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Individual Paths to the Global Ummah:
Islamic Revival and Ethnic Identity in Northwest China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Alexander Blair Stewart

Committee in Charge:

Professor David K. Jordan, Chair
Professor Suzanne Brenner
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2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved wife and son, who patiently endured one year of my absence while I conducted research and another year of virtual absence while I wrote this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Individual Paths to the Global Ummah:
Islamic Revival and Ethnic Identity in Northwest China

by

Alexander Blair Stewart

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor David K. Jordan, Chair

The ongoing resurgence of religious practice in China features an Islamic revival characterized by rejection of the traditional association of religion with ethnicity, emphasis on individual understanding and devotion, and the embrace of an imagined transnational community that is both modern and universal. Exploring how this revival influences individual experiences of religion and the status of Islam and the Hui ethnic group of Chinese-speaking Muslims within the Chinese state uncovers profound implications for the relationships among religion, ethnicity and modernity and the role of religion within secular states. This study is based on ethnographic research in and around

Xining, Qinghai Province, among participants in the Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at movements, converts to Islam, and “reaffirmed Muslims” who have recently embraced more devout forms of Islamic practice without changing their sectarian affiliation.

The history of Islam in China contextualizes modern revival movements as the latest in a long line of new ideas Chinese Muslims have brought from the Middle East to revitalize and unintentionally destabilize Chinese Islam. Contrasting nonobservant “ethnic Muslims” with devout “reaffirmed Muslims” illustrates key characteristics of revival that transcend sectarian boundaries to create broader forms of identification perceived to be more modern. Profiling imams from different sects highlights how theological debates underlie differences in religious practice and authority. Describing how individuals withstand social and familial censure to participate in Tablighi Jama'at or Salafiyya, convert to Islam, or embrace more devout forms of practice illustrates how some perceive embracing the universal ummah over devalued local communities as a form of individual empowerment.

These individual paths to revival have broad implications for our understanding of ethnic, national, and transnational identities and communities within China and other secular states. Numerous profiles of informants reveal diverse visions of modernity and perceptions of transnational alliances and conflicts within and in relation to the global ummah. Overall, most Chinese Muslims see themselves as a particularly virtuous group within (and usually not wholly opposed to) the predominantly Han and atheist nation. Revivalists tend to emphasize a sense of belonging to an imagined transnational community rather than a parochial ethnic community or a materialist national one.

Chapter 1 - Xining's Islamic Landscape

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing and all-aware. (Qur'an 49:13)

Narrated Narrated Kathir bin 'Abdullah [and he is Ibn 'Amr bin 'Awf Al-Musani]: narrated from his father, from his grandfather that the Prophet said to Bilal bin Al-Harith: "Know." He said: "I am ready to know O Messenger of Allah!" He said: "That indeed whoever revives a Sunnah from my Sunnah which has died after me, then for him is a reward similar to whoever acts upon it without diminishing anything from their rewards. And whoever introduces an erroneous innovation which Allah is not pleased with, nor His Messenger, then he shall receive sins similar to whoever acts upon it, without that diminishing anything from the sins of the people." (Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2677)

It's lunchtime on a Friday, and the sidewalks and buses on the main street running through the center of Xining (西宁), the capital of Qinghai (青海) Province, are packed with men wearing small white hats and toting prayer rugs, from scrawny teenagers in patent leather blazers to wispy-bearded old men in long, gray coats. Most of them are headed to Dong Guan (东关) Mosque, where so many Muslims attend Friday prayer that the prayer hall overflows into the courtyard, and more of Allah's devotees spill out of the front gate to cover the sidewalk and at least one lane of the street. Each Friday when the sun is at its zenith, the Islamic faith requires all male believers to attend prayer in a congregation of at least three people, but in Xining, virtually all devout Muslims converge in just three groups, leaving about fifty mosques virtually empty. Xining perhaps the only Chinese urban center in which most Muslims belong to the Yihewani (伊赫瓦尼) revivalist sect and attend a single mosque en masse. Loudspeakers broadcast

the imam's voice so that tens of thousands can move as one. On Muslim holidays, traffic is diverted, and the entire street is filled with prostrating, white-hatted masses. First built in 1380, the mosque is the oldest in town and its congregation is the largest in China. Many renovations have combined Chinese temple-style prayer hall and classroom buildings with Arab-style dome and minarets over the front gate. The mosque's architectural style and the Yihewani or New Teaching (新教) religious movement it houses illustrate the work in progress that is Chinese Islam, a constant struggle between Chinese-style syncretism and globalized Islamic universalism.

On the eastern fringe of this historic Muslim quarter, three blocks from Dong Guan Mosque, members of Yang Jia Zhuang (楊家庄) Mosque prostrate in unison under green and white minarets that were just recently encased in bamboo scaffolding as a new Arabic-style mosque that rivals the size of Dong Guan was built over the site of an older Chinese style mosque. The only significant contrast with the other mosques in town is the presence of incense cauldrons, which facilitate a uniquely Chinese ritual practice proscribed by the more orthodox reform movements like Yihewani and its more recently arrived rival, Salafiyya. Worshippers here are eager to remind a curious outsider that their Gedimu sect (格迪目 or 格底木), (a transliteration of the Arabic *qadīm*, meaning "old"), a Sunni sect practicing the Hanafi school of law, is popularly known as the Old Teaching 老教 in order to differentiate it from both Sufi sects and the aforementioned reform movements that began arriving in China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. They remind me that their Old Teaching contains the majority of China's Muslims, and the unusual prominence of Yihewani in Xining is merely the legacy of a Guomindang (国民

党)-allied Muslim warlord named Ma Bufang (马步芳, 1903-1975) supporting this more unified and nationalistic, thus easier to control, movement over the more fractious Gedimu and Sufi sects in the 1930s and 1940s. But worshippers here are reluctant to openly criticize other sects, and one student here even tells me that which mosque one attends simply is determined by where one was born. While numerous Sufi brotherhoods exist all over China, only the Qadariyya is prominent in Xining, and its members are still so few in number that they often attend the Gedimu mosque and are popularly considered part of the “Old Teaching” in contrast to the “New Teaching,” as Yihewani is commonly called.

Between the large and imposing Yang Jia Zhuang and Dong Guan Mosques, down an alley off the main street, a third congregation meets for Friday prayer. The old Shu Lin Xiang 树林巷 Mosque had no minarets, and one could easily overlook its modest doorway topped with Arabic lettering, but its prayer hall’s Arab-style windows were unmistakable once one stepped into its courtyard. This modest edifice was smaller than the previous two mosques, but its two-story prayer hall also would fill to capacity each Friday with members of the Salafiyya movement, the smallest and most recent to emerge among China’s Islamic sects. Many non-Salafis refer to it as Santai (三抬), meaning “three hand-raises,” as raising the hands three times during each cycle of prayer is the most readily apparent practice identifying adherents of this movement. During my time in Xining, the old Salafi mosque was demolished to make way for a new development and the temporary prayer hall in a run-down apartment building looked even less mosque-like, but the congregants were building an ornate new building, which will rival other

local mosques in size and grand Arabic-style architecture. Salafis are a much maligned minority within China, but they are quick to remind others that their sect is dominant in the original homeland of Islam, Saudi Arabia. While the imams and theological students at other mosques wear turbans wrapped around their heads and trailing down their backs during prayers as is common in Iran and Central Asia, the learned Muslims at Shu Lin Xiang drape keffiyas them over their heads Saudi-style, just one superficial example of their professed claim to a more authentic Islam.

Both Yihewani and Salafis regard Sufism as heterodox and Gedimu as too Sinified, but Salafis also claim that the Yihewani did not go far enough in removing cultural accretions and returning to the original, universal Islam. The Yihewani and Salafiyya movements both descend from the eighteenth century Wahhabi movement that advocated a return to the practices of the Prophet and his followers as described in the Qur'an and Hadith, which required purging the perceived innovations that had arisen in the latter days of the Ottoman Empire. The Yihewani is related to the global Ikhwan or Islamic Brotherhood movement, but its Chinese manifestation has become strongly nationalistic, engaged in Chinese politics, and supportive of modern education. The evolution of these characteristics (to be described in chapter 2) earned the movement the sponsorship of Ma Bufang in the 1930s and 1940s, and more recently, the Chinese Communist Party's Chinese Islamic Association. The Salafi in China gradually emerged out of the Yihewani movement in the 1930s and '40s in response to the perceived Sinification of Yihewani due to involvement with Chinese politics and too loose an interpretation of the Qur'an. Today, Yihewani make up about one-fifth of China's

Muslims but are inordinately represented among powerful urban elites and bureaucrats. The Salafi remain a tiny minority making up about less than one percent of China's Muslims, but the sect is rapidly growing, and Salafi ideas are very influential among foreign-educated Muslims, some international businessmen, and Arabic language teachers¹. Small but important contradictions in ritual practices and theology mean devout Muslims must choose membership in just one of the aforementioned sects, but there is one movement that manages to transcend these sectarian bounds.

A few hours after the noontime sermons, many Muslims return to the same mosque for afternoon prayer, but some prefer to gather in a small hotel prayer room instead, where a particular kind of religious study will follow prayer. Twice every day, after dawn and late afternoon prayer, some participants in the Tablighi Jama'at² (Preaching Society) movement sit in a circle on the prayer room floor and listen to one of their number talk. Eventually, he designates a small group of four to ten people, including a local guide and some amateur preachers visiting from out of town, to go out and knock on doors to invite other Muslims to join the study session. He chooses another to stand at the door to welcome and guide inside any Muslims this group manages to recruit. One more person sits and lectures the few people who remain behind on one of the six major virtues of Muhammad's companions. Finally, an elder man is entrusted with what they regard as the most important responsibility; he sits in a corner, facing Mecca and prays

¹ These figures are estimates based on personal experience, the estimations of numerous Chinese Muslims, and Gladney (1996) who cites the following estimates by Ma Tong: 58.2% Gedimu, 21% Yihewani, 10.9% Jahriyya, 7.2% Khufiyya, 1.4% Qadariyya, 0.5% Xidaotang, and 0.7% Kubrawiyya.

² This is the Urdu name, which is the term most commonly used internationally. In Arabic, it is called Jama'at al Tabligh. The English translation is the same.

for the endeavor's success. Eventually, the group returns, with or without new recruits, and one of its members delivers a sermon that concludes with the need for Muslims to leave their homes to embark on proselytizing trips in which they urge every Muslim they meet to more actively practice and promote Islam. Finally, someone stands up and asserts that it is every Muslim's responsibility to go out on such a preaching trip, or jama'at, for three days each month, forty days each year, or at least four months in a lifetime. Then he takes names and contact information of volunteers, so that the organizers may pray that they follow through on their pledges, drop by their houses and visit them, and help them form groups to embark on such trips in the future. Since the movement's founding in 1920s India and its arrival in China in the 1980s, this practice has attempted to combat a perceived prevalence of nominal adherence to Islam by striving to imitate the deeds of Muhammad's companions in the early days of Islam when believers were few and they all had to struggle to spread the faith.

Yihewani, Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at movements continue a historic cycle of reform and revival movements led by Chinese scholars of Islam who return from abroad preaching new ways of returning to the original faith. Salafis claim that Salafism is not a sect, but a methodology of strictly interpreting the Qur'an and of solving disputes by looking for evidence in only the Qur'an and Hadith, without regard for unsubstantiated claims by imams of the past or present. Likewise, participants in the Tablighi Jama'at attempt to transcend all sectarian divides by inviting everyone to live in the simple lifestyle of Muhammad's companions and refusing to discuss any contentious issues. Despite these attempts at inclusiveness, each movement to arrive in China receives the

pejorative label of “new” from its critics, while adherents describe it simply as a return to the true Islam. Of course, Salafis reject many Chinese Islamic practices as innovation, and even Tablighi Jama’at is accused of criticizing existing sects by claiming that embarking on proselytizing journeys (called “jama’ats”) is every Muslim’s duty. Proponents of Salafism in the 1930s and ‘40s brashly highlighted the shortcomings of the other sects, including the Yihewani movement from which they emerged. The result was a backlash both from leaders of those sects and from ordinary Muslims, who still feel Salafis are ill-mannered extremists. Thus, today’s Salafis favor a more academic, inwardly focused and nonjudgmental approach to theological issues. Despite very different tactics, practices, and beliefs, adherents of both Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama’at claim a stronger link to the legacy of the Prophet because of their association with transnational movements very much in vogue throughout the Islamic world. These linkages to movements in regions of geopolitical importance create legitimacy as well suspicion in the eyes of the government. This permits them some leeway to carry out civil society-type public service projects, but also makes such activities subject to strict supervision.

Like Salafiyya and Yihewani, the Tablighi Jama’at advocates a return to the original, authentic, and universal form of Islam practiced by Muhammad. Herein, I will discuss all three of these movements as modes of Islamic revival, but the exact definition of what they want to revive and the means of achieving it are different in each case. There are also many Muslims who seek to revive Islam without participating in any of these movements. A young Salar named Ayoob whom I will introduce later, told me that

the same Hadith from the al Bukhari collection inspires both Salafis and Tablighi Jama'at movements: "The most superior among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it" (6.61.546). The Salafis insist one must thoroughly learn the Qur'an before teaching, while participants in Tablighi Jama'at emphasize the need to teach whatever one knows. While these Islamic modalities differ in goals, practices, and some theological aspects, it is important to remember that almost all of Xining's Muslims still greet each other with a friendly "As salaam alaykum!" and sometimes even pray at each other's mosques. They each view their past and present differently, but aspire to a common future goal in which China's Muslims will be more pious and united with the global ummah. Despite their differences, most adherents of all these congregations agree that all Muslims are brothers, and their ancestors peacefully (for the most part) have shared the same neighborhood for centuries; together they compose the shifting theological terrain that is Xining's Islamic landscape.

The Ethnographic Context:

Seeking Universality Between Han Majority and Ethnic Minority

Xining, a bustling city of two million (small by Chinese standards), is capital of China's largest, least populated, and westernmost province (excluding autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang). Qinghai Province also has the unique distinction of sitting between China's two most restive regions, Tibet and Xinjiang, with its capital situated at the confluence of Han (汉族), Tibetan (藏族), Mongolian (蒙古族), Uygur (维吾尔族), and Hui (回族) cultural realms. The Hui and Uygurs are two of the ten Chinese national minorities that traditionally adhere to the Islamic faith. The Hui are the largest among

these ethnic groups and often are misleadingly called “Chinese-speaking Muslims,” by scholars, Han, and Hui themselves. Most Hui are indistinguishable from Han Chinese except for their Islamic beliefs and practices, but they actually speak a variety of local dialects and include a variety of ethnic traits. Many of them can trace their ancestry back to Arab, Persian, or Central Asian traders who came to China in numerous waves beginning in the Tang Dynasty, married Han women, and raised Muslim children who spoke Mandarin or other local dialects. Many others converted to Islam more recently, and some of them live among other non-Muslim ethnicities, speaking their languages and physically resembling them, but their legal identification cards and self-identifications proclaim them to be Hui. Hui live scattered all over China in virtually every major city, but the largest concentration of them is located in eastern Qinghai Province, eastern Gansu (甘肃) Province, and Ningxia (宁夏) Hui Autonomous Region.

Traditionally, the Hui served as middlemen between more sedentary Han agriculturalists and the mostly nomadic neighboring ethnic groups. In Xining and other Chinese cities, Muslims historically lived outside the city gates, separate from the Han Chinese in a buffer zone between the Han and other non-Chinese peoples. In spite of recent tensions between Hui and Tibetans, the two groups historically enjoyed a symbiotic economic relationship in which the Hui would bring agricultural trade goods from Han cities to Tibetan camps (Gaubatz 1998; Fischer 2005). Today, the vast majority of Xining’s mosques, and most of its Muslims still reside in the historic Eastern District 城东区 that once lay outside the city gates. Thus, Dong Guan, whose name means “east gate,” and many of the city’s older mosques (or their modern incarnations) have names

reminiscent of Muslim exclusion: Bei Guan (北关, “north gate”), Nan Guan (南关, “south gate”), Xi Guan (西关 “west gate”), Shui Cheng Men (水城门, “Water City Gate”), and Guang De Men Gongbei (广德门拱北, “Broad Virtue Gate Tomb”). During my time in Xining, I lived just outside the southern wall of this suburb, living on the fringes like a foreigner traditionally would. The Hui, however, were neither fully within the city’s inner walls nor separate from Han settlements; both in imperial times and the present, they straddle the line between minority ethnicity and membership in the Chinese cultural and political community.

According to the 2010 census, Hui make up sixteen percent of Xining’s population and twenty-nine percent of the Eastern District, which contains all of the prominent mosques. Since these numbers include only those with an official *hukou* (户口) residence permit, the number of migrant workers and other transient residents doubtlessly makes the actual Hui population much higher. While the ambiguous nature of Hui ethnic identity gives religion an inordinate impact on members’ identity and makes them ethnographically interesting, Xining’s cosmopolitan Islamic revival movements include members of the Salar, Dongxiang, Kazakh, and Uygur ethnicities, as well as a few Han, Tu, Mongolian, and Tibetan converts. In contrast to the Hui, each of the other Muslim minorities has its own distinct language, common ancestry, and traditional territory within China. The Han and Hui sometimes regard other minorities as less civilized than the more assimilated Hui, but members of these minority nationalities themselves often take pride in their status as “pure Muslim people.”

