—Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam—reached China, while



Chinese ideological systems made no inroads to the West. Naturally, the movements of religious and commercial goods across Eurasia brought a growing awareness and appreciation of distant and initially quite alien, artistic traditions (ibid).

Ghazan selected two of his retainers Malik Fakhr al-Din Ahmad (p. 34) and Oljeitu, a Christian converted to Sunni Islam who then became a Shiite who took care to appeal to his Muslim subjects. The main chronicler of his reign, Qashani portrays Oljeitu as deeply devoted to the Faith especially in comparison to other Muslim rulers and notes his respect for the descendants of the Prophet and the favours he bestowed for Muslim divinity. Originally named Nicholas and then Muhammad Khudabandah, he took the title Uljaitu Sultan at his coronation in 1305 (p. 1304). On the coins issued in Oljeitu's time, however the message is uniformly Muslim. He is called "Sultan Most Mighty/Ruler over subject peoples [riqab al-umam] (p. 37).

And in his negotiations with the Mamluks in 1301, Ghazan, while he invoked his Islamic faith, still consulted with old Mongolian advisers (p. 33).

Amitai-Preiss (1996, p. 2) writing on Ghazan Khan makes an interesting observation. He states that the conversion of Ghazan Khan to Islam in A.H. 694/A. D 1295 was an event of great importance for both the Mongol ruling class and the Muslim subjects of his kingdom. He adds, thus, "Another area of Mongol Imperial culture which might have been influenced by Ghazan's conversion to Islam was his relationship to the Qa'an/Great Khan (1996, p. 6). Amitai-Preiss further observes that Ghazan's Islam was a syncretistic faith and having converted, he maintained a belief in various aspects of Mongol custom and tradition, much of which explicitly contradicted the precepts of his new religion. This syncretism also characterized the Islam of the Mongols as a whole (1996, p. 9).

#### **4.0 Islamic viewpoint on nationhood**

According to Lipman (1984, p. 289) Muslims arrived in China as early as the seventh century. They are referred to as Hui or Sino Chinese and the majority of them are non-Han. Gladney (2003, p. 452) argues that Muslims in China are "the largest Muslim minority in East Asia" yet they are "the most threatened in terms of self-preservation and Islamic identity". Inter-racial and internal conflicts are not a rare occurrence in our troubled world. In Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe religious tensions, border and inter-racial issues are common. In this concern, Kären Wigen (1999, p. 1183) argues that the "old War has put regionalism back on the map" worldwide. When it comes to dealing with minorities, a nation has mainly two options: either to accommodate the needs and rights of minority/minorities or ignore these and instead oppress them. At the beginning, China opted for or was obliged for political reasons to opt for the first but recently China has been cracking down on the rights of minorities (not only Muslims) in many parts of the Chinese territories. Ironically enough, Raphael Israeli (1981) claims that no

matter how China tolerates or oppresses its Muslim minority the outcome is the same: revolt. Israeli argues that:

the two opposite extremes of "crash integration" and "lax liberalization" have historically brought about the same result- the rise of Muslim separatism in China. The first instance, when the regime trespassed the threshold of a viable Muslim culture, the Muslims rose up in arms in defense of their patrimony. In the latter instance, when the opportunity presented itself, as in times of domestic relaxation, the Muslims also pressed their demands for cultural and even political autonomy if not outright political session. (p. 915)

Unlike Israeli and the handful of researchers who argue that it is difficult for Muslims to integrate in China, Gladney argues that Muslims can be part of the Chinese nation. In this regard, she states:

In China there were many attempts to reconcile Chinese culture with Islam, leading to a range of alternatives. At one extreme there are those who reject any integration of Islam with Chinese culture, such as Ma Wanfu's return to an Arabized "pure" Islam. Conversely, at the other extreme, there are those leaders of the Gedimu, such as Hu Dengzhou, who accepted more integration with traditional Chinese society. Likewise, Ma Qixi's Xi Dao Tang stressed the complete compatibility of Chinese and Islamic culture, the importance of Chinese Islamic Confucian texts, the harmony of the two systems, and the reading of the Quran in Chinese (2003, p. 452).

