

STUDIES ON ETHNIC GROUPS IN CHINA

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*Familiar Strangers:  
A History of Muslims in Northwest China*  
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# Familiar Strangers

## A History of Muslims in Northwest China

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### STRATEGIES OF INTEGRATION

convert what had been frontier buffer zones for an empire—those governed by Qing period *tusi*, for example—into integral parts of the homeland, demarcated by national boundaries. This was the substance of Gu Jiegang's message in 1938—that the border and the frontier must be the same line. But that process took a long time, including the Qing conquest of the northwest and then eastern Turkestan; Agui's subjugation of Su Forty-three and Tian Wu; Zuo Zongtang's carefully planned reconquest of the whole northwest; the creation of Xinjiang as a province; and Dong Fuxiang's cooptation of Ma Anliang and his Muslim cavalry to defeat Ma Weihan, Ma Yonglin, and the other rebels of 1895. All of these military acts forwarded the political incorporation of the northwestern frontier into a Chinese-dominated nation-state, centered in the east.

The irony lies in the gradual *disintegration* that characterized political China as a whole during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Qing and then Republican governments struggled to hold at the center, as secessionist movements broke off large chunks of the empire, as the entire political fabric unraveled after 1916, the northwest drew closer to China. Ma Fuxiang, Ma Yuanzhang, and many other northwestern Muslims played roles in that conflicted but nonetheless clearly centripetal movement. By accepting the legitimacy of the Qing and Republican states and actively supporting them, working with or even becoming officials, building their own communities as part of the Chinese nation, these new leaders ensured the inseparable bond between their poor, battered region and the New China a-borning in its cultural centers back east.

#### MA QIXI (1857–1914) AND HIS SINO-ISLAMIC COLLECTIVIST MOVEMENT IN SOUTHERN GANSU

In 1914, after Ma Anliang murdered Ma Qixi, more than forty young women of the Xidaotang were kidnapped to Hezhou, where they were imprisoned in a cart shop before being bestowed upon men. Two *ahong* from another *menhuan* just happened to be walking by the shop gate and saw what was going on, so they could not help but ask, "You say that your Xidaotang is an orthodox Way, but everyone says you're heretics! What the ear hears may be groundless, but what the eye sees is true, so we'll test you today. Can you answer?" Then the two *ahong* started quizzing them about faith, the six articles of faith, and the five divine

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commandments, and then moved on to the interpretation of each part of the Koran, *shari'a*, the Three Vehicles [of Sufism], and more. Those young women, using both Arabic and Chinese, cited the scriptures and quoted the texts, answering every question smoothly and fluently. The two *ahong* were deeply moved, and they ran to Ma Anliang and said, "You've made a grave error! Their religious solidarity is a true one." And they demanded that the imprisoned Xidaotang women be released.<sup>48</sup>

On the inside, communist; to the outside, imperialist [Ch. *Nei gongchan, wai diguo*].<sup>49</sup>

#### Local Leader, National Vision

Ma Yuanzhang rebuilt the Jahriya, using its already established networks, its interprovincial trade, and its tradition of internal cohesion in the face of social, religious, and political hostility. His expertise in Chinese calligraphy, social relations, and politics earned him the admiration of Qing officials and local gentry, while his Islamic learning, Arabic calligraphy, and ability as a mediator won him the respect and obedience due from *menhuan* adherents to a successful *jiaozhu*. Around Zhangjiachuan, he tried to build a self-sufficient refuge, a place where Muslims could live, not detached from Chinese society but far enough from the real dangers of ethnic strife and prejudice. He also shared with Ma Fuxiang, the cosmopolitan Guomindang warlord based at Ningxia, the need to relocate the Sino-Muslims politically in the rapidly changing world of New China. At home in Gansu, both of them had to deal with Ma Anliang, whose military and political power, based at Hezhou, dominated the region. All players in Gansu public life knew that Ma Anliang would use his cavalry and his close relationship to the Lanzhou authorities against any opposition, a willingness displayed most vividly in his violent attack on the Xidaotang, an apparently innocuous Muslim group based at Old Taozhou.<sup>50</sup>

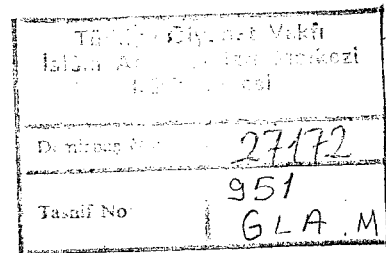
48. Zhu Gang, "Zhongguo Yisilanjiao," 101–2.

49. This proverbial description of the Xidaotang appears in many articles on the subject, e.g., the comment of Gu Jiegang's companion in his northwestern mission (Wang Shumin, "Xidaotang," 123).