In spite of clear differences among minority nationalities, Chinese people of all ethnicities commonly use “Hui” as a catchall category for all Muslims in China, so revivalists have begun to correct misuse of this term to point out that Hui is really an inherited ethnic category peculiar to the Chinese context, and devout Muslims of all ethnicities should actively embrace their common, universal identity as Muslims, now officially transliterated as Musilin (穆斯林), instead of dividing themselves into parochial ethnic groups. Thus, my discussion will use *Hui* or other terms to refer to ethnic categories and *Muslim* to refer to believers in Islam regardless of ethnicity. However, to understand the significance of this shift in identity, we first must explore the genesis of Hui as a somewhat unlikely and very malleable ethnic category.

In most cases, the widely recognized and officially celebrated characteristics of all Chinese minorities are superficial—colorful clothing, ethnic cuisine and traditional dances. Hui differ in that they do not invite tourists to dance in circles like other minorities, their cuisine is indicative of dietary restrictions that separate them from the Han (although Chinese of other ethnicities also enjoy Hui cuisine), and distinctive dress is just as often a sign of intra-Hui sectarian divides than it is of Hui unity. It may be impossible to address all of the multifarious regional and linguistic groups legally included within the Hui category in a single study, despite the attempts of most scholars of the subject to do just that. Indeed, numerous Muslims associate this vagary and variety with the chaotic and lax state of Chinese Islam, which inspires devout Muslims to emphasize a transnational religious identity over the questionable label of “Hui.” However, this ever-evolving and ever-broad government-defined category has made the

Hui an ideal locus in which to explore individual and local agency in forming networks and shaping ethnic and religious identity on a national scale. This study will examine how individuals and groups involved in religious revival challenge the state-defined framework of ethnic identity through embracing a universalized and individually determined religious identity, a rival notion of modernity that transcends the Chinese state, and collective action that subtly threatens to supplant the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) discursive role as sole purveyor of virtue.

A Methodological Note: On Crossing Boundaries

This project is based on eleven months of field work conducted within the Eastern District (城东区) of Xining, where most of the city's mosques and Muslims are concentrated. For nine months, I attended congregational prayers multiple times virtually every day, usually in Shu Lin Xiang Mosque, and frequently in Dong Guan, Yu Dai Qiao (玉带桥), Nan Guan, and Bei Guan Mosques. Nearly every day during the last four months in Xining, I prayed and studied in a certain hotel prayer room that will remain nameless because of the questionable legality of the Tablighi Jama'at movement. I also spent a cumulative total of about two weeks staying in an Islamic school in Wuzhong 吴忠 County, Ningxia Province and at another school in a rural area outside Xining, experiences which included rooming with students and teachers, interviewing imams and students, sitting in on classes, and even waking at two a.m. for night prayer during Ramadan. I had the opportunity to fast as part of the Xining Muslim community for the entire month of Ramadan, including eating breakfast at an informant's house every day at 3:30 a.m. and breaking fast with numerous generous hosts. In most cases, I will use

informants' Arabic names in order to preserve their anonymity and for the sake of clarity because virtually all of them share the surname Ma (马), which most Chinese Muslims adopted in the Ming or Qing Dynasties to represent the first syllable of "Muhammad."

During my time in Xining, I went from being considered a bizarre outsider with a strange appearance and unorthodox beliefs to a Muslim brother with an outstanding beard who was struggling to pronounce Arabic and memorize surahs like everyone else. This transition was only possible due to a personal belief that each religion is an equally valid metaphor for the ineffable, and so accepting all of them in spite of their contradictions can only increase one's grasp of the divine. While most Chinese would express atheism by saying, "I don't believe in everything" (我什么都不信), I would omit the negative particle to say, "I believe in everything" (我什么都信). I personally appreciate how this koan-like profession placed my theology beyond logic, but it only confused most people and distracted them from my project. As I became more immersed in the Islamic community, I would explain honestly that I perceived all of the world's religions within the Qur'an. I wholly submitted to Islamic law, and became immersed in the Islamic community until people began telling me that I was more devout and knowledgeable than most Hui.

In my first two months in Xining, I sought out every mosque I could find and chatted with the teens and preteens studying there as well as the old men who were always hanging around mosques. I would ask about where they were from, what brought them to this particular mosque, and what they hoped to do when they completed their studies. They would tell me that they came from eastern Qinghai and Gansu; they chose

the mosque because of convenience, family connections, or admiration for an imam; and they hoped to go abroad to continue their studies. They invariably asked numerous questions about the United States and what brought me to China, and when they asked about my religion, I would profess my faith in omnitheism, which only distracted from my line of questioning. Eventually, the call to prayer would sound, and they would say goodbye and disappear inside the mosque. This continued until the day I visited Shu Lin Xiang, the Salafi mosque, and an old caretaker with whom I had been chatting invited me inside to pray. I told him that I was not Muslim and did not know how, and he said that it was okay, all I had to do was follow him. He led me into the mosque and indicated for me to sit next to him. When he stood, I stood. When he raised his hands and said, “Allahu Akbar,” I did the same. He bowed; I bowed. He prostrated; I prostrated. I returned for the next prayer and did the same. I kept coming back, and he and others showed me how to perform ablution before prayer, the proper way to prostrate, how to sit on my left foot with my right toe on the ground, how to properly pronounce “asalaam alaykum,” and gradually they taught me all the recitations of obligatory prayer and began explaining more and more practices.

I began supplementing my Islamic education at my home in a youth hostel by memorizing the first surah of the Qur’an and other recitations necessary for prayer. Eventually, one of many informants at Shu Lin Xiang took me to buy an electronic Qur’an with reciting pen, and a few men began teaching me the Arabic alphabet and correcting my pronunciation. One day, a learned Muslim man brought me a printout of the declaration of faith both in Arabic and roughly transliterated into the Roman alphabet.

A day or two later, I recited it for him and others while sitting in the mosque between prayers, effectively making me a Muslim. Both Salafis and Tablighi Jama'at participants loved to tell the story of how the other mosques turned me away because of my long, blond hair and white skin, and they would say that those who invited me inside were the only true Muslims, because they understood the universal nature of Islam and disregarded my appearance. Salafis would use this story to emphasize the veracity of their transnational sect, while Tablighis would say it illustrates the need to invite others to pray. I was careful to explain my research project to everyone I met, but they invariably interpreted my presence as Allah's divine guidance and adherence to Islamic law as proof of Islam's veracity, eagerly embellishing and deploying the story of my coming to Islam for their own purposes.

Upon hearing about my studies, my informants claimed that Islam was anthropology, a prescriptive and descriptive science of man. I have not written the evangelical text or moving narrative of conversion they recommended, but I hope my devout method has allowed me to present the world as seen through the eyes of Chinese Muslim revivalists. My omnitheist ideas were not completely alien to my Muslim interlocutors, but only the most open-minded would accept them. Many Chinese Muslims were fond of saying that there is only one truth, so other sages could be divinely inspired, even if their latter-day followers have gone astray. Some Muslims remarked that Buddha, Confucius, and other great teachers could be prophets because the Qur'an says Allah sent many more prophets than are named therein. Others pointed out that the love and forgiveness Christians emphasize is also present in the Qur'an, although imams rarely

emphasize such things. Traditionally, anthropologists bodily participate, but their minds observe from the sidelines, refusing to fully embrace the beliefs of their interlocutors. This too easily can lead to condescension, orientalism, or mechanistic explanations of profound religious experiences. I threw myself into my research, body and soul, which allowed me to glimpse the subjectivity of my subjects, and my informants were better able to understand and embrace my presence as a Muslim brother than as a curious outsider intent on going through the motions.

During my time in China, I tried to follow through on every practice I learned from my Muslim teachers. Before long, I felt uncomfortable if I missed or was late for an obligatory daily prayer. I would enter buildings with my right foot and enter restrooms or leave homes or mosques with my left foot. I would eat, drink, and accept things from people with my right hand and tried to reserve my left hand for dirty things like using the restroom. Of course, I would say, “Asalaam alaykum” and shake hands with all Muslim men, and sometimes I would commit a faux pas and say it to a Muslim’s Han friends as well. I began saying, “Insha’allah” (God willing) instead of “I hope so” or “probably,” “Bismillah,” meaning, “In the name of Allah” before starting to eat or before entering a building, and “al Hamdulillah” or “praise Allah” after finishing a meal, after someone sneezed, or when hearing good news. There was another supplicatory prayer that I would recite before bed, and had I stayed longer, there are countless more I would have learned for nearly every daily activity. I confess that I have not continued praying or abstaining from pork or alcohol after returning to the U.S., but these phrases pop into my head at the appropriate times, my right foot always seems to enter buildings first, I feel slightly

uncomfortable accepting something or eating with my left hand, and I am constantly surprised at how many embodied practices have become second nature. Perhaps most of all, I find myself missing the peace and camaraderie of the mosque and the obligation to take a quiet, meditative pause five times a day. In a sense, I still am experiencing a taste of the conflicted identity of Chinese Muslims. I obviously lack the hereditary and traditional ties to Islam that the Hui have, but I still am torn between a secular culture and Muslim habitus.

History of the Hui Label

The earliest known occurrence of the term *Huihui* (回回) first occurs in the records of the Western Liao Dynasty (西辽朝) around 1124 as the name of one of the kingdoms its founder, Yelü Dashi (耶律大石), encountered in his campaigns near Samarkand (Dillon 1999). It might have been a transliteration for the Uygur people (then usually transliterated as Huihu or Huihe) who also occupied Central Asia at this time (Gladney 1991). Today, many Hui claim the character 回, which means “to return,” describes their perpetual status as sojourners in China, and others claim the pictograph was chosen to represent the ka’ba within the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Regardless of its origins, the term became commonly used in its reduplicated form to refer to all Muslims during the Yuan Dynasty when numerous Muslims and other foreigners were imported to help oversee China. Today, this form is used solely to deride old-fashioned or uneducated Muslims as “Lao [old] Huihui” (老回回). From the twelfth century until the advent of the present Communist era, the term “Hui” referred to all Muslims in China, regardless of ethnolinguistic distinctions, and it still retains this meaning in popular usage, although

upon reflection, most people now realize this usage is erroneous. Gladney (2010) credits the Marxist historian of the mid-twentieth century Bai Shouyi with successfully persuading the party authorities that the religion of the Hui should be called *Yisilan Jiao* (伊斯兰教, Islamic religion) and not *Hui jiao* (回教, Hui religion) as it is an indigenization of Islam and not a faith unique to the Hui.

The Chinese Nationalists recognized the Hui as one of five nationalities making up the Republic of China, and the Communists maintained this category when they further subdivided the population into 41 nationalities in the 1953 census, and 53 in 1964 before arriving at the present number of 56 in 1982 (Gladney 1991:17). The inclusion of the Hui alongside of and parallel with the other ethnic nationalities (some of which are also traditionally Muslim) transformed the concept of the Hui from a religious to an ethnic community and created a unique minority nationality originating in China.³ The diversity and lack of cohesion among various Hui communities complicated this transition. Nevertheless, Hui people generally embrace their inclusion as a minority nationality and the government-granted benefits that come with it. Various regional and sectarian Hui groups seek to define themselves as the normative Hui variety and their brand of Islam as the definitive faith not just for people of Hui ethnicity, but for all Chinese Muslims. The status of the Hui as the largest in population of China's Muslim ethnicities, the fact that most of them share a common first language with the Han, and their history of involvement in Chinese politics gives them inordinate influence in

³ The Hui are no longer entirely unique to China, because of the Dungan, who are Hui who have lived in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan since their ancestors fled China during the Qing Dynasty.

shaping and defining Chinese Islam. However, the CCP's construction of minority nationalities as quaint fossils of previous stages of cultural evolution entails a notion of identity that is frozen in time and tasked with coming to terms with the present. Thus, Hui identity is in a state of constant tensions among conflicting notions of history, modernity, and proper Islamic practice.

Hui as an Ethnic Category

The complex and often contradictory definition of the Hui as both a religious group and an ethnic category poses the question of how a minority group can simultaneously construct and contest an identity in the midst of a great deal of internal variety and under the often oppressive purview of a majority-dominated state which manipulates such categories to reinforce its own legitimacy. According to the 2000 census, China is about 92% Han Chinese, with 55 different minority nationalities⁴ (少数民族) making up the remaining percentage of the population. The “Hui nationality” (回族), with an estimated 9.2 million members, is the largest of ten such minorities that traditionally practice Islam. But Hui people lack the shared language and common ancestry that helps to define the other nine Muslim groups (listed in descending order of population): the Uygur, Kazakh, Dongxiang (东乡), Kirghiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Bao'an (保安), and Tatar. As with any system of ethnic or cultural taxonomy, the Marxist-Stalinist-inspired system of classification adopted by the Chinese is highly problematic, and this is especially true when considering constructions of Hui identity. Still, the

⁴ The Chinese term *minzu* has traditionally been translated as *nationality*, and while this makes sense for communities that share an identity with a separate nation, like Kazakhs, or those with a substantial history of independent self-governance, like Uygurs, I find the term *ethnicity* to be more fitting for the Hui

government and many Hui perceive more or less common origins in periodic influxes of Islamic traders and mercenaries over the past 1300 years. Throughout this time, the Hui have displayed and maintained boundaries separating them from the Han through the practice of Islamic customs, especially the observance of the pork taboo. However, there is a great deal of variation within Hui ancestry and religious practices, making them both questionable charters for identity.

Of all the 55 officially recognized Chinese minority nationalities, the Hui are the most diverse and widespread, which helps to make their definition as a single nationality the most problematic. When the CCP formed the classification system for nationalities in the 1950s, it viewed all non-Han peoples as fossilized remnants of earlier stages in a unilineal evolution towards socialism. Of course, all of these nationality categories, especially that of the Hui, are in a constant state of contention and reinvention (Caffrey 2004), but most Chinese minorities, to some extent, have accepted a construction of their own identity as a set of traits that must be commemorated and preserved, a few relics of the past that must be carried, unchanged into the future, and can sometimes be exploited for economic gain. Some may clamor for recognition of ignored or mislabeled ethnicities, but the officially recognized groups are—at least officially—set in stone and projected backwards in time as historical fact (Caffrey 2004). At the same time, the state claims to be ushering these loyal subjects forward into a Chinese, socialist modernity.

With the exception of the Han majority and the Hui, the CCP determined that each minority nationality generally meets (or once met) Stalin's four criteria for defining minority nationalities: they speak their own language, are concentrated in the same

general region, have some common subsistence strategies, and share certain customs that can be construed as evidence of a common “psychological makeup.” The Hui loosely fit the last two requirements as they traditionally engage in trade, halal butchering, and operating halal restaurants, and they share in a variety of other customs associated with Islam. But it seems that these traits are common among all Muslim populations and not constitutive of an ethnic identity. Most Hui can recite a little Arabic from the Qur’an, but this hardly constitutes a common language. In spite of this ambiguity, the Hui were among the first nationalities that the Communists recognized, receiving their first autonomous county in 1936⁵. Sun Yat-Sen included them, lumped together with Uygurs and all other Chinese Muslims, as one of the five nationalities of the Chinese Republic. It seems that both Nationalist and Communist parties recognized the Hui as an ethnic minority as a practical component of nation-building efforts, which somewhat arbitrarily imposed an ethnic designation on a religious community. The lack of common language, territory, and uniformity of customs creates the (somewhat accurate) appearance that the Hui are made up of all Chinese Muslims whom the government does not consider distinct enough to warrant their own nationality. This extremely malleable ethnic category has evolved into a discursive arena in which disparate sectarian, regional, and individual actors manipulate religious signifiers to contest the meaning of Hui identity, the nature of Chinese Islam, and the role of religion in individual and group identity.

⁵ Mao Zedong recognized Yuhai Hui Autonomous County in what is now Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region after the fledgling Red Army survived the Long March. The meeting was held in Tongxin Mosque, so it was one of the few religious sites to survive the Cultural Revolution completely intact. Today, it is home to an Yihewani congregation.