In between, one finds various attempts at changing Chinese society to "fit" a Muslim world, through transformationist or militant Islam, as illustrated by the largely Naqshbandiyya-led 19th-century Hui uprisings. The Jahriyya sought to implement an alternative vision of the world in their society, and this posed a threat to the Qing as well as to other Hui Muslims, earning them the label of "heterodox" (xiejiao) and persecution by the Chinese state (p. 466). Mao (2011) goes in the same vein arguing that Sino-Muslims have a unique viewpoint regarding Muslim integration into the Chinese society and being a part of motherland China. In the early twentieth century, both China and Japan tried hard to win over the minds and hearts of the millions of Muslims living in the East Asia region. Logically, Muslims themselves were divided. Some affiliated with colonial Japanese while others affiliated themselves with China motherland.

During the Japanese Chinese tensions in the first half of the 20th century, both sides, argues Mao (2011, p. 380), tried to persuade the Muslim community to be on their side, to join them. In this regard, Mao (2011) states that:

Hoping to further advance the goal of the modernist movement to claim a rightful place for Muslims in the Chinese nation-state, many Sino-Muslims participated in anti-Japanese efforts .... In doing so they invoked a phrase from the Hadith, "Hubb al-watan min al-iman" or loving the country is loving the religion" which was first used in 1930 by Imam Wang Jingzhai. (p. 381)

Lipman (1984) and Kexun (1982) referred to the fact that many of Sino Muslims are no less patriot than any other Chinese ethnicity. In this regard, Limpan (1984, p. 312) states that some Muslim Brotherhood members were well-known Chinese patriots who defended their motherland against Japanese aggression. In the same vein, Mao (2011, p. 373), argues that as early as the 1930s Sino-Muslims advocated a unified Chinese nation which accommodates all communities regardless of their ethnicities or religions. In this regard, Chinese promised that the “five nationalities” — the Han, the Mongols, the Manchu, the Tibetans and the Muslims (or the so-called Hui) would enjoy equal citizenship and freedom of religion” (Mao 2011, p.376). So, Chinese Muslim delegations visited many Muslim countries in the 1930s, for example Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, with the aim of refuting Japanese claims that Muslims would be better off if they joined Japan and at the same time promoting the Chinese cause for integrating Sino-Muslims into China rather than Japan (Mao 2011, p. 384). In 1938-39, a Chinese Muslim delegation (most of whom were Chinese students who studied Arabic and Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt) travelled to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. and at the same time to promote the idea that it is for the benefits of Muslims to join China not Japan. Members of the delegation, according to Mao:

actively used their mission to advance a vision of the Chinese nation in which Muslims would play an important role in domestic and foreign affairs. This was based on a particular understanding of global politics which allowed Sino-Muslim elites to reconcile the transnational characteristic of Islam with loyalty to the territorially bound “Chinese nation” (Mao 2011, p. 373).

From an Islamic point of view, one must abide by the laws and regulations of the country where he resides in, either as a citizen or a visitor let alone being loyal to his country to the extent that he/she would gladly lose his/ her life defending his/her homeland. Dying while defending your country is the highest and most honourable death a Muslim can dream for; something which may elevate the participant to the position of a “shahid” (martyr). Muslims do not have any problem integrating in any country where they live as long as they have their dignity respected. If they suffer from severe problems or persecution in their homelands or elsewhere, Muslims are advised by God to seek refuge somewhere else where they can find better treatment. Yet, what we can add here is that loving one’s country is a very Islamic tenet, but it is not to be taken for granted. Rather, it is a reciprocal relationship or bond between a nation and its citizens according to which people love their countries as so long as they and their rights are respected. On the other hand, people may loathe their countries of birth if they are marginalized or discriminated against.