50. Old Taozhou refers to the *jiucheng*, the more ancient and strategically located of two walled towns in the county, both now called Lintan. New Taozhou, for a long time the administrative seat of the county, lies twenty miles to the east, closer to the northward bend of the Tao River and to China.

MUSLIM CHINESE  
*Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*

Dru C. Gladney



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Quranic texts and banners; these are the most striking markers of Sufi mosques and worship centers in the northwest, whose walls are often layered with calligraphy and unique Hui-style art.<sup>166</sup>

Within the Yihewani, another reform movement emerged in the 1930s, the Salafiyya, that stressed a non-politicized fundamentalist return to Wahhabi scripturalist ideals.<sup>167</sup> In turn, in the last few years, a controversy has arisen within the Salafiyya in Gansu over the immanence or transcendence of Allah. Those who believe in transcendence—that Allah dwells in a high place above the affairs of humankind (*gao weizhishang*)—demonstrate their position by cutting their hair short. Immanentists, by contrast, let their hair grow down to their collars, symbolizing God's presence in the world.

The Yihewani continue to be a powerful Islamic group throughout China. Like the Gedimu, the Yihewani emphasize leadership through training and Islamic education rather than inheritance and succession. The Yihewani differ from the Gedimu primarily in ritual matters and their stress upon reform through Chinese education and modernism. Because of their emphasis on nationalist concerns, education, modernization, and decentralized leadership, the order has attracted more urban intellectual Muslims. The Yihewani are also especially numerous in areas like Qinghai and Gansu where they proliferated during the Republican period under the patronage of Hui warlords. Many of the large mosques and Islamic schools rebuilt with government funds throughout China in the late 1970s and early 1980s tend to be staffed by Yihewani Imam.

*The Xi Dao Tang.* A small Islamic movement that did not gain much popularity in China is important because of its historical and cultural significance. The Xi Dao Tang was the only completely "native" Islamic movement in China, which arose at the beginning of this century through a fascinating combination of Chinese and Islamic learning. Known publically as the "Study the Han Faction" (*Han xue pai*), they called themselves the Xi Dao Tang ("Western School" or "Mosque"). Xi Dao Tang originated in Lin Tan (Tao Zhou old city), a market town that served as an important economic center and crossroads for Sichuan, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Gansu, Tibet, and Qinghai. The site of incredible turmoil in the aftermath of the 1862 Hui Rebellion, Tao Zhou was the cen-

ter of fierce Han, Hui, and Tibetan ethnic violence, as well as sectarian divisions among the competing Islamic orders in the area. The movement took its inspiration from Ma Qixi (1857-1914, note that his name means, "one who reveals the West"), a Qing *xincai* scholar, who wrote several works along the same lines as the Qing-dynasty Islamic-Confucian texts of Liu Zhi, which sought to legitimate Islam in terms of Confucian moral tenets and discourse. Originally a member of the Khufiyya Beizhuang branch *menhuan*, in 1901 he established his own movement, which emphasized study of the Quran as the only scripture as opposed to other Sufi texts. Significantly, he promoted the study of the Chinese Confucian-Islamic classics, communal living, and cordial relations between Han, Hui, and Tibetan. Ma Qixi strongly stressed both classical Chinese and Arabic learning, even the study of the Quran in Chinese, and his following grew quickly. He was able, in a relatively short time, to establish a modernist, accommodationist movement that was supported by the pillars of Tao Zhou Hui commercial society. There is much mixed opinion as to the source of Ma Qixi's popularity and wealth. George Andrew, the Protestant missionary who worked in the area, gives the following account of the rise of this "New Sect":

By this time he had quiet a large following, and to them he commenced to expound his new teaching, which proved a strange mixture of Mohammedanism, Confucianism, and Spiritualism. He held regular seances, and mystified his followers by exhibitions of black art. Strange to say, this retirement had resulted in the restoration of his health. Numbers joined him, till one morning the members of the Old Sect awoke to the fact that a large, powerful, and dangerous organization had sprung up in their midst. This was no sooner realized than they took steps to suppress it, but the root had already struck deeper than they thought.<sup>168</sup>

With its approximately 10,000 followers, one of the early unique contributions of the association was an emphasis upon communal living and holding all economic assets in common. About 400 lived this way in Tao Zhou, with other adherents spread throughout Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. The Xi Dao Tang also emphasized the passing of succession through merit, not blood, and criticized the accumulation of wealth by the leaders of the association. The 400 in Tao Zhou lived in community, seeking equal distribution of their goods. As a trading center, Tao Zhou proved to be an excellent environment for this kind of community