Although Hui usually live clustered around mosques in urban neighborhoods or rural villages, their communities are scattered all over China, and clearly do not constitute a common territory. The Hui have the third largest population of all minorities and the most autonomous administrative areas, but even in their autonomous region of Ningxia, Hui comprise only one third of the population, with over 80% of the Hui people living elsewhere in China. Hui reside in every major city and scattered in villages throughout the countryside. Some number of Hui resided in 2,308 of 2,372 counties across China in 1982 (Gladney 1991). However, the Hui population is most concentrated along trade routes on the fringe of China proper, especially in the Gansu-Ningxia-Qinghai corridor leading from Xinjiang toward Xi'an. The wide dispersion of Hui communities is associated with a tradition of pilgrimage and travel for religious study, as well as generations of involvement in trading, military endeavors, and acting as intermediaries on the frontier between the Han and other ethnic groups. Some scholars (Broomhall 1910; Ekvall 1939) contend that strong social, spiritual, and Confucian ties to kin, native villages, and ancestors' graves historically discouraged extended travel among the Han, while spiritual value placed on pilgrimage to Mecca and travel to tombs and theological institutes within China had the opposite effect on Hui. Of course, Han also go on Buddhist or Daoist pilgrimages, and they have migrated all over the world in the Chinese Diaspora, but the relative tendency of the Hui to travel both for religious and secular purposes may have been more pronounced in the era before modern transportation. In the eyes of party officials determining ethnic categories, this proclivity for travel and

commerce could have been used to define a common Hui territory around trade routes and centers of exchange or—just as problematically—as a common economic life.

Although the Hui have always made up only a small proportion of the Chinese population, they have historically dominated several profitable trades. Stereotypic Hui today run halal noodle restaurants or engage in freelance trade, and like many stereotypes, this contains elements of truth about the actual situation and popular perception. I met numerous Hui who stated their occupation simply as “trading” (做买卖) and many others spent at least half their time doing business in Guangzhou or other major commercial capitals. Halal requirements historically involved Hui in the restaurant and hospitality businesses, and today, Lanzhou-style beef noodles have spread from the Hui heartland to become comfort food all over China. Several other occupations, such as butchering sheep and cattle as well as leather-working, also are outgrowths of Islamic customs. It also could be argued that trading excursions are often a secondary outgrowth of religious travel. Indeed, Arabic and Persian language skills contemporary Hui learn in mosques frequently garner prestigious careers in international business rather than employment as religious professionals. Of course, more Han have been seeking opportunities to work and study abroad as China has opened to the outside world, but Han with such ambitions study English, while Hui study Arabic. In short, Hui economic life is just as variable as that of the Han—although the proportions may be slightly different—but other practices set the two apart more clearly.

The taboo on eating pork has created a separation from the Han that has been a major factor in preventing Hui assimilation over the course of their many centuries in

China. In my experience, even the least observant Hui who consume alcohol and eat meat that has not necessarily been slaughtered in the halal fashion still refuse to eat pork, and this shapes Chinese perceptions of Hui identity more than any other tenet of Islamic faith or practice. Some Hui, and many outsiders, consider this to be the defining aspect of Muslim identity, and all others are lumped into a single group of pork-eaters (Caffrey 2004). This creates a barrier between the Hui and Han because the Chinese eat more pork per capita than any other nationality—the word for meat, *rou* (肉), used in isolation is assumed to mean pork—and the Hui cannot eat with any utensils that have been used to prepare or serve it. Eating is a huge part of Chinese social and cultural life, so difficulties in sharing food can create serious social rifts. Yet Muslims (and Jews) all over the world hold this taboo, so its presence, while a significant ethnic marker, hardly constitutes an ethnic identity. The pork taboo is not constitutive of Hui identity, but it could be considered a cornerstone of difference that maintains separation from the Han and builds internal solidarity. Other Muslim nationalities have linguistic and ethnic distinctions that set them apart from Han and Hui alike, so these differences combine with the pork taboo to place the Hui in a cultural space where they are neither completely separated into a minority community nor embraced by the majority. However, dietary restrictions encourage Chinese Muslims to take in traveling co-religionists and open inns and restaurants for Muslims who will not eat or sleep in ritually unclean Han establishments. This situation creates some shared economic characteristics as well as interdependence and community among the Hui and China's other Muslim peoples.

If the Hui fit any of Stalin's criteria, various practices associated with Islam could be said to constitute a shared psychology or culture. In addition to a notion of common descent from Persian and Arab Muslims, customs related to Islam—in spite of varying levels of observance—are the defining characteristics of the Hui. But many modern Hui who have forsaken Islam for atheism still avoid pork and maintain other Hui cultural practices such as endogamous marriage. These secularized Hui could lend credence to the construction of Hui as an ethnicity rather than a religion, or they could simply represent the type of feeble religiosity maintained by lapsed adherents on the periphery of any religious group. In his study of a Fujian Hui lineage that no longer practiced Islam, Gladney (1991) reveals how the Communists gradually shifted from a religious definition of Hui that excluded the lineage to a hereditary concept that included it due to its descent from foreign Muslims. Most Hui are descended from a mixture of ethnicities who spoke several different languages and came from various locations from Central Asia to the Middle East, but I observed an even messier situation on the ground when I met numerous people in Xining who called themselves Han-Hui or *Zang* (藏, Tibetan)-Hui because they or their ancestors had converted to Islam. Thus, for some people, Hui is an inherited ethnic label inscribed on their identity card that makes them feel guilty if they eat pork or drink alcohol. For others, it indicates membership in the Chinese branch of a universal religious community. But increasing numbers of these converts, reaffirmed Muslims, and revivalists prefer to call themselves *Muslim* (穆斯林, Muslims) to distance themselves from those who laxly and/or habitually persist in their faith as an inherited

ethnic trait, and instead, seek a more authentic Islam to align themselves more closely with the global ummah.

Scholarship on the Hui

China's opening to the outside world in the last few decades has allowed several scholars access to the Hui, and they have developed theories to describe the process by which the Hui construe their sense of identity in the rapidly changing cultural and political landscape. Historically, geography and periods of government-imposed isolation have separated Chinese Muslims from the rest of the Islamic world, facilitating the independent development of Islamic practices and also encouraging those able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca to bring back more "authentic" ideas and practices. Gladney (1999) cites Joseph Fletcher's use of the term "tides" to describe these influxes of Muslims and revitalization movements, but he suggests that they would be more properly called "modes" to more accurately capture their lasting and overlapping nature. Regardless of terminology, Alles and her co-authors (2003) note that such movements only succeed by adapting to Chinese culture, but they do not suggest how this would be possible for movements that strive to remove such adaptations from Chinese Islamic practice. Also, placing the Hui on a continuum "between Mecca and Beijing"—to borrow the title of Gillette's (2000) book—does not address the diversity within Chinese Islam that includes historical impact of Persian Islam, virulent condemnation of Saudi Salafism, and growing influence of South Asian Islam through Tablighi Jama'at. It is important to acknowledge the agency of Hui groups and individuals in shaping diverse combinations of these. As Veselič (2013) argues, Chinese Muslims perceive themselves unequivocally

and simultaneously as members of both the Chinese nation and the global ummah. Ties to Chinese tradition or international Islam are tools for asserting and validating local Hui religious and ethnic identity, but not wholly constitutive of it.

Ethnographers and historians alike have puzzled over why diverse and often feuding Hui groups within China persist in embracing the rather arbitrary label the Communist government imposes on them. In many ways, the Hui occupy a middle ground between the Han and the other minority nationalities of China, but there is much contention over whether they can be considered a united entity. Barbara Pillsbury (1973) speaks of “cohesion and cleavage,” Elisabeth Alles and her colleagues (2003) discuss “unity and fragmentation,” and Jonathan Lipman (1984) attempts to determine whether the Hui constitute a “network society or patchwork society.” None of these dichotomies are resolved or are resolvable, since the Hui simultaneously profess to share a single identity while remaining divided into sectarian, regional, and linguistic groups. The only official organization connecting various Hui communities is the Chinese Islamic Association, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) created largely to monitor and control all of China’s Muslims (as it does all of the other recognized religions). But more interesting than these dichotomies or state attempts to manage them are the efforts of traveling Muslim scholars and Tablighi Jama’at preachers to resolve them by spreading a cohesive vision of Islam, encouraging unity and building networks. While the party strives to maintain harmonious relations among the patchwork of Hui sects, Muslim revivalists attempt to transcend these divisions by advocating a universal identity that is inherently beyond the party’s control.

While the government has sanctioned the Hui as an ethnic category and has attempted to guide the discourse on Islamic orthodoxy through sponsorship of Islamic schools and public pronouncements, many Hui actors co-opt, reject, transform, or ignore such attempts by the atheist party to meddle in religious matters. In light of this situation, Gladney (2004:159-60) perceives the construction of Hui identity as “a process of dialogical interaction between self-perceived notions of identity and sociopolitical contexts, often defined by the state.” This analysis continues to hold true, but the Salafi and Tablighi Jama’at revival movements increasingly ignore local political and sociopolitical contexts and advise each individual to independently understand Islam in order to grasp a direct connection to the transnational religious community. McCarthy (2005), Caffrey (2004) and Jaschok (2009) afford the Hui agency in describing how they redefine their position in relation to the Han majority, but they all tend to emphasize politicized collective contestation of representation instead of examining the subjective process by which Muslims adopt public embodiments of Islam that help them to cultivate more piety both in their subjectivities and communities. While Gilette (2000) examines how some Xi’an Hui shape and display a religious identity through consumption habits, participants in Tablighi Jama’at and Salafiyya movements reject such superficial materialistic concerns as distractions from individually pursuing authenticity and salvation. In contrast to the above approaches that largely attempt to evaluate the disparate Hui community as a whole, this study will focus on the individual subjectivities that make up two movements on the cutting edge of Islamic revival in China. This requires extensive profiling of informants to convey the diversity of viewpoints and

methods of reaching them. While small in number, these movements draw participants from diverse backgrounds and spark widespread debate about transnational allegiances, Islamic orthodoxy in China, and what it means to be Hui.

The Hui within the Chinese State

In spite of largely peaceable relations between the Hui and the People's Republic, violent separatists among the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang color perceptions of Chinese Muslims and inspire those who study the Hui to examine their relationship with the Chinese state and their propensity for similar movements. The work of Raphael Israeli (1997, 2000, 2002) centers around this issue in addressing the Hui as a study in cultural confrontation and viewing Islamic and Chinese culture as irrevocably opposed to one another. Such ideas have preoccupied other scholars (Mackerras 1998; Gladney 1999a; Hernandez 2007; Gladney 2010; Kuo 2012) with debating transnational Islamic movements potential to encourage separatism and/or violence among China's Muslims. Such concerns stem from the history of violence among various Hui groups and the Chinese state, especially during the Qing Dynasty. The scholarly consensus is that the Hui have little to no desire to combat the Chinese state, and their scattered population makes separatism virtually impossible. However, transnational Islamic movements lend credence to Samuel Huntington's (1996) assertion that transnational modes of identity increasingly supersede national ones, but my research indicates that there are multiple conflicting sodalities within the Islamic "civilization" and not all (or even most) of them necessarily clash with others.

Historical conflicts among various groups of Chinese Muslims and the Han-dominated state must be seen in the context of the violent political chaos in China at the time, the brutally repressive nature of Qing policy toward Muslims, and the fact that many “rebellions” actually began when the heavy-handed Qing state interfered in local matters (Lipman 1997; Atwill 2003). Most studies (Mackerras 1998; Gladney 1999a; Gladney 2010) show little potential for Hui separatism and no apparent links between the recent violence in Xinjiang and Islamic revival movements (Kuo 2012). The Hui—let alone all of China’s Muslims—uniting in opposition to the government or any other cause is a rare exception to the normal state of division. While Israeli (2000:452) is particularly wary of the political “radical beliefs” of the Salafiyya, much more nuanced works (Gladney 1999b, McCarthy 2005), point out that the Salafiyya movement thus far has advocated withdrawal from politics altogether, a fact that this study will confirm. While some informants told me that the party is trying to restrain the growth of this movement for fear that it could upset the existing balance of power among Islamic sects, others said that government policy of religious freedom has actually helped Salafis by forcing other sects to stop persecuting them.

CCP regulation of religion evolved from early days of co-opting religious communities into patriotic religious associations dominated by the party, to outright proscription of all practices in the 1960s and ‘70s, then relative liberalization and rapid growth of religious adherents in the 1980s. This resulted in 1990s policies that emphasize “accommodating” religious practices and professionals to the “rule of law” to balance desires to protect social stability from separatists and foreign agents and to appease

foreign concerns about human rights (Leung 2005). In the broad sweep of history, Lipman (1996) observes the transition from a traditional Hui identity built on cultural oppositions, to a genealogical one in the late Qing and Republic of China, to a legalistic category under the P.R.C. Since its ascent to power in 1949, the party has claimed to support freedom of (and from) religion as a means to allow believers to evolve naturally toward atheism as Marxism predicts will happen. But in 2001, Jiang Zemin suggested in a public speech that in addition to playing a role in international politics, religion could be a positive force for stability and development and inevitably will be around for a long time (Leung 2005). Despite this recent softening of rhetoric toward religion, the party remains committed to its support of atheism and morality based on socialism, even as the Chinese economic system has left behind any pretense of socialism and numerous scholars (Ci Jiwei 1994; Madsen 1993; Litzinger 1998; Yang 2004; Nanbu 2008) cite popular perceptions of a correlation between post-Mao materialism and Chinese moral decay.

Numerous modern Hui express some degree of loyalty to the Chinese state, in spite of the CCP's history of suppressing religion, persecuting imams, and attempting to forcibly assimilate minorities. Even in Gladney's (1991) analysis of widespread protests in response to the publication of a book in 1989 deemed insulting Islam,⁶ he argues that Muslims were protesting to ask the state to take action against publishers, not attacking the government itself or undermining its legitimacy. In 1993, Muslims all over China

⁶ This book, entitled *Sexual Customs*, claimed that the hajj was an excuse to engage in bestiality and homosexual orgies and compared mosque features to sexual organs.

protested a Chengdu newspaper's publication of articles insulting to Islam, but Xining's Muslims were denied a permit, and insisted on protesting anyway. The armed police blocked their attempt to march to Lanzhou (the capital of Gansu province) and stormed Dong Guan Mosque, which protesters had occupied, leading to several deaths as well as numerous injuries and arrests. However, Lipman (2004) argues that this violent incident was only indicative of the local Xining Muslims' attempt to express displeasure to their government and clearly did not signify any regional tendency toward separatism. My informants were reticent to speak of this incident beyond saying that it shows why they do not participate in politics or oppose the government.

Indeed, the Hui have no apparent desire to separate from or overthrow the Chinese state, nor do they express sympathy for those who do. Lipman (2004) also makes the insightful point that Hui living abroad make no attempt to set up governments in exile like Tibetans or Uygurs and instead behave like other Chinese immigrants before them. During my time in Xining, several violent incidents occurred in Xinjiang, resulting in dozens of alleged Uygur separatists and policemen dying, but I never heard anyone sympathize with such movements, and many of my informants in Xining were quick to condemn them. Historically, Hui have been more likely to aid in suppressing such movements than to join them. To depict the Hui as defined by resistance is to commit what Sherry Ortner (2006) calls the problem of "ethnographic refusal:" reducing a complex culture to its relationship with the majority, flattening complex internal politics down to crude resistance, and removing the agency and subjectivity of individual actors in favor of broad cultural forces. Describing the evolution of Hui identity as a narrative of

resistance against a hegemonic Han state is a gross oversimplification that undermines the diverse sectarian identities and transnational allegiances that are more salient to Hui than their relation to the state. Just as Litzinger (2000) examines how elite members of the Yao minority create new forms of “postsocialist belonging,” Islamic revival movements illustrates how Chinese Muslims forge alternative visions of modernity as well as new modes of belonging to the global ummah and belonging to a particularly virtuous group within (and not necessarily opposed to) the predominantly Han and atheist nation.

Studies of Islamic Revival in China

The most recent Islamic revival movements within China have largely escaped scholarly attention; precious few scholars have addressed the Salafiyya movement, and virtually no one has studied the Tablighi Jama’at in China, in English or Chinese. Hillman (2004) provides a fascinating account of Islamic revival in a village in Shangri-La County, Yunnan Province, but he never mentions the sectarian affiliation of his informants, so it is impossible to assess what role, if any, transnational Islamic movements played in this inventive revival driven by local economic desires. Gladney (1999a, 2010) highlights both the apolitical nature of China’s Salafiyya movement as well as its potential to become the next major wave of Islamic revivalism, but his introduction to the movement in China does not discuss how individuals become Salafi adherents and the religious subjectivity and perception of Hui ethnic identity that joining this minority sect encompasses. In examining sectarianism in Linxia, Chang (2012:7) asserts that sectarian issues are not so much about theology or practice as much as

asserting difference in order to compete for “socio-religious resources.” This explanation makes sense from the perspective of Gedimu imams on which Chang focuses, but it cannot explain why individuals leave sects rich in socio-religious resources to join the marginalized Salafiyya, or the appeal of and controversy surrounding non-sectarian movements like Tablighi Jama’at. Khalid (2011) provides useful insight into how Salafi education leads Hui women to align themselves with an international community perceived as more modern, while still retaining pride in a Chinese identity that they feel grants them higher status than women in the Islamic world. Unfortunately, gender segregation limited my access to female interlocutors, but this study will build on Khalid’s exploration of Hui ethnic versus transnational religious identity by exploring how and why individuals choose the Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama’at movements that condemn their ancestral Islamic practices. I will also explore the impact such choices have on participants’ conceptions of ethnicity and how revival movements affect the discourse surrounding Hui identity.