According to Israel (1981, p. 902), their (the Muslims) “daily validation of their membership in the universal umma is at the basis of Muslim ritual and one of the “pillars of Islam” is the tenet of Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca-the Holy place of all Muslims. Despite Chinese attempts to differentiate within the Muslim community in China between the Hui of China proper, the Uighurs of Xingjian, and the other Turkic minorities of Central Asia—Uzbek, Kirghiz and Kazakh—a general sentiment of Islamic brotherhood potentially if not practically unites all those splinters into one social and cultural group.

## 5.0 Subversive Acts: Human Rights Crises and Echoes of Repression in China

This section is a brief review of China's Human Rights abuses against its people in particular among the Muslim communities in Xinjiang semi-autonomous region. Other foreign nationals too suffer though the challenge of Uighur suppression is dominant. It describes the various methods that demonstrate repression of the Uighur Minority Muslims in China. It assesses frankly the human rights abuses meted out to them by the Chinese government, giving it a dismal score for abuses. It examines critically the feasibility of using the UN for example to protect the rights of the Muslims. It concludes by stating the case for an integrated and properly coordinated approach by the international community as a whole not only for the problem of Muslims in China but other religions as well.

During the last two decades, Chinese crackdown on the Muslim minority in China has been on the rise. Throughout this period reports of massive arrests, repressions and killings appeared in international media outlets. Again, thousands of mosques were demolished inside Chinese territories (Shohret Hoshur and Brooks Boliek, 2018). In 2018, Chinese authorities started to demolish a historic mosque in China's western region of Ningxia but thousands of locals demonstrated against this and for the time being this operation has been put on hold (Michael Martina, 2018). According to the BBC, in August 2018 international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, reported that about one million Uyghur Chinese Muslims have been held in political rehabilitation camps.<sup>(1)</sup> An 117 pages report by HRW entitled "Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," details human rights violations committed by Chinese authorities against Muslim minority in China. The report serves an enumeration of some of the human rights abuses meted to members of the Muslim community include mass arbitrary detention, religious repression and surveillance. The article focuses on Xinjiang. It states: "The Chinese government is conducting a mass systematic campaign of human rights violations against Turkic Muslim in Xinjiang in northwestern China"<sup>(2)</sup>. This situation is reiterated in a 117-page report titled, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," where new evidence of the Chinese government's mass arbitrary detention, torture, and the increasingly pervasive controls on daily life is cited. The article paints a picture of a situation where people are subjected to among other atrocities, forced political indoctrination, collective punishment, restrictions on movement and communications, which heightens religious restrictions, and mass surveillance.

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(1) BBC, "China Uighurs: One million held in political camps, UN told," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-45147972>, cite accessed on 01/9/2018.

(2) HRW, "China: Massive Crackdown in Muslim Region," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/09/china-massive-crackdown-muslim-region>, cite accessed on 01/10/2018.

The magnitude of these atrocities is aptly captured by Sophie Richardson, who is Director at Human Rights Watch for China. She observes: "The Chinese government is committing human rights abuses in Xinjiang on a scale unseen in the country in decades"<sup>(3)</sup>. She adds Chinese "employ high-tech mass surveillance systems that make use of QR codes, biometrics, artificial intelligence, phone spyware, and big data. And they have mobilized over a million officials and police officers to monitor people including through intrusive programs in which monitors are assigned to regularly stay in people's homes"<sup>(4)</sup>. This assertion is reiterated in an article "Eradicating Ideological Viruses" where it solidifies the narrative of Human Rights abuses by mentioning them, for example, the use of high-tech mass surveillance systems, conducting compulsory mass collection of biometric data, such as voice samples and DNA, and use of artificial intelligence and big data. On his part, Gay McDougall, a member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination asserts that Beijing had, as quoted by the BBC, "turned the Uighur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internment camp". His views are captured in China Uighurs: One million held in political camps.<sup>(5)</sup> In these camps mentioned by McDougall, inmates are forcefully made to swear loyalty of allegiance to China's president Xi Jinping. His assertions are enumerated elsewhere where deaths in the political re-education camps have been reported, raising concerns about physical and psychological abuse as well as stress from poor conditions, overcrowding, and indefinite confinement. This article goes further and claims, "people are held even when they have serious illnesses or are elderly; there are also children in their teens, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people with disabilities" [ibid].