Participants in Tablighi Jama’at all over the world acknowledge that it exists in every country, but few outside the movement or the realm of Chinese Islam are aware that the movement exists in China. This could be attributed to the movement intentionally keeping a low profile as an evangelical movement in a nation where proselytization is illegal. But in every country, the movement emphasizes face-to-face interaction instead of publications or online publicity. Participants in China rarely refer to the movement by its full name, which is rather awkwardly transliterated, *Taiboli’e Zhemati* (泰卜里厄哲玛提). Instead, they simply call it, “Da’wah work” (达瓦工作), and the CCP’s official term

for the movement is “Da’wa Preaching Circle” (达瓦宣教团). Da’wah is an Arabic word meaning “invitation” or summons, and it appears in the Qur’an to describe Allah’s call to prophets or humanity in general to spread and practice His religion. Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did Islamic revivalists (including, but not exclusively, Tablighi Jama’at) interpret da’wah as a duty of all Muslims to teach Islamic faith and encourage devotion among fellow Muslims. In Egypt, China, and probably elsewhere, the term also encompasses a variety of educational and social welfare activities targeting Muslims in need (Mahmood 2005:57-8). The CCP enforces a ban on Tablighi Jama’at in Xinjiang but generally seems to tolerate the movement elsewhere in China. Religious practice is only permitted within state-recognized religious institutions, so some core Tablighi practices are illegal even though the movement as a whole is not specifically prohibited. In Xining, organizers advise participants to walk down the street in small groups to avoid arousing attention and to refrain from taking photographs during gatherings. Some participants insist the movement is completely legal; others say the opposite. Perhaps the most accurate describer of the official attitude toward the movement used a Chinese idiom, “One eye open, one eye shut” (睁一只眼, 闭一只眼), to say that as long as the movement does not cause trouble, the authorities are content to look the other way.

Nevertheless, the spread of Tablighi Jama’at throughout China recently has inspired a few Chinese language sources, which provide basic facts about the movement’s history and practices, review literature about the movement abroad, and explain that a group of South Asian participants came to China in the 1980s and were

aghast at the lax practices they found (Qian 2009; Ma Qiang 2012; Ma Zhi Qiang N.d.). Qian (2009) suggests that the movement may seek to expand its operations in China, and the others (written by Chinese Muslims) are aware that this has taken place, but their works mainly illustrate how little is known about its history and activities in China. In personal communication with Ma Zhi Qiang, he offered anecdotal evidence of graduate students being told not to study this movement. Alles and her collaborators (2003) make passing reference to the presence of foreign Tablighi Jama'at preachers and official discomfort at their "inflammatory preaching tours," but they do not discuss widespread Chinese participation in this movement and the larger impact it has on individuals and Islamic networks. Veselič (2013:108-9) noticed Tablighi Jama'at-style practices among university students in China's northwest, but they never mentioned the name of the movement, and she only discovered the existence of "two popular Tablighi proselytizing centres" by chance late in the course of her research. Metcalf (2003) discusses the earliest recorded activities of Tablighis in China (an account written in Urdu by one of the first preachers to arrive in China), and observes how these Indian missionaries were aghast at the lax practices of Chinese Muslims, which they attributed to both Westernization and government oppression. She is more concerned about what jama'ati tales reveal about the movement in general, but her observations of how Tablighis share certain ideas with both Sufis and Salafis illustrates some reasons why the movement has drawn opposition from both sides of the theological spectrum in China. Rather than considering either Tablighi Jama'at or Salafiyya as an isolated movement among the Hui, this study will evaluate the

two of them as the newest participants in the constantly evolving discourse of Chinese Islam, which is just one arena of the larger phenomenon of global Islamic revival.

It would be too simplistic to view Chinese Islamic revival as a mere return to the status quo after the varying degrees of Maoist repression of religion between the communist takeover in 1949 (which mainland Chinese, even Muslims, still refer to as “liberation” 解放) and the post-Cultural Revolution political and economic reforms beginning in 1978 (which Chinese refer to as “reform and opening up” 改革开放). The current Chinese situation fits Carvalho’s (2009) economic relative deprivation-style theory that asserts that raised aspirations of socioeconomic mobility coupled with persistent income inequality, poverty, and low actual mobility lead people to turn to religion for solace. This mechanistic theory may account for a general increase in religious devotion at a societal level, but it does not explain why so many Hui, including significant numbers among the elite and educated, turn to new modes of religiosity that sometimes contradict their ancestral beliefs. To varying degrees, intensive state religious regulations place revival movements in what Yang (2006) refers to as a “gray market,” which helps to capture the way state control can taint perceptions of more traditional sects and drive Muslims toward revival movements, but it also paints revivalists as passive consumers of prepackaged religiosity, which does not accurately describe participation in these agentive movements. My research addresses the growth of Tablighi Jama’at and Salafiyya movements as two components of a global Islamic resurgence that have distinct manifestations in the Chinese context and effects on Chinese notions of ethnicity and modernity.

In his broad study of Islamic revival movements throughout the globe, Lapidus (1997) claims that these movements which seem to advocate a return to the past actually profess a modernist vision in that they are based on commitment to an abstract community rather than caliphs or ulema, they appeal to and are supported by the sort of professionals and academics indicative of a modern state, and they look to the past to find ways of dealing with modern problems wrought by centralized states and capitalist economies. He argues that this parallels the way as Protestantism circumvented church authority to allow individuals to seek answers in the Bible. In a similar vein, Cherif-Chebbi (2004:89) shows how Yihewani, and now Salafiyya, movements have found common cause with the Chinese state in advocating renunciation of the past—whether it be heterodox Islam or feudalism and capitalism—in order to create “the responsible individual” via education and propaganda. Both Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama’at are concerned with constructing what Lapidus (1997:455) calls “a form of modernity in Islamic terms,” but his broad temporal and geographic focus can only describe this type of modernity and its construction in the most general terms. The present analysis tends to support the conclusions of Lara Deeb (2006) and Saba Mahmood (2005) that new forms of increased individual devotion can be agentive means of constructing an Islamic modernity and a more pious public sphere.

Both Tablighi Jama’at and Salafiyya mesh with Mahmood’s (2005) usage of the Aristotelian notion of habitus, which in contrast to Bourdieu’s latter-day formulation, emphasizes conscious cultivation of virtuous habits in order to effect an internal transformation. Participants in the Tablighi Jama’at emphasize all the external practices

of Islam, while Salafiyya emphasizes individual study and understanding, but both movements aim to transform individual subjectivities in hopes of eventually improving the ummah and society as a whole. These movements also embody differing strategies of negotiating between individually determined religious subjectivity and conventional modes of socially and structurally determined moral subjectivity similar to the way Simon (2009) describes the function of *salat* (Islamic prayer) in Indonesia. Both movements attempt to subsume individual subjectivities within standards of Islamic comportment perceived to be universal, but they also consciously differentiate between local standards that are lax or heterodox and the “true” Islam promoted by their global movement. Simon (2009) insightfully describes the dynamic and variable formation of Islamic subjectivities, but focusing on a dichotomy between individual agency and sociocultural structure does not address the ability of individual participants in global movements to use transnational imagined communities to justify and promote forms of orthodoxy and subjectivities that conflict with local norms. Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya provide Chinese Muslims with two different means of using transnational imaginaries to help negotiate disjunctures between internal religiosity and external moral strictures.

Religious Revival and Hui Identity

There is a growing awareness among the Hui I met in Xining that the Hui ethnicity is nothing more than a catchall category for Muslims who do not belong to one of the other nine more clearly defined ethnic groups. Muslim revivalists often bring up the distinction between a person's ethnic Hui identity—which many revivalists

increasingly view almost as a merely bureaucratic convenience—and identity as a Muslim in order to emphasize the need to personally embrace Islam and prevent the Hui from being assimilated into the (unbelieving) Han majority one-by-one. Such people are concerned with the preservation and promotion of the Islamic community, not so much with maintaining ethnic identity. A major goal of revival movements is to bring Hui Islamic practice into line with international norms, which entails removing any sort of ethnic peculiarities or cultural accretions. Of course, the minority policy in China today guarantees perks such as exemption from the one-child policy and extra points on university entrance exams, so there are practical reasons for Hui to guard their ethnic identity. However, revivalists often shake their heads at nonobservant Muslims and say, “They are Hui, but not Muslims” (他们是回族但是不是穆斯林). Diverse Hui communities—delineated by sect or locality—contend to be the most authentic Muslims, to be the most progressively modern of all Chinese nationalities, or to experiment with unique combinations of the two (see Lipman 1996). Hui position themselves in relation to both Islamic and Chinese notions of tradition and modernity, co-opting the government’s notions of virtue and social evolution as they attempt to reconstruct and perfect Islamic beliefs, practice, and identity.

It is an odd coincidence that Muslim revivalists and the party each attempt to more clearly define the differences between religious traits and the customs of national minorities. The party wants to preserve quaint and harmless customs without supporting a potentially subversive foreign faith, and revivalists want to remove the old-fashioned ethnic connotations that they believe damage the image and authenticity of Islam. In

reviewing the 1982 party document defining religious policy in the reform era, Wellens (2009) shows that official policies warn against conflating religion and nationality because one's religion can change, unlike one's nationality. While party officials are suggesting that minority people can become atheist without risking their minority status and the accompanying perks, Muslim revivalists often make a similar pronouncement to suggest all nationalities can (and should) convert to Islam. CCP policies also encourage party members to differentiate between nationality customs with some religious content and actual religious practice, because party members are forbidden to take part in the latter, but permitted to take part in the former, because avoiding religiously oriented public festivals could cause alienation from their communities (Wellens 2009). Revivalists strive to make this distinction as well, but with the opposite intention of avoiding cultural customs that some uneducated or unorthodox Muslims mistake for Islamic requirements. The party downplays the significance of national identity by focusing on superficial traits and excluding ideological characteristics (Wellens 2009), and conversely, revivalists tend to criticize habitual adherence to ethnic customs without understanding of the Islamic principles behind them. Wellens (2009) argues that such ambiguous policies leave room for interpretation and creative negotiation among state and minority actors to allow religious revival at the local level (see Hillman 2004) and maintain a mostly harmonious relationship between atheist state and devout minorities. In this study, I will elaborate further on how these revival movements subtly undermine the state's materialistic discursive framework without abandoning or openly opposing it.

None of the revivalists I met are ready to shed their Chinese, ethnic, or local identities, but participants in Islamic revival movements tend to de-emphasize ethnic and national labels in favor of membership in the universal Islamic community. In an urban environment such as Xining, Muslims of various ethnicities pray together at the same mosques, and while they may gravitate towards people of the same ethnicity in the same way they gravitate towards people who speak their native dialect, I never perceived any sort of tension or conflict along ethnic lines. Once, when discussing the various languages and dialects commonly heard at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque, one man pointed out that there were four different ethnicities in the small group of men chatting between prayers and joked that this was the Salafiyya *gongheguo* (共和国, Republic, or literally “harmoniously together nation”), in other words that the mosque united people of different linguistic backgrounds and, to some extent, customs. This play on the name of the Chinese People’s Republic was not intended to be suggestive of political or separatist tendencies, but it did illustrate how the universalist theology and mode of identification already familiar from the political sphere, with its presentation of a communist state as a family of nationalities, helps to make movements like Salafiyya inclusive and credible. Unfortunately, it also can make such movements suspect in the eyes of a ruling political party that has carefully delineated its subjects into separate ethnicities.

Subjective Transformation/Public Manifestation: Islamic Revival in the Chinese Nation

Participants in the Islamic revival make individual choices that markedly separate them from most of the Chinese populace, and sometimes create sectarian tensions with other Muslims, but a sense of brotherhood with all Muslims and membership in the

Chinese nation also drives them to uplift their fellow Muslims and countrymen. Even though revivalists repeatedly deny any intention of dividing their religious community, striving for authenticity inherently implies that the practice of other Muslims is inauthentic. Virtually every Muslim I met readily described the state of Chinese Islam as “chaotic” (乱), “old-fashioned” (落后), “unorthodox” (不正确), or simply “not okay” (不行). They said Chinese Muslims were too lax, “Hanitized” (汉化), the various sects bickered too much, and revivalists would say there were too many Chinese cultural practices infiltrating religious practices. Virtually every time I told Muslims about my project, they told me I should go to the Middle East to study the “real” Muslims. Chinese Muslim revivalists were united in disparaging the present situation and being motivated to build a more Islamic future.

Muslims organize various activities in order to rectify this perceived lack of “quality” (素质) among Chinese Muslims. Participants in the Tablighi Jama’at movement travel all over China encouraging more devout and orthodox practices among Muslims. Young students leave home to study with renowned imams in the hopes of going abroad and gaining further, and more authentic, Islamic knowledge. The “Every Ethnicity Muslim Home” (各族穆斯林之家), a Salafi-led—but non-sectarian—organization in Xining, regularly brings food, clothing, and religious texts to poor, rural congregations. All of this helps to advance the state’s rural development goals of encouraging education and “civilized” behavior, but such missions exist in competition with state projects in that they promote a religiously defined notion of civilization and Arabic-language education, instead of materialistic science and atheism. Like most other subjects of the People’s

Republic, Chinese Muslims steadfastly avoid political activism and are wary of publicly expressing opinions that could be construed as political, but there is a certain amount of political meaning is inevitable in their embodiment of public religiosity, building of Islamic networks, and inherent critique of godless Chinese society.

In contrast to Western politics of difference, Chinese people in general and Muslims in particular tend to emphasize sameness and the universality of their claims, needs, and desires, instead of demanding special treatment based on individual or special group rights. Hui assert that they will not eat pork just as anyone would not eat food they find unappealing, and they are offended by insults to Muhammad just as anyone would be upset if someone demeaned their role model. Informants told me they would make excuses to skip lunch meetings at work during Ramadan rather than explain that they were fasting. If their Islamic beliefs were openly challenged, Muslims would cite the fact that it was an officially recognized religion in China and millions of Muslims all over the world shared their beliefs. Salafis who faced ostracism from friends and family because of their sectarian affiliation generally did not assert a natural, individual right to choose their own beliefs, but they would justify their choice by citing the popularity of Salafism in Muslim majority nations and the party's guarantee of religious freedom. Gladney (2004) characterizes the situational assertion of multiple identities, like Chinese and Muslim, as "relational alterity," claiming that people inhabit narrow levels of identity in response to local threats, such as uniting with fellow Xining Hui against rural Hui butchers accused of selling fake halal meat, and broader levels of identity in relation to larger exterior threats, such as banding with fellow Muslims of all ethnicities when they

perceive a slight by the Chinese state. This accurately describes how identity is oppositionally influenced and deployed, but Chinese Muslims and tend to make claims in terms of sameness and belonging instead of using the language of difference. Although I did not witness any Muslim activism myself, those with whom I discussed past popular uprisings over publications deemed insulting to Islam asserted that participants were only doing what “any Muslim” naturally would do. Individuals were using membership in a global community to contest local forms of identity, including those promoted by the the nation-state.

I witnessed identity politics deployed far more often to build connections or assert a sense of belonging than to oppose external threats. I witnessed a Han man who had no interest in talking with Muslim missionaries sit down with a group of Tablighi Jama’at preachers because one of them was originally from his home province. A Hui man whose neighborhood was reduced to rubble successfully preserved his house from demolition with the patriotic gesture of flying a Chinese flag out his window, claiming the property rights of a Chinese citizen rather than decrying the Han government’s destruction of his predominantly Hui district. And it took me months of building connections and praying in mosques before I could gain any ethnographic information about sectarian conflicts because most Chinese Muslims downplay such disputes—especially to outsiders—by repeatedly asserting their common religious identity, greeting all Muslims with “asalaam alaykkum” and claiming that “all Muslims are brothers.” In each case, Muslims did not claim unique needs or sensitivities to be protected, instead they claimed membership in a larger group with undeniable and accepted characteristics which were to be respected and

never infringed upon. Revival movements advocate active participation in Chinese and Islamic communities in order to make both of them more pious in the future.

While both Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya movements espouse an apolitical stance with regard to China's internal politics, they are openly critical of the rampant materialism and corruption in Chinese society. Of course, Muslims hold this criticism in common with most Chinese regardless of ethnicity or creed, including Xi Jinping himself, but unlike most Chinese, they perceive this as a direct outgrowth of the moral vacuum left by Marxist materialism. Chinese Muslims advocate a return to the wisdom of the Qur'an to address the modern problems wrought by capitalism and a centralized Marxist state. Thus, individuals participate in revival movements in order to begin rectifying the shortcomings of Chinese society by joining a transnational community that emulates the past but is focused on building a better future (see Lapidus 1997). This allows them to leave behind their fossilized ethnic identity and their marginalized existence as a tolerated and co-opted minority religion and even assert moral superiority to their atheist Han brethren. While the government attempts to exploit the moral authority of the various religious traditions in its realm, its anachronistic reliance on Marxist rhetoric renders this pretense transparent. The party itself repeatedly criticizes the same problems of corruption and ostentatious spending that Muslims blame on atheist materialism. Despite revival movements' apolitical stance and views held in common with the party, they are unintentionally subversive in that they implicitly deny officially sanctioned boundaries between ethnicities, static definition of religion, and the party's materialist justification of sovereignty cloaked in transparent socialist rhetoric. Islamic

revival movements empower individuals by giving them a personal connection to the universal Islamic ummah that they can deploy to renegotiate Hui identity and the place of religion in the atheist Chinese public sphere.

Outline of the Dissertation

We will begin by with a brief review of the long history of Islam in China, recounting how numerous Islamic movements contributed to the diverse tapestry of Chinese Islam before comparing the two revival movements to arrive in twentieth century China: Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at. Chapter three introduces several “reaffirmed Muslims,” who were born Muslim, but only recently made an individual decision to actively study and adhere to Islamic practices. These individuals participate in Islamic revival without belonging to any specific movement, and I will contrast them with those who are ethnically Hui and consider themselves Muslim without strictly practicing the faith. Chapter four highlights the structure of Islamic communities and the role of religious professionals in profiling several imams and contrasting their sectarian beliefs. Chapter five will discuss how participants in the Tablighi Jama'at cultivate a virtuous, Aristotelian habitus while on missionary journeys they hope will transform them into more virtuous people. Chapter six will analyze the experiences of non-Muslims who converted to Islam and Muslims who converted to the Salafiyya movement, both of which generally involve, disillusionment, a search for answers, and diligent study. Chapter seven will address Muslim participation in the Chinese public sphere and perceptions of the global ummah through examining the perspectives of current and former Muslim government employees, transnational businessmen, and international

students. Finally, the concluding chapter will weigh the influence of these individual conversions and networks of revivalists on conceptions of Hui ethnicity and Islamic modernity, suggesting implications for the role of religion in the post-socialist Chinese state and our understanding of Islamic minorities in secular public spheres.

Chapter 2 - Old Teaching, New Teaching: A Historical Overview of Islam in China

It was narrated from 'Awf bin Malik that the Messenger of Allah said: "The Jews split into seventy-one sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy in Hell. The Christians split into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which will be in Hell and one in Paradise. I swear by the One Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, my nation will split into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two in Hell." It was said: "O Messenger of Allah, who are they?" He said: "The main body." (Hadith: Bukhari 1.36.3992)

The history of Islam in China is long and contentious, full of constant strife over the proper means of following the universal faith while living in a society dominated by non-Muslims. Reviewing this history will reveal the depth of Hui linkages to Chinese society and animosities among Islamic sects to illustrate that Chinese Muslims neither exist in opposition to the Chinese state, nor are they monolithic. Tales of Hui allying with the Qing state against their brethren debunks attempts to see the Hui as a monolithic entity opposed to Han rule. But most relevant to our current study is the historical precedent of scholars returning from the Islamic world to usher in waves of reform and revival. Such movements historically are initially met with more opposition than acceptance, but any sort of reaction shifts the nature of Chinese Islam, which belies attempts to see any sect as pure orthodoxy or the Hui minority itself as a static cultural fossil. However, Muslims themselves contend that Islam should remain constant, and so the plurality of sects and the perceived unorthodoxy among many of them is a source of great anxiety. Much of this account will closely parallel Gladney's (1999) description of "three modes" of Islam, including traditionalists, various Sufi brotherhoods, and more modern scripturalist reformers, before suggesting that Salafiyya may constitute a fourth

mode. This chapter will update this history by examining Salafiyya's contrast and conflict with previous modalities and further complicating the picture by introducing Tablighi Jama'at, a new modality that transcends sectarian boundaries. Both of these most recent movements allow Chinese Muslims to participate in the global trend of Islamic revival through individualized piety and membership in a transnational community.

Origins of Chinese Islam

Chinese Muslims commonly cite a Hadith—of questionable authenticity, according to Islamic scholars outside China—quoting the prophet Muhammad saying, “Seek knowledge even unto China.” So at least according to China's Muslims, the idea of Islam in China existed long before the first Muslim arrived there. During my time in Xining, I heard this Hadith only from members of the Gedimu and Sufi sects. Islam undoubtedly arrived in China during the Tang Dynasty (唐代), but popular Hui legends claiming that it did so during the prophet's lifetime are rather dubious. Some stories also allege that the emperor Tang Taizong (唐太宗) dreamt of a turbaned man quelling demons, and his interpreter of dreams revealed that the man was a great sage from Arabia. He advised the emperor to send ambassadors to bring his wisdom back to China. So the emperor sent a general to the west, and the prophet's own maternal uncle, Sa'ad Waqqas came to China in 628 or 631. Some even claim Sa'ad Waqqas secretly converted the emperor to Islam before he died (Lipman 1998:24-25).

The veracity of these stories is questionable at best, but Sa'ad Waqqas' tomb in Guangdong 广东 has become a symbol of China's Islamic history and Hui identity even though Arab historians assert Waqqas was buried in Medina with the rest of the prophet's

companions. Such tales are testament to the Hui's dual sense of identity and historical heritage, which begins with the birth of Islam, but is set in China. Members of the Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at movement prefer telling the more canonical stories of the prophet and his companions, set in Mecca and Medina instead of China, but some of them still claimed Taizong as a convert as well.

From the Tang through the Song dynasties, Islam traveled with maritime traders from Persia and Arabia into Chinese port cities, and caravans trading horses and other goods for silk and tea brought the faith through Central Asia to the Chinese interior. Muslim mercenaries came down the Silk Road as well, brought by empires contending with China for dominance or hired by Chinese emperors to help keep "barbarians" in check. In spite of Tang and Song Dynasty attempts to restrict these sojourners' movements and interaction with the Chinese populace, some of these Muslim men would settle down, marry Chinese women, and have Muslim children who spoke Chinese. But this was only a trickle compared to the Yuan Dynasty (元朝) when the Mongol khans imported craftsmen, administrators and soldiers from Persia, Central Asia and elsewhere in their vast empire to help rule the Middle Kingdom. These foreigners were second only to the Mongols in a racial hierarchy and many of them accumulated wealth and prestige. Then, the Ming Dynasty (明朝) sought to diffuse tensions lingering from the earlier stratification by integrating talented Muslims into its bureaucracy and also attempting to assimilate them through policies encouraging intermarriage. Also in the late Ming, Chinese Muslims began setting up Islamic schools to teach the Arabic and Persian

languages of their ancestors that had been widely forgotten, and the learned among them began publishing original theological treatises in Chinese.

Structure of Traditional Chinese Muslim Communities

Even though Islam arrived in multiple waves and over multiple routes, all of China's Muslims are Sunnis who follow the Hanafi⁷ school of law, except for 33,000 ethnic Tajik Shi'a Muslims living in far western Xinjiang. In both historical and modern times, there is much variation in practice because most Muslims live in communities centered on administratively independent mosques. Such traditional Muslim congregations have been labeled *Gedimu* (from the Arabic *qadim*, meaning "old"), which is really a catchall category that arose to differentiate this mode of Islam from Sufi who began gaining adherents in the Ming Dynasty. *Gedimu* mosques are managed by a council of elders (乡佬) or board of directors (董事会), made up of learned Muslims as well as wealthy, influential, and senior members of the community. A Muslim anthropologist at Qinghai University told me that in the past two decades he had noticed the composition of these boards shift from learned and devout Muslims who were active in their community to more nouveau riche seeking power and status and party members concerned with keeping tabs on local Muslims. I also met one retired party member who had served on the board at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque (see chapter seven),⁸ but he said that he quit because he was tired of politics and backbiting among board members. These

⁷ Hanafi is the oldest and largest of the four major *madhab*, or schools of law, in Sunni Islam, founded by Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man ibn Thābit (699 - 767CE). It is dominant throughout Central Asia and the most commonly followed school of law today.

⁸ This is a Salafi mosque, but these and Yihewani mosques generally follow the same administrative model as the *Gedimu* in that they are managed by a board of directors that hires along for three-year terms.

committees handle the mosque's finances, which mostly come from member donations and real estate, and hire the *ahong* (阿訇) (the Chinese word for imam, from the Persian *akhund*, "teacher"), who will lead the prayers and train students in Arabic language, memorization and proper recitation of the Qur'an, and theology.

Small mosques have only a single *ahong*, who usually has a second job or business to complement his meager salary. But the position of *ahong* is a prestigious full-time occupation in larger mosques who usually employ a foreign-trained head *ahong* and several other teachers (also called *ahong*, as are any men who have received a mosque-based education). Theological students give the call to prayer and often lead the congregation in prayer, even when the head *ahong* is present. Occasionally, students may deliver a sermon, especially during Ramadan when a short lecture follows each morning prayer. Since the *ahong* is typically hired for only a two or three-year term, which usually is not repeated, the power of the position is somewhat limited. While the vast majority of *ahong* (and every one I met) are male, female *ahong* have taught Islam and Arabic to women at least since the early Qing Dynasty, and there are even mosques exclusively for women as well (Jaschok and Shui 2000). Many Xining have separate prayer rooms for women, but there are now mosques specifically for women. However, the leadership of more conservative mosques feels women should pray at home, and thus many mosques do not reserve any space for women in their mosques. Gedimu communities, from urban neighborhoods to rural villages, all share the same general pool of traveling *ahong* and similar prayer practices, but these ties are much looser than those forged by Sufi orders in

which adherents in multiple communities owe allegiance to a single holy man and his saintly lineage.

Overview of Sufi Sects in China

Since the thirteenth century, Sufi movements drew numerous adherents among Muslims of Central Asia and the Tarim Basin, so there is no doubt Chinese Muslims interacted with Sufis traveling the Silk Roads. By the seventeenth century, Sufi sects began to transform mosque organization and religious practice in many Hui communities of the northwest, putting Xining on the forefront of transition and conflict. The first major Sufi leaders arrived as ascetics, wandering, teaching, and amassing followers. Successful Sufi masters established their own orders and eventually built mosques, directly appointing along without seeking approval from community elders as in the Gedimu model. These brotherhoods amassed land, power, and numerous mosques over generations, and so this form of inter-mosque organization became known as *menhuan* 门宦, which may descend from the term *menfa* (门阀) meaning “powerful family” or *menhu* 门户 meaning “gateway” or “faction” (Dillon 1999).

Not only does Sufism tend to circumvent traditional community authorities, it also competes with Gedimu mosques for devotees, since neither branch has won many converts from outside Islam (Lipman 1998). As Sufi leaders established *menhuan* institutions, schisms among them escalated into violent conflicts that drew imperial intervention several times over the course of the Qing Dynasty. These *menhuan* were most popular and powerful among Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the Hui and other Muslim minorities in Qinghai, Gansu and Ningxia, so traditional Gedimu communities were

geographically and theologically removed from Sufi sects and conflicts among them. Thus, Gedimu Muslims tended to view Sufism with more disdain than hostility, and later movements opposed to both these movements would later lump both of them into the category of “old teaching.” Mosque committees now run each individual Sufi mosque, and the party has restrained the power formerly held by Sufi masters, effectively forcing them into the decentralized organizational mold already followed in Gedimu mosques. However, Sufi along and the patriarchs leading each sect still wield an inordinate amount of influence and spiritual authority, based on intellectual or hereditary descent from a Sufi master, religious knowledge gained in the Middle East, or innate spiritual gifts.

Four major sects of Sufism have made their way into China: Qadariyya, Qubrawiyya Khufiyya, and Jahriyya (with these last two both being branches of the Naqshbandiyya). These have subsequently transformed and splintered into at least forty different sub-sects, each called *menhuan*. As Muslims, they obviously have much in common with non-Sufi Islam, but all of four sects and their various *menhuan* share certain distinctly Sufi practices such as meditation, emphasis on reciting dhikr⁹ (chanting in “remembrance” of Allah), reverence to a founder and a patriarch hereditarily or spiritually descended from him, burial in domed tombs, and veneration to a spiritual leader and his lineage that is centered on these tombs. Many individual reformers and even some Chinese Sufi orders have decried hereditary succession, which was not

⁹ Members of all sects recite dhikr (usually silently) after each prayer, consisting of reciting alhamdu’Allah (praise to Allah), subhan’Allah (Glory be to Allah), and Allahu Akbar (God is great) 33 times each. But members of Sufi brotherhoods recite these and other phrases more often, collectively, and place more emphasis on this practice, with Jahriyya brotherhoods elaborating it to include oral recitations and/or physical movements.

initially the norm in Chinese Sufism, but Chinese lineage and inheritance practices may have encouraged hereditary descent of Sufi leadership.

Chinese Muslims historically simplified the divisions within Sufism into a dichotomy of Old Teaching (老教), consisting of the Qadariyya, Kubrawiyya, Khufiyya and other sub-sects whose members recite the dhikr silently, and the New Teaching 新教, made up of branches of the Jahariyya who recite aloud and sometimes incorporate ecstatic exclamations and bodily movements. The distinction did not reflect the contrast between the Gedimu and the later arrivals, but rather linked the Gedimu and all of the later arrivals except the Jahariyya, and in an important way this reflects the assimilation of the waves of immigrants and of foreign Sufi thinking that arrived between the seventeenth and mid eighteenth centuries. The disparaging term for Jahariyya also illustrates a tendency among Chinese Muslims to regard new and visibly different modes of practice with hostility. However, after the Yihewani arrived in China at the end of the nineteenth century, they and the Salafiyya began to derogatorily label all of the Sufi brotherhoods as well as the Gedimu as “Old Teaching,” and the Yihewani became the “New Teaching.” When I was in Xining, most Muslims would refer to Gedimu as “Old Teaching,” Sufi sects as menhuan, and Yihewani as “New Teaching,” but I will avoid these terms in favor of more specific terminology whenever possible. Of course, distinctions between sects are highly variable; there are no definitive works in English that distinguish among the various sub-sects of Islam among the Hui, and any attempt to do so on a scale larger than a single city or village might be futile. This variety and local

particularity among adherents to what is supposed to be a universal religion is one reason Yihewani and Salafi reformers have great contempt for Sufism.

Sufis established sects in China in several waves beginning in the mid seventeenth century, intensifying in the eighteenth century, and erupting in violent conflicts in the nineteenth century. Indeed, various movements arrived in China from points west in what Joseph Fletcher (qtd. in Gladney 1999) first called “tides” of Islam: a series of surges of new scholars and principles that would gradually recede, mix with local culture, and then largely be replaced when a new wave of thought arrived from the Islamic world. However, Gladney (1999) more accurately terms these movements as “modes” to describe the way they interact, coexist, and define themselves in opposition to each other. And he astutely describes how the Gedimu only exist as a unified mode in contrast to the Sufis, Yihewani, and other movements that arrived in China after them. But it is important to remember that while each movement may be novel to the Chinese context when it arrives, adherents invariably view themselves as devotees to the original, orthodox Islam, and they often view others as practicing sinful innovation. In this sense, each new sect attempts to cleanse Chinese Islamic practice of its Chinese-ness by emphasizing pure ideas and practices from the realm of the “real” Muslims. “Real Muslims” was the term people would use to describe the people of the Islamic world when they told me that I should go there if I wanted to study Islam inasmuch as Chinese Islam was too “chaotic” (乱) and “backward” (落后). Fletcher’s “tides” is useful in a historical sense to describe the incursion of new movements into China, but Gladney’s “modes” more accurately describes the present situation on the ground. So reviewing the

history of each of these types of Islam, not only illustrates the precedent of sectarian revival movements, it also provides useful background on the various modes of Islamic practice that are the object of modern revivalists' critique.

A Brief History of Sufism in Early Modern China

The first recorded Sufi brotherhood to firmly establish itself in China was the Qadariyya. In 1672, Khoja Afaq, spiritual leader of the Naqshbandi brotherhood and political leader of several Tarim Basin (present-day Xinjiang) cities, legendarily met sixteen-year old Qi Jingyi (祁静一) in Xining and told him that he eventually will become a great teacher, but he first must find another master. Afterwards, Qi found the renowned Sufi teacher and descendant of Muhammad, Khoja Abd Alla, who would initiate him into the Qadariyya order and allow him to spread it from Guangdong, to Yunnan, Guizhou, and Gansu. The early Qadariyya advocated worship centered around tombs instead of mosques, ascetic withdrawal from society, and monastic celibacy for along and religious students (Gladney 1999). And in 2013, at a tomb complex atop the South Mountain of Xining, a Sufi teacher and a small group of students still live this cloistered lifestyle. I visited this tomb with a Han convert to Islam whose English name was Larry, and we both were shocked when prayer time came and went with no one gathering to pray or even reciting the call to prayer, but this sect emphasizes individual meditation more than the traditional five pillars of Islam. Like many Chinese Muslims, Larry did not express exclusive devotion to any sect, but the neglect for basic requirements of Islam was shocking to one who had learned the faith in an Yihewani-dominated context. Instances of such apparent laxity are one reason Yihewani and

Salafiyya find Sufism so abhorrent. While the extreme devotion and aescetic lifestyle may have fit well with the context of Buddhism and Daoism, the unorthodox interpretation of Islam also opened the door for later Sufi movements to surpass it in influence.