Over the past decade, human rights groups have documented widespread repression of this Turkic ethnic minority, from barring religious customs, to forcing many Uighurs to change their names and attend communist party rallies according to a report by Aljazeera "Has China detained a million Uighur Muslims?"<sup>(6)</sup> Furthermore, dietary traditions have been violated as well. A good example is where Muslims are forced to drink alcohol and eat pork in China's re-education camps. This observation is noted by Gerry Shih (Gerry Shih and Dake Kang, 2018). He is quoted, "Muslims are detained for re-education by China's government and made to eat pork and drink alcohol, according to a former internment camp inmate". An article from the Independent states that the reason why non-Chinese had been detained is

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(3) *HRW*, <https://www.hrw.org/about/people/sophie-richardson>, cite accessed on 5/11/2018.

(4) *HRW*, "China: Massive Crackdown in Muslim Region," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/09/china-massive-crackdown-muslim-region>, cite accessed on 5/11/2018.

(5) BBC, "China Uighurs: One million held in political camps, UN told," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-45147972>, cite accessed on 01/9/2018.

(6) *Aljazeera*, a report in Upfront on September 15, 2018, "Has China detained a million Uighur Muslims?" <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2018/09/china-detained-million-ughur-muslims-180914083334948.html>, cite accessed on 30/9/2018.

that the government stated that the rights of foreigners are protected and they should be law abiding as well.

In conclusion, it can be safely concluded that world powers are not able to reprimand and publicly criticize the government of Beijing. In November 2018, the United States considered imposing sanctions on China for violating human rights but such proposals are just news (Edward Wong, 2018). In reaction to this, according to a report in the Businessinsider, Chinese authorities asked the Congress to back off such a proposal (Alexandra Ma, 2018). This is partly attributed to the fact that China has gigantic global influence. As if not enough, China's position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council insulates her from the International community and this therefore means that China has the authority to deflect international action against her. The United States, European Union and others need to remain vocal on human rights and bring on larger contingents of like-minded countries to collectively stand against these policies. Whatever the rhetorical commitment to fundamental change and movement to equitable future scenarios, strong elements of continuity will be evident, even in the medium to long term. Again, when fourteen EU Ambassadors serving in China sent a letter signed by all of them to Chinese authorities in which they asked for explanations about reports that say that 1 million Muslims were detained in China, Chinese officials described this as "very rude".

### Concluding remarks

This paper has discussed the evolution of the cultural aspects of the Muslims in Mongolia and has assessed some of the difficulties encountered from the beginning in their worship of the religion of Islam. With a new and increasingly democratic power structure in regard to prospects in China, Islamic institutions and cultural practices will have to re-assess or continue to re-assess the needs of the Islamic society in Mongolia. This must mean offering more opportunities to Mongolian Muslims and those who suffered under the previous regimes. Given that there is minimal capacity at the present Mongolian cultural structures, this presents a considerable challenge.

It seems fair that religious minorities like the Muslims should be given some form of freedom to practice their religion freely without any bottlenecks or restrictions. This certainly can be justified on grounds of the historic disadvantage of Mongolian Muslims and their impoverished representation in the decision-making mechanisms of public and private life in Mongolia. The exclusion of Mongolian Muslims in important decision making is untenable both ideologically and pragmatically. The Mongolian Muslims should be at the centre of nation building and denying them any of those opportunities is, realistically dubious and from a principled stand-point, it would surely run contrary to the sense of natural justice that has informed the efforts of those who have struggled for so long in the quest for a democratic society founded on equal treatment regardless of race or creed.

This paper has touched on many issues including the creation of an elite class of farmers and military. Although it addressed various facets of the Muslim culture in Mongolia, it examined contextual levels only, namely trade, farming, religion and development. In response to the post-Genghis Khan period, the Muslims stepped up food production. Various agricultural schemes were proposed, peasant production was re-examined and there was revival of agricultural impetus.

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