While today's reformists tend to lump all Sufis together in accusations of mysticism, heterodoxy, and syncretism, the Naqshbandiyya (a type of Sufism that includes Khufiyya and Jahariyya) arrived in eighteenth century China as a movement advocating a return to orthodoxy and engagement with the world. The name *Naqshbandiyya* means "engraving the bond between individual and creator," and this movement that spans the globe today began in Central Asia with Baha' ad-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) and spread to the Tarim Basin over the course of the next century. Even though this movement diverged from Qadariyya, it also traces its ancestry to Khoja Afaq, who traveled throughout China's northwestern regions. Two of Khoja Afaq's disciples from Gansu, who studied under different teachers abroad, founded rival branches of the Naqshbandi order within China: Khufiyya and Jahariyya. Unlike the Qadariyya, these orders advocated marriage, accrument of material wealth, and engagement in worldly affairs and politics. Gladney (1999) argues that, particularly in the case of the Jahriyya, this more engaged stance led to friction with Gedimu and the more quietest Qadariyya Muslims in China, and the subsequent inter-sectarian strife would arouse the ire of the Chinese state.

Ma Laichi (马来迟) was raised by one of Khoja Afaq's disciples, inherited leadership of his movement, then went on hajj to Mecca, studying with several Sufi

orders in Yemen and Bukhara before returning to China to found the Huasi (花寺, flowery mosque) menhuan within the Khufiyya brotherhood. After returning from the Middle East in 1731, Ma spent 32 years spreading his teaching around Qinghai and Gansu. It remains powerful in this region today, and is centered around Ma Laichi's tomb in Linxia, Gansu. A smaller Khufiyya tomb, called Guangdemen (广德门), was undergoing renovations in Xining in 2013. Khufiyya practice focuses on veneration of saints at their tombs and recitation of dhikr in silence. They are also generally more detached from politics than their Naqshbandi Jahariyya rivals who would arrive in China later (Gladney 1999).

The Jahariyya became established in China when Ma Mingxin (马明新), another disciple of Khoja Afaq, returned from pilgrimage and sixteen years of study in and around Yemen to teach what he had learned. The primary contrast between Khufiyya and Jahariyya is that the latter recite dhikr aloud, and their name literally means “the vocal ones.” When he returned from the Arabian Peninsula in 1744, Ma Mingxin advocated vocal recitation of dhikr and opposed excessive veneration at the tombs of Sufi saints. It seems that the opposition to the predominant Chinese Sufi practice of worshipping at tombs, apparently raucous loud chanting, along with uncomfortable closeness in temporality and theological origin provoked violent and long-lasting internecine conflict. We will see echoes of this in the bitter feud between the modern, Wahhabi-inspired movements, Yihewani and Salafiyya. In order to quell the sectarian violence, the Qing government arrested and executed Ma Mingxin in 1781, outlawing what they then called the “New Teaching” (新教). However, this was unsuccessful in quelling Jahariyya-led

violence, and almost one century later, another Jahariyya descendant of Ma Mingxin, Ma Hualong (马化龙), would lead the great Northwest Hui Rebellion that would drag on for fourteen years and create unrest in the region that would last through the end of the Qing Dynasty. This violent history as well as the ability to unite numerous mosques under one spiritual leader likely helped inspire both Nationalist and Communist forces to patronize reform movements that oppose Sufism (Gladney 1999).

The Development of Yihewani

Yihewani and other reform movements provoked the ire of many Chinese Muslims by proscribing many traditional practices that they claim accreted from Chinese or other cultures and are not justified by Qur'an or Hadith. The Yihewani (伊赫瓦尼, Arabic: Ikhwan) and Salafiyya denounce some practices central to the administration and material well being of other sects' mosques such as hereditary succession and acceptance of payment for performing prayers at wedding, funerals, and other rituals. Whereas the structure of Sufi menhuan leaves spiritual leaders open to charges of selfishly amassing wealth and diverting followers' devotion into a cult of personality, these scripturalist movements tend to decentralize authority and focus on devotion to the Qur'an and Hadith instead of the words of imams. What revivalists see as a return to a more pure and universal form of Islam, traditionalist sects see as petty partisanship, blind following of foreigners, and/or a slight to Chinese Muslim ancestors. These reform movements historically are tied to returning pilgrims who hope to conform Chinese Islam to the practices they observed in the Middle East, and they remain popular among Muslims who have studied abroad. Indeed, the introduction to a handbook of Salafi-style prayer

practices published in China began with a strident defense of exchange students to Arab countries (Ye 2007). Even though both reform movements historically dedicated most of their criticism to the traditionalist sects, conflicting visions of orthodoxy have spawned much ill will between Salafiyya and Yihwani since they split in the 1930s. Issues of contention include differences in daily prayer practices, theology, politics, and sources of theological authority. To understand how so many differences emerged from similar origins, we will first examine the complex historical evolution of the Yihewani movement in the tumultuous period of the late Qing and Republican periods, from the late nineteenth century through World War II.

In 1888, a third generation imam of the Dongxiang (侗乡) minority named Ma Wanfu (马万福) set out from his home in Gansu to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Ottoman Empire controlled Mecca and Medina at the time, but the Sa'ud clan had allied with the theological descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) in a campaign to expel the Ottomans and return the Arabian peninsula to what they perceived as the original form of Islam. To this end, the Sa'ud clan organized, supplied, and armed Bedouin tribesmen into puritanical religious militias called Ikhwan (Arabic for "brothers"), and settled them into garrison towns at oases around the peninsula. Ma Wanfu studied Islam for four years in this atmosphere and returned to China in 1893 to found a movement named after these Ikhwan, which was translated, *Yihewani*. He and his followers criticized non-Islamic customs including Sufi veneration of tombs and hereditary transmission of leadership, as well as practices many Sufi sects shared with the Gedimu such as performing prayers for payment and observing Chinese mourning

customs. Ma Wanfu advocated purging all elements of Chinese culture and even remained proudly illiterate in Chinese to illustrate the unimportance of Chinese learning and culture. Notably, Ma Wanfu's reforms did not reject the Hanafi school common to Chinese and Central Asian Muslims in favor of the Hanbali school prevalent in Arabia (Lipman 1984:311-12), one of several reasons why Salafis would claim Yihewani reforms were incomplete.

Naturally, these ideas aroused the ire of the traditional Sufi powers in China, and Ma Wanfu's opposition to Chinese education and culture alienated assimilated Hui and those with ties to the Qing Dynasty. Thus, Ma Wanfu was a clear enemy of the Qing-loyalist Hui general Ma Anliang (马安良), who also belonged to the Huasi branch of the Khufiya Sufi brotherhood. During armed conflict among Muslim sects in 1895-6, Ma Anliang drove Ma Wanfu out of Gansu and into Shaanxi. The Gedimu communities to the east were more accepting of his reformist teachings than the Sufis of the northwest, and the Yihewani movement offered a potentially unifying ideology for these traditionally independent congregations. After chasing Ma Wanfu around Shanxi, Gansu and even Xinjiang, Ma Anliang finally managed to have him arrested in 1917. But before the leader could be executed, another Hui warlord based in Xining, Ma Qi (马麒), seized the opportunity to co-opt the new sect and improve the balance of power with his rival, Ma Anliang. Ma Qi's soldiers rescued Ma Wanfu and brought him to live and preach in Xining. Even though Ma Qi was from a Khufiya Sufi family, he saw an opportunity to exploit the Yihewani sect as a counterweight to his rival Ma Anliang's power base in the Huasi menhuan (Lipman 1998: 207-8).

Ma Qi and his sons helped establish Yihewani as the orthodox sect in their realm, and the Yihewani sect gradually became less extreme in its opposition to Chinese culture. When he became patron of the Yihewani sect, Ma Qi passed strict laws against opium and decreased the power of Sufi menhuan in his domain. And the formerly fundamentalist Ma Wanfu also compromised in tolerating Ma Qi's Sufism and participating in Chinese politics. Patronage of the Yihewani proved so successful, that the family of Ma Fuxiang (马福祥), the Hui Sufi warlord clan governing Ningxia, also encouraged Yihewani development in its realm (Lipman 1998: 207-8). The integration of Yihewani into the Chinese milieu continued when a second generation disciple of Ma Wanfu named Hu Songshan (虎嵩山) felt that he faced discrimination for being Chinese when he went on hajj in the 1920s. Upon his return, Hu concluded that the Yihewani movement had to first strengthen the nation of China in order for Chinese Muslims to be accepted as equal members of the global ummah. Hu continued opposing cultural accretions in religious worship, but he also encouraged Muslims to pursue traditional Chinese and Western education, and in the 1930s, he even authored a prayer in Arabic and Chinese soliciting Allah to aid China in its struggle against Japan (Lipman 1996:208). Ma Qi's son and successor, the Nationalist-allied warlord Ma Bufang, would continue supporting the Yihewani movement and molding it into a form of patriotic scripturalism. Throughout his domain centered in Xining and encompassing modern Qinghai and much of Gansu, Ma Bufang increased suppression of all movements the Yihewani considered unorthodox, including the Khufiyya Sufi order to which his own family belonged and the Salafiyya movement which he labeled a "heterodox" 邪教

“foreign teaching” (外道) (Gladney 2010:79). Yihewani cooperation with the state and disapproval of Sufism and Salafism would continue through the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

In today’s Xining, Ma Wanfu’s grandson is the head imam of Dong Guan Mosque, still leading prayer each Friday for all Yihewani Muslims in the city. And in eastern Xining, one can visit an artifact of Hui power in the “jade palace” of Nationalist governor Ma Bufang. However, in curating Ma Bufang’s former residence, the local government is not subtle about framing him as a pawn of the Chinese Nationalist Party (国民党) and foreign imperialists. There is not even a whiff of his support of Yihewani, suppression of Sufism, or mistreatment of Tibetans for fear such issues might threaten the harmonious unity of China’s minority peoples. World War II-era American military equipment sits in the main courtyard, and tourists (who are virtually all Han) can pay a few RMB to pose in it wearing American military uniforms. Any suggestion of Ma being an agentive Muslim leader is drowned out by Nationalist regalia; historic photos of joyful Muslim, Tibetan, and Han locals greeting the People’s Liberation Army; and exhibit halls dedicated to each of Qinghai’s minorities located in what was once the quarters of the Ma family women.

Ma Bufang himself fled to Hong Kong in 1949, then went on hajj to Saudi Arabia with 200 family members and associates. He attempted to build support for an insurgency against the CCP from Egypt, and then served as Guomindang ambassador to Saudi Arabia before eventually dying there in 1975. His old “jade palace” was derelict and forgotten until reopening as a museum in 2006 (see Cooke 2008), but his legacy

continues in the local dominance of the Yihewani, although only rival sects associate the Yihewani with the man popularly perceived as a tool of foreign imperialists. In spite of shared theological ancestry, the sect for which Yihewani believers generally reserve the greatest hostility is its rival revivalist sect, the Salafiyya, which emerged out of the Yihewani in the tumultuous 1930s.

Muslims in the People's Republic

In a contest for the strategically important buffer zone between China proper and the U.S.S.R, the Japanese and Nationalists each sought to portray themselves as sympathetic to Islam, and when the Communists' famed retreat from Nationalist forces known as the Long March carried them through the Chinese Muslim heartland of Gansu, they also softened their atheist rhetoric to appeal to the Muslims there. As the Chinese Red Army passed through Hui and other minority-dominated areas, advance scouts asked permission of local leaders to encamp in their domains. They explained that their beliefs included Han-Hui equality and resistance against Japan, and communist leaders forbade soldiers to eat pork or enter mosques. Much of this was necessary to counteract Nationalist propaganda that alleged the Communists would "collectivise marriage...[and would] eradicate Islam and ahongs would be boiled alive" (Dillon 1999: 88-9).

But such niceties were not enough for the Communists to gain Muslim support in securing the Gansu corridor and access to Russian allies. When the Communists moved to seize the crucial trade route, Muslims from Ningxia, Qinghai and Gansu banded together to defeat them. Lindbeck (1950) attributes this Communist failure to win over Muslims to three distinct causes (1) the portrayal of Islam as an ethnic peculiarity rather

than a universal religion, (2) attempts to turn Muslims against each other in class struggle, and (3) the threat that collectivization would undermine the economic base of Islamic institutions. It is doubtful that many Hui considered their actions in such intellectualized terms, but perceived threats to the practical foundations of Chinese Islamic communities and a condescending denial of Islam's universality likely would have factored into Hui motives. Even if conflicting ideologies caused suspicion, many Muslims still found common cause with the Communists during the tumultuous 1930s and '40s.

In 1936, the Communists set the tone for future minority policy by establishing the first ethnic minority autonomous government in Yuhai (豫海) County in present-day Tongxin (同心) County, Ningxia (Dillon 1999). The need for allies against the Nationalists combined with a desire to circumvent Japanese offers of future ethnically-based autonomous states along the lines of Manchukuo (Manzhouguo 满洲国) helped motivate this Communist generosity. In these early days, the CCP guaranteed minorities the right to secede in imitation of the Soviet model, but this promise was withdrawn in 1940 as the party became entrenched at Yan'an (延安). But the legacy of 1930s minority policy allowed the oldest mosque in Ningxia survived the Cultural Revolution virtually untouched because Mao himself held a meeting there to establish the Hui Autonomous County. In order to fight escalating Japanese aggression in 1937, the Communists abandoned their attempts to preach class struggle and organize areas under their control into soviets to focus exclusively on resistance against Japan. The party resurrected the nationalism of Sun Yat-sen, permitted religious freedom, allowed government by local

assemblies, and organized guerilla campaigns involving both Hui and Han against the invaders (Lindbeck 1950).

Communists, Nationalists and Muslims participated in an uneasy alliance until the Japanese surrendered and the Civil War recommenced in earnest in 1946. Based in Xining, Ma Bufang commanded Nationalist armies throughout northwest China and earned a reputation as a modernizer in the American press by installing an American-made sewer system in Xining. After pledging in April 1949 to never surrender to the communists, Ma fled to Hong Kong and then Mecca later that year (*New York Times* 1949). From Cairo, Ma announced the start of the Guomindang Islamic Insurgency in January 1950, but it was limited to a few isolated acts of ambush and sabotage. Many battle-weary Muslims saw little distinction between Communists and Nationalists, and scattered resistance ended within a month (Lindbeck 1950). However, the Hui would soon discover that the Communist regime would be much more hostile to their faith than the Han-Hui unity preached by the Nationalists.

There was a great deal of debate inside the CCP over whether the Hui should be considered a nationality since they can only be construed as meeting one or two, if any, of Stalin's four criteria for determining a nationality. The dispute was portrayed in a legendary conversation between Mao and Stalin just after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949; Stalin allegedly asserted that the Hui only should be classified as a religious group, but Mao observed that in order to gain their support in consolidating control of China, they must be considered a nationality (Gladney 1991). Perhaps the CCP had learned from Hui opposition to Chiang Kai-shek's (蒋介石) 1939 shift in

government policy that declared that the Hui and Han were in fact one race; the former had just converted to Islam (DeAngelis 1997). In a 1934 speech in Cairo before the Association for Mutual Knowledge of Muslims, the renowned Hui scholar Ma Jian (马坚) observed that the majority of Chinese Muslims denied this official viewpoint. However, once the Nationalists were vanquished in 1949, the CCP began to shift its policy to encourage assimilation. Gladney quotes an October 1949 cable from the Central Party Propaganda Office announcing the proscription of slogans formerly used in predominantly Hui regions such as, “Resolutely Oppose Han Chauvinism” and “Nationality Self-Determination” in the interest of unity and in recognition that the “Han today are the major force in China’s revolution” (qtd. in Gladney 1991:89-98). This would prove only the first of many vacillations in Communist policies towards religion and ethnic nationalities.

In the Common Program ratified in 1949 and again in 1954, the CCP guaranteed “freedom of religious belief” to every citizen, but the interests of socialism, national security and public order largely superseded freedom of religious practice. Furthermore, the Communists enacted a xenophobic isolationism condemning all foreign and non-Russian things, people, and ideas. Thus, Catholicism would be the most dangerous faith with its hierarchy and foreign leadership, but Muslims also literally focus their attention abroad each time they pray. Either the Communists feared internal rebellion or sought to curry favor in the Middle East, because they made numerous concessions to Islam in the early years of their reign over China. For example, a 1952 decree mandated respect for Muslim customs in all government institutions and required separate cooking equipment

installed in schools, military barracks and government offices wherever there was a significant number of Muslims. Leaders of Islamic communities received government positions, and many who had served as officials under the Guomindang were allowed to remain in their posts, including the governor of Xinjiang, who had defected to the Communists only when Nationalist defeat was imminent. Nationalities received their own autonomous regions and therefore Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was established in 1955 and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region was founded in 1958.

Like the Nationalists and the Japanese, the Communists set up organizations and educational institutions, founding the Chinese Islamic Association in 1953, which published new editions of the Qur'an and works on Islamic theology and organized trips to Mecca, and they founded the Chinese Institute of Islamic Theology in 1955 to train along and Islamic scholars (Dreyer 1982). Cherif-Chebbi (2004:83-85) suggests that Yihewani imams received most appointments in such institutions primarily because they were literate in Chinese and thus were more able than imams of other sects to understand and relay party instructions, and the party also found them to be less 'capitalist' than Sufi *menhuan* that had acquired much land through collecting *zakat* from congregants. Both of these parallel other party-dominated organizations, like the Chinese Patriotic Protestant Association, set up to establish party oversight of religious organizations and activities.

Despite placating gestures on the part of the national CCP, the 1950s saw Muslim rebellions sparked by economic hardship, Marxist indoctrination in Islamic schools, and anti-Muslim discrimination at the local and regional level. Muslims who were previously better off than their Han neighbors were now subjected to rationing and a tax on

slaughtering animals that was waived only during certain Islamic holidays. Teachers at Islamic schools had to attend atheistic socialist education classes. Mosque lands were confiscated, and they were required to house clubs that studied Marxist political theory more than the Islamic or general education curriculum on which they purported to focus. The Communists also took part in the age-old imperial tactic of relocation, moving Muslims from eastern China to the rural Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia region of western China. And various county and local governments would discriminate against Hui through mere exclusion and monitoring or overt harassment and humiliation (Dreyer 1982). Gladney (1996:90) cites this as an application of Lenin's strategy for controlling nationalities, in which one promises self-determination until seizing power, then assimilates them in a supposedly autonomous area while excluding them from the central government. In 1952, the Jahariyya order rebelled under Ma Zhenwu (马震武) in Guyuan (固原), southern Ningxia and in Zhangjiachuan (张家川), Gansu. Legendarily, Ma issued slips of paper called *pi'erhan* (皮尔汗), essentially tickets to heaven, to those who might die while defending mosques and tombs whose lands were to be confiscated and redistributed. This resistance movement was crushed after two months, but its leader evaded capture until 1958. He was publicly decried as a "religious landlord" before dying in prison, only to be rehabilitated as a "victim of 'leftist radicalism'" in 1983 (Gladney 1996:136). Clearly, religious freedom under the Communists had its limits, especially when it came to dissent.

When the party invited criticism during the 1956-57 One Hundred Flowers campaign, numerous Muslims complained of discrimination, anti-religion policies, and

autonomy that was merely a sham. Overwhelmed by the response from all segments of society, the party lashed out in the anti-rightist campaign of 1957. Ahongs, Muslims and other rightists were hauled into mass meetings to be accused of despicable crimes and humiliated in front of the entire community. Vice chairmen of the Chinese Islamic Association were removed from their posts, and blamed for engineering anti-communist propaganda. Like many religious leaders, the head imam at Dongguan Mosque was arrested in 1958 and later died in prison (Cherif-Chebbi 2004:74). In addition to repression, the CCP answered its critics with propaganda, pointing out that freedom of religion was enshrined in the constitution, asserting the differences among the 10 different Muslim nationalities and even establishing Ningxia as an autonomous zone in 1958, furthering the pretense of Muslim autonomy. In spite of condescension and harassment, the rights and customs of Muslims were still officially protected. Even though stoves reserved for cooking halal food were often dirty and scarce, Muslims organized into cooperatives still had access to separate cooking equipment. But Muslims soon would be fully integrated and collectivized during the Great Leap Forward.

Beginning in 1958, Chairman Mao plunged China into a massive socio-economic experiment to collectivize and exponentially increase industrial and agricultural production in the span of a few short years. With all of China's resources dedicated to this task, the Chinese Islamic Association was abolished, lands that still belonged to mosques were confiscated, imams and women were sent out to work in the fields and—in a throwback to the Ming—Han-Hui intermarriage was encouraged. This last policy was likely enacted in hopes that—contrary to historical precedent—the Hui would dissolve

into the Han and cease wasting valuable time praying and maintaining mosques and tombs. In the bowels of the Xining library, I found a 1958 pamphlet with sinister knife-wielding along on the cover that urged Hui to resist these scoundrels who would bilk them out of money, sodomize their sons, and rape their daughters (Qinghai People's Publishing House 1958).¹⁰ This attempted surge in national production ended in catastrophic failure, famine, economic devastation, and political backlash (Dreyer 1982). As more pragmatic cadres came to power in 1961, the reforms that would have been most odious to Muslims quietly faded along with the disastrous economic policies of the Great Leap Forward. Many prominent Muslims gradually returned to the positions they had lost, and communal dining halls made changes to accommodate Muslims. However, mosque lands were not returned and those mosques that closed did not yet reopen. Then, the fickle political winds shifted again, allowing the Great Helmsman to seize control and steer China into yet another tempest.

When Mao Zedong launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, numerous young people across China formed various bands of Red Guards dedicated to the task of remaking Chinese society in a radical Maoist image. Muslims and other minority nationalities were, for many Red Guards, emblematic of the “four olds” (四旧; old ideas, customs, culture and habits) that Mao had marked for destruction and reformation. The Chinese Islamic Association disappeared again, mosques were closed and vandalized and Muslim leaders publicly denounced and humiliated. Muslims in

¹⁰ I also found a hand-written party document dated 1958 that complained of how Muslims wasted too much time studying and praying instead of working. Unfortunately, this document had been mysteriously removed from the catalog when I came back for a second look, so I was unable to record bibliographic information.

Xining recalled to me how the grand, 600-year old Dongguan Mosque became a meeting hall hosting propaganda films and dances, a use likely chosen to be particularly odious to Muslims. Xining's beautiful Qing Dynasty Shui Cheng Men Mosque served as a wire factory between 1958 and 1980, and the 1934 Nanguan Mosque became an embroidery factory from 1958 until 1960 and then an elementary school until 1979. Muslims were encouraged to raise pigs during this period, and Gladney (1996:135) claims that only a few Muslims hoping to win favor with party officials actually did so. Indeed, the only man who told me he had raised pigs was a retired party member (see chapter seven for a profile of Mr. Han), and he seemed to be on the verge of tears just mentioning the indignity. Gladney (1991:137) also reports Muslim protests in Beijing, Ningxia, Henan and Hebei during this period, and leading Muslim cadres in Ningxia and Gansu were charged with political offenses and removed (Dreyer 1982).

Violence between rival factions of Red Guards was common at the time, but one such clash in Shadian (沙甸), Yunnan Province pitted Han against Hui in an ethno-religious confrontation. In parallel to the way many 'Muslim rebellions' began with violence between rival Muslim sects, this confrontation began with two armed factions of Hui Red Guards feuding over different interpretations of Maoist—rather than Islamic—orthodoxy in 1968. When town leaders welcomed Han soldiers to quell the violence, the soldiers began a struggle campaign against the local ahongs and other religious leaders. Ahongs and other prominent Muslims were forced to eat pork, act like pigs, and roll in the mud; soldiers also polluted the local wells with pig bones and carcasses. Even when local mosques began reopening in 1973, Shadian Muslims were denied permission to

resume services at their mosques. A year later, officials in Kunming arrested local leaders who took their petition to reopen the mosque to the provincial capital.

Due to Shadian's persistence in opposing the party's ban on religious practice, a neighboring township formed a Han militia to oversee Shadian. This prompted the local Hui to form themselves into a "Huihui militia." Clashes between the two led to multiple deaths and eventually caught the attention of Beijing, so authorities sent the People's Liberation Army to resolve the situation. Shocked by the size of the PLA contingent and wary of soldiers after their experience in 1968, the citizens of Shadian refused to let the army into their village. Intolerant of this obstinacy, Beijing ordered a surprise attack, and PLA soldiers stormed the town in the middle of the night on July 29, 1975. Soldiers burned Shadian to the ground, and over the next week, killed between one and two thousand Hui. In 1979, the post-Mao government made reparations to survivors, criticized unnamed culprits responsible for the brutality, and paid to rebuild the town and seven new mosques in the area (Gladney 1996:137-140). Today, Shadian has become a center for Islamic education where the Salafiyya movement is particularly influential, and people often told me that I should go there to see the best of Chinese Islam, some saying that it was "just like Saudi Arabia."

The ebb and flow of Maoist political campaigns critical of religion caused Islam and its factions to virtually disappear from the public sphere, but the same variety of sects quickly reemerged after the series of reforms beginning in 1978. Numerous mosques in Xining were built in the early 1980s, and most of the larger one's have been rebuilt and expanded at least once since then. Apparently, mosques were more sorely missed than

similar institutions in other religions, as Gillette (2000:95) notes that Muslims in Xi'an repaired their mosques rapidly while Buddhist sites were still in disrepair decades later. (Of course, Buddhist and Daoist temples are sites of occasional rituals and do not serve the same function as community centers and sites of daily prayer like mosques.) Various sects competed to rebuild their mosques quickly and with grander, more Islamic architecture. Indeed, Hui identity today features tensions and conflicts among the same historical forces I have described: centuries of Gedimu or Sufi tradition embedded within individual communities, the Chinese government offering recognition and practical benefits in exchange for supporting its Marxist rhetoric and practical hegemony, and the allure of movements from abroad preaching an allegedly more authentic Islam.

Selective Memory Among Modern Chinese Muslims: "It is Better Now"

When asked about the thirty years between "liberation" and "reform and development," Chinese Muslims remember poverty first, then they also remember religious ignorance and sometimes secretly praying, but they nearly always emphasize that "it is better now." Today, they have no fear of government retribution for what they say in private, but there is a sense of humiliation and loss of face in recounting mistreatment at the hands of a party that is still in power and whose citizens are powerless to oppose it. Whenever I asked about modern restrictions on Islamic practice, they also emphasized how much more freedom they have today compared to the past. Several times informants had to rescind an invitation to attend an Arabic class when the teacher told them government policy forbade the presence of foreigners (see Armijo 2008:182). And once I rode four hours to Linxia to attend an Islamic studies conference

only to learn that foreigners were not allowed. Chinese Muslims were usually surprised to learn of such restrictions, and would optimistically say that at least now I was free to attend prayer at their mosques. Also, when I asked why the sale of Islamic literature was illegal in Qinghai, they would emphasize that at least now they could study texts bought in other provinces. Older people readily recalled that the situation today is far better than the Cultural Revolution when all the mosques were closed. There were also recent memories of widespread “pressure” 压力 in 2008, when widespread riots in Xinjiang produced scrutiny of and tension among all Chinese Muslims. This is not to say that other Muslims were implicated in the Xinjiang riots, but one informant used a Chinese idiom to describe the situation: “When the city gate catches fire, fish in the moat suffer.”

While discussing history with an old Muslim man while walking through a market, he spoke glowingly about the variety of goods available in contrast to how things were when he was young. Back then, he would go barefoot until his family acquired a ration ticket for shoes, and they did not have money to buy even clear soup (清汤) unless the government gave it to them. His father taught him basic Arabic by transliterating it into Chinese characters, and he would pray in secret sometimes, but not five times a day. When I asked another old Salafi man if they were allowed to pray in the fifties and sixties, he laughed and said that when they were organized into work communes and eating out of one big pot, there was simply no time to even think about praying. Another old man who studied at several mosques in Gansu during the ‘80s, recalled blocking out all the windows during Ramadan in the early 1970s, so no one could see him eating a predawn meal of bread and water to prepare for the day’s fast. The aforementioned

Muslim with whom I perused the market called Chinese Muslims “not good” (不行) and “backward” (落后), and even blamed this on the government because it forbids religious instruction of minors. However, he immediately proceeded to express a common belief that the Qing emperors had been much worse than the communists, killing one-third of Shaanxi’s Muslims. He saw the Qing as a low point for China’s Muslims and the Maoist era as a time of gradual improvement towards the tolerance and economic development of today.

Some Muslims were more overtly critical of the CCP, usually those who had directly experienced the party’s wrath. One ahong, who made and sold cooking oil, whom I will call Harun, told me how three generations of his family had “been injured by” (被伤害) the CCP. His grandfather was an ahong who was sentenced to forced labor during the anti-rightist campaign of the late fifties. Harun’s father was handicapped and could not do as much work as an able-bodied man, so he received decreased rations from his commune during the Cultural Revolution. He was caught stealing from the communal fridge to feed his family and was beaten to death. Then in 2007, long after the party began liberalizing, Harun received a reminder that he still had limited legal rights when a development of forty apartments he owned and recently had built was demolished without compensation. This kindly middle-aged man related all of this matter-of-factly and said that he was not bitter because these were just Allah’s “trials” (考验). However, he also said that the party, “Still says good things and still does bad things” (还说的好事还做的坏事). Harun also warned me that many mosques were filled with imams and

spies who were actually working for the CCP.¹¹ When Xi Jinping appeared on the television in the back of his oil shop, he suddenly exclaimed “illegal” (非法的). When I asked what he meant, he asked me, “What Chinese person chose him?” (什么中国人选择他). Like many Chinese Muslims, Harun was critical of American foreign policy, but envied Americans’ ability to choose their government. Harun also expressed hopes that the party would soon fail, saying that most Chinese people had grown complacent at the appearance of economic growth, but growing inflation indicated that there was trouble looming beneath the surface. Like many Muslims I met, he was discontent with the party and hopeful of change, but would never even think of taking any sort of political action because he was all too aware of the consequences.

Characteristics of Salafiyya

The Salafiyya say that they emulate Muhammad and his companions and the two generations of Muslims to follow them, and the name of the sect comes from the phrase, “*Salaf al-Saalih*,” meaning “pious ancestors.” This refers to a Hadith in which Muhammad, in response to a believer’s question, says the best Muslims are his companions, the next best make up the generation after them, and the third best are those of the following generation (Bukhari 2651). There is also a Hadith in which Muhammad uses the term “salaf” for himself: “I am the best predecessor (salaf) for you” (Bukhari 5885; qtd. in Elmasry 2010:217). In China, emphasis on studying Hadith such as

¹¹ I encountered one such informer on the first Friday of Ramadan. The Public Security Bureau arrested some Uyghurs who apparently were in town illegally outside the mosque after noon prayers. They also called me over and asked me a few questions about where I was from and what I was doing in town. I answered in the vaguest possible manner when they asked how often I came to the mosque, and a white-hatted man I did not recall leaned over the policeman’s shoulder to tell them that I was at the mosque every day. The officers asked to copy my passport, told me to carry it with me next time when I told them I did not have it, and did not give me any trouble any other time in Xining.

these also gives Salafiyya the monicker “Hadith sect” (圣训派). However, Members of other sects most commonly call them by their most obvious marker of difference: “three hand raises” (*santai* 三抬), because they raise their hands three times during each cycle of prayer (ra’kas). Such outsiders tend to associate Salafis with the eighteenth century thinker Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but Salafis themselves generally consider the appellation, “Wahhabi,” as a pejorative because it characterizes them as followers of a man from the early modern era. Instead, Salafis see themselves as followers of the original Islam and part of a theoretical tradition of strict, literal interpretation of the Qur’an originating with Muhammad himself and including Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal (d. 855 C.E.) and Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328). Despite their admiration for Hanbal and the Saudis, Chinese (and many other) Salafis do not ascribe to the Hanbali *madhab* (school of law) used in Saudi Arabia or the Hanafi school common to all other Chinese Muslims, instead they accept reasoning from any tradition as long as it falls in line with Qur’an and Hadith. Salafis believe that schools of jurisprudence are latter-day innovations and that each believer should be prepared to make judgements based solely on these two infallible authorities.

Salafis do not characterize their movement as a sect; they see it as a method of making decisions and determining the true Islamic path based solely on the Qur’an and Hadith. They claim that followers of other sects blindly follow the ways of their fathers instead of those of the prophet. They decry the Yihewani accretion of some Chinese practices like commemorating the anniversaries of relatives’ deaths by having an imam recite scripture (instead of burning incense and making offerings as Han Chinese would

do). This makes Salafism a threat to the authority of imams and somewhat insulting to the filial sensibilities of many Chinese Muslims. Of course, Salafis do not reject the wisdom of all imams and scholars, but they expect any advice given by learned Muslims to be firmly grounded in unimpeachable scriptural authority. In spite of Salafi denials of sectarian status and a good deal of internal diversity, Salafiyya's criticism of other sects' practices makes belonging to the movement generally more exclusive than other sects. Most Chinese Muslims belong to a sect into which they were born, but many, if not most, Salafis have made a conscious decision to join a maligned minority movement. Rather than stress loyalty to the sect, Salafis emphasize an individual's responsibility to perfect personal knowledge and practice of Islam, testing oneself in pursuit of a more perfect faith. Most Muslims can recognize Salafis immediately due to numerous small differences in prayer practices, but only the learned are aware of the larger theological contrast these represent.

The numerous small variances in practice between Yihewani and Salafiyya are the most visible distinctions, but the most hotly and frequently debated sectarian issue I encountered was the exact location of Allah. The Salafi literally interpret several Qur'anic descriptions of creation that say after creating the world, Allah rose above heaven (2.29, 7.54, 10.3, 13.2, 25.59, 32.4, 50.38, 57.4). Several other Qur'anic verses and Hadith refer the Allah in a "high" or upward direction, so Salafis maintain that Allah is located above heaven. On the other hand, Yihewani claim that one cannot attach a position to Allah because the Qur'an says there is nothing like Allah (42.11, 112.4), but He is also all-encompassing (4.126), he also is closer to man than his own jugular vein

(50.16), and when three are engaged in private conversation, Allah is the fourth (58.7). Yihewani cite a passage in the Qur'an warning believers that some will try to use esoteric verses to mislead Muslims (3.7) to argue that the aforementioned verses are too esoteric for humans to understand, should not be taken literally, and that Salafis are using them to mislead believers. They claim that giving Allah a specific position is tantamount to idolatry or giving partners to Allah, the greatest sin in Islam. Indeed, literally interpreting the Qur'an also leads Salafis to believe that Allah has face, eyes, hands and shins. Salafis are quick to specify these features are of unknowable nature and nothing like human body parts, but Yihewani insist this is idolatry. Dispute over the exact translation of the verse about creation also has caused a schism among the Salafis, as some take literally one translation that claims Allah is seated on a throne above heaven, while others argue that sitting like a human is beneath Allah's majesty. Both of these controversies are common to Muslims internationally, but they are exacerbated by limited knowledge of Arabic grammar and conflict over the proper translation of the Qur'an into Chinese, with older sects and older individuals generally favoring older (and some would say less accurate) translations.

The differences in practice between Salafiyya and Yihewani stem from contradictions among Hadith, and they may seem small, but it is very obvious and even disruptive when one or two people in a mosque pray in a different style. Salafis are immediately recognizable when they raise their hands before and after bowing instead of just at the beginning of prayer. But they also say, "Ameen" aloud instead of silently at the end of the Fatiha (the first surah of the Qur'an), which is recited at the beginning of each

cycle of prayer. After the congregational prayer, Salafis sit and silently recite dhikr before doing nonobligatory sunnah prayers independently. Yihewani and Gedimu do sunnah prayers immediately after congregational prayer and then recite dhikr afterward. They also conclude prayer by raising their hands and saying a silent dua (supplicatory prayer) led by the imam, but Salafis omit this step, saying dua only on occasion during sunnah night prayers. On Fridays, Salafis pray only two cycles of congregational prayer at noontime, instead of praying these two followed by the usual noontime prayers that Muslims make every other day, as Yihewani and Gedimu sects do. Yihewani also recite scripture over the grave at funerals, while Salafis just say a silent dua after the burial. During Ramadan, Salafis waited for word from Saudi Arabia about when to begin and end the fast, while other sects made these decisions locally. And Salafis performed eleven, slow cycles of prayer during Ramadan night prayer, while the other sects performed twenty-three cycles at twice the normal speed. Salafis also de-emphasize some cultural customs (风俗习惯), such as wearing a hat to pray or men keeping their hair cut short, that they believe the Yihewani and others have begun to mistake for religious requirements. Salafis can cite numerous Hadith attributing their practices to Muhammad and his companions, and they claim that there is a dearth of evidence for the practices they omit. These differences may seem small, but they are clear markers of difference that can cause serious conflict.

Table 1: Comparison of Major Islamic Sects in China

	Gedimu	Sufis	Yihewani	Salafiyya	Tablighi Jama'at
Chinese	格迪目, 老教	苏菲, 门宦	伊赫瓦尼, 新教	赛来菲耶, 圣训派, 三抬	泰卜里厄哲玛提, 达瓦宣教团
Arabic	qadīm قدم	four main brotherhoods: Qadariyya القادريه, Khufiyya خافيا, Jahriyya جهريه, Kubriya كبرى	al-khwan الإخوان	Salafiyya سلفي	Jama'at al Tabligh جماعة التبليغ
name translation	old, old teaching	Sufi, menuan from 门宦, meaning powerful and influential family (Dillon 1999)	brothers, new teaching	three generations, Hadith sect, three hand raises	preaching society, Da'wah preaching circle
earliest recorded date in China	Tang Dynasty	late Ming Dynasty	1893	1936	1986
source of movement	various sinified Muslims	various, mostly from Central Asia	Egypt, but Sinified	Saudi Arabia	South Asia
identifying practices	rub hands over face after greeting each other	incense burning, tomb veneration, touch hand to heart when greeting other Muslims	raise index finger when silently reciting Shahada during seated recitation at end of prayer	raise hands three times, keep index finger extended throughout seated recitation at end of prayer	door-to-door invitation to study

Table 1 (continued): Comparison of Major Islamic Sects in China

	Gedimu	Sufis	Yihewani	Salafiyya	Tablighi Jama'at
ameen at end of Fatiha	silent or whispered ameen	varies	silent ameen	say Ameen aloud	varies
dress of manla and ahong during prayer	turban	varies with brotherhood	turban	keffiyeh draped over head	turban
dhikr	after sunnah prayers, sometimes led aloud by imam	various forms of chanting, aloud in case of Jahriyya, sometimes involving head-shaking, etc.	after sunnah prayers	before sunnah prayers	should be recited whenever possible to gain merit
aids for counting dhikr	prayer beads	prayer beads or stones	prayer beads	none	prayer beads or electric counters
duai (supplicatory prayer)	after each prayer, rub both hands over face afterward	after each prayer,	after each prayer	only sometimes during witr (night prayer)	varies
location of Allah	everywhere, but cannot be pinpointed	varies with brotherhood	everywhere, but cannot be pinpointed	above heaven	won't discuss it or other contentious issues
Funeral practices	same as Yihewani with commemoration of death anniversaries for which imam is paid to recite	entombment of renowned imams	recite Qur'an over graves, no women allowed to attend, death days sometimes commemorated	no tombstone, no reciting, no women allowed to attend	varies
source(s) of authority	imams, scripture, community tradition	Sufi masters, imams scripture	Qur'an, Hadith, 4 great imams	Qur'an and Hadith only	sahaba, scripture, imams

Table 1 (continued): Comparison of Major Islamic Sects in China

	Gedimu	Sufis	Yihewani	Salafiyya	Tablighi Jama'at
school of law	Hanafi	Hanafi	Hanafi	none	varies
commemorate death days of loved ones	yes	yes	sometimes	no	varies
adorned mosque interiors	yes	yes	sometimes	no	no dedicated mosques
greeting other Muslims	two-handed handshake, followed by rubbing hands over face and beard	handshake, then touch right hand to heart	handshake	handshake	handshake, say "make good duai (supplications)" (做好duai) on parting

History of Salafiyya in China

The Salafiyya movement emerged out of the Yihewani in the 1930s. Isolating the exact moment of separation is difficult because of similarities in the two sects' scriptural ideas, historical ancestry and opposition to many traditional Chinese Islamic practices. Many claim to have had Salafi ideas before they knew what Salafism was. However, the origin of a separate sect called *Salafiyya* can be traced to Ma Debao (马德宝), who grew up in a Sufi household before gravitating toward the more orthodox Yihewani tradition, and then brought the principles of Salafiyya back from a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1936. When he returned to his home in Linxia, China's "little Mecca," prominent imams told him to get rid of the texts he brought back with him, saying that those in Mecca were *kafir* (unbelievers). Ma Debao could not believe that Chinese Muslims were more knowledgeable than those in the holy land, so he studied the materials he received in

Mecca until he clearly perceived what he believed to be errors in the Yihewani practice and theology. He began preaching Salafi principles that included belief in the literal meaning of the Qur'an, which opposed certain Yihewani ideas and placed Allah above heaven. This conflict played out in a series of public debates in Linxia, which led to a formal split with the Yihewani in 1937. Ma Debao's grandson, an ahong named Ahmed, told me how his grandfather traveled around eastern Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang, meeting with rejection and death threats. Ahmed described how he had to travel with knife-wielding bodyguards until he ultimately found a small measure of acceptance in his home county, where virtually every one of China's Islamic sects manages to coexist. I interviewed a Ningxia Salafi ahong who remembered that in the 1940s, the simplicity and textual verifiability of Salafiyya's message appealed to him and many other enthusiastic young students when they first heard it in Linxia. And he characterized Salafi ideas on the position of Allah as the biggest theoretical difference. In spite of promising beginnings, Salafiyya's development nearly stagnated after the communist revolution as all Islamic education faced various degrees of discrimination and suppression for nearly 30 years.

Most sources have nothing to say about the development of the Salafiyya movement between 1949 and the 1980s when China was closed to outsiders and party policies suppressed religion to various degrees, but several informants told me how during this period they and their fathers independently developed the same critique of Yihewani that they would only later come to know by the name *Salafiyya*. I learned some Hui martial arts from a fellow congregant at the Salafi mosque, Master Yang, who claimed that his father was the first to teach Salafi ideas in Qinghai, and I was shocked

when he claimed this happened in 1963 or '64. I mentioned this to Ma Debao's grandson, Ahmed, who formerly served as lead imam of Shu Lin Xiang Salafi mosque, and he recalled that Master Yang's father was not well educated but "extremely devout" (虔诚的很). Ahmed said that the elder Yang had had one of precious few Arabic-language collections of Hadith at a time when possession of such an object could be considered evidence of promoting feudal superstition, exhibiting bourgeoisie sympathies, or even conspiring to commit espionage. In these Hadith, he saw evidence of the prophet locating Allah above heaven, which contrasted with the Yihewani ban on giving Allah a location. Master Yang recalled how his father would lead prayers and deliver Friday sermons at his house and how ahong visiting Xining would stay and study at the family home. When I visited Ningxia weeks later, the aforementioned elderly imam inadvertently confirmed the existence of this early underground Salafi community when he mentioned the elder Yang's name as one of many early proponents of Salafism. As a minority within a minority, Master Yang said that Salafis were "attacked" 攻击 the most during the Cultural Revolution, and so the movement did not begin to develop in a major way until the 1990s. He also expressed some bitterness about how young people today are unaware of this history, and even those who study Islam abroad do not appreciate the contributions made by those who studied Islam at risk of their very lives.

The "little Mecca" of Linxia where Salafism first took root is still home to some of the most prominent Salafi mosques and scholars, but the movement has spread throughout the surrounding Hui heartland of eastern Gansu, eastern Qinghai, and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. It has reached eastern China and become prominent in Yunnan

Province, especially in the town of Shadian (沙甸), which has become a center of Islamic learning with the help of CCP restitution for its aforementioned destruction during the Cultural Revolution. These Salafi communities are connected by a strong network of Salafi scholars, including alumni at Chinese and foreign Islamic institutions and businessmen who trade with both Chinese and foreign Muslims. I met imams from all over China at the Salafi mosque in Xining, and when I traveled in Gansu or Ningxia, Salafis would recognize me because they had seen me at that mosque in Xining.

Salafism benefits from a tight-knit and growing community within China, and its international ties are sometimes seen as cosmopolitan and modern, but they also leave the movement open to accusations of “blindly worshipping all things foreign” (崇洋媚外) or even association with violent terrorism. Many of its most ardent supporters and most prestigious imams have studied abroad, and Armijo (2008:183) confirms that Chinese Muslims are not eager to welcome young students returning from abroad into religious leadership positions because they do not necessarily understand Chinese Islamic communities. This does not hold true for most Salafis who devalue particularistic Chinese traditions, but it helps explain the popular rejection of Salafiyya. The defensive mode of Chinese Salafis was obvious in the introduction to one of the first pieces of Salafi literature I received from an informant; this handbook on Salafi prayer practices began by defending the reformist ideas of China’s foreign exchange students to Middle Eastern countries (Ye Sai Er 2007). Such elite Muslims who are able to make the hajj or travel to the Arabian peninsula for study or business often remind Chinese Muslims that

Salafiyya may be a denigrated minority in China, but in the Muslim holy land and many other places, it is the norm.

Adherents to the Salafiyya movement make up a tiny, but influential and purposeful, minority of Chinese Muslims. Many have stories of how they converted to the Salafi methodology, and even those who were born into the Salafiyya movement usually can tell the story of how their father or grandfather discovered the movement (see chapter six). In China, adherence to a sect or Sufi order is largely exclusive, although one might stop into any mosque for prayer when traveling. Rural Muslims in particular tend to pray at the same mosque and in the same manner as everyone else in their village, often without awareness of its sectarian affiliation. It is precisely this form of unexamined religiosity that revival movements combat. Adherence to a tiny minority sect like Salafiyya comes with the awareness that one's practice is different, and usually the belief that is better. Criticism of other sects makes adherence to both Yihewani and, even more so, Salafiyya exclusive, and when Salafis attend prayers in Yihewani mosques they usually leave immediately after obligatory prayer rather than participate in dhikr and dua they consider unorthodox. One Ningxia schoolmaster who discretely teaches Salafi ideas at an Yihewani institution (See Aisa Ahong in chapter four) estimates that 90% of imams in China's Islamic and Arabic academies have Salafi ideas even if they do not raise their hands three times during prayer or consider themselves part of the movement. Even those Yihewani imams who vocally criticize Salafiyya have inadvertently increased the latter's notoriety through recognizing the Salafiyya critique and responding to it. Indeed, the increasing popularity of Salafiyya, especially among foreign-educated young people, has

caused legal and popular backlash. Whether it is because of its perceived association with Islamic terrorism, the possibility that it could upset the sectarian balance of power, or a simple aversion to new religious movements, Salafism is banned in Xinjiang and discouraged to various degrees elsewhere in China.

When I traveled to Yinchuan, the predominantly Han capital of Ningxia, with a young Salafi from that region named Noah, who was working on a master's degree in anthropology, we met some men at a mosque who mistakenly believed Salafism was illegal, but Noah said this showed that they had no personal experience with Salafis, except for maybe hearing that it was actually banned in Xinjiang. Noah once attended the investiture ceremony for the head of the Chinese Islamic Association in Ningxia, and the man receiving control over all mosques in the province warned his audience of imams, religious students, and other learned Muslims to reject Salafi ideas. Possibly because the party tends to blame separatist movements in Xinjiang on foreign terrorist groups that also claim a Salafist ideology, Salafism is banned in Xinjiang. But it is only discouraged to various degrees in other provinces. Some argue that the government is hostile towards Salafism because it fears the infiltration of foreign terrorist ideology, but Noah said that the scholars in Beijing realize that those advocating violent jihad are a tiny percentage of self-professed Salafis. Instead, he claimed that the government's main concern was that growth of a new sect would upset the existing balance of power among Muslims, a situation that often led to violence in the Qing Dynasty. However, when I happened to meet a Uygur Muslim in Yinchuan later that day, I was shocked to see him raise his hands

in the Salafi manner in a Gedimu mosque, something he said he would never do in Xinjiang and something I had been warned against doing in Xining.

Dueling Scripturalists: Conflict Between Yihewani and Salafiyya

Throughout my travels in Qinghai, Gansu, and Ningxia, Xining's mosques seemed the least receptive to Salafism, and several local Muslims confirmed this observation. In Xining, several of my Salafi friends warned me that people would get upset and possibly resort to violence if I raised my hands three times during prayer like a Salafi. An Egyptian Arabic teacher told me that when he first prayed in a newly rebuilt mosque in the heart of Xining's Islamic district, he raised his hands three times as he was accustomed to doing. While he was performing prayer, an old man approached him until their faces were inches apart and stared at him angrily for several seconds before rushing out of the mosque. The Egyptian told me that he ceased raising his hands in Yihewani mosques after this, because he feared someone might get angry and do something much worse than performing prayer in an unorthodox way. Since conforming to local practices, he had been well received, especially by students and alongs eager to practice their Arabic. Once or twice, I accidentally raised my hands three times during congregational prayer in an Yihewani mosque and received some dirty looks. Later, my Salafi friends assured me that I only escaped verbal censure because I was a foreigner. In contrast, I would often see members of other sects praying in the Salafi mosque and not raising their hands, but I never saw Salafis scolding or correcting these visitors. Many Salafis often attended Yihewani, or even Gedimu mosques, because the mosques were conveniently

located or they were accompanying non-Salafi friends, but when they did so, they would not pray in the Salafi style.

One faction within the Yihewani, called the *Yingpai* (硬派) or “hard sect,” goes so far as to condemn Salafi as *kafir* (unbelievers), and Yingpai imams tell their followers that it is sinful to pray behind Salafi imams, including the imams who lead prayers around the ka’ba in Mecca. Many Salafis I knew laughed at these Chinese Muslims who believed they knew better than the rest of the ummah that is eager to pray at Islam’s most sacred site. But such ideas have serious effects; one prominent Yingpai imam from Gansu, Ma Youde (马有德), argues that as *kafir*, Salafis should be killed, but since Chinese law forbids this, they should be completely shunned and cut off from the Muslim community. This extreme condemnation of fellow scripturalist sect is interesting because it acknowledges the authority of Chinese law in addition to creating radical opposition and separation between the sects. The family of one elderly congregant of Shu Lin Xiang Mosque abandoned him at the behest of Yingpai imams when he refused to stop attending the Salafi mosque, leaving him to live in poverty in a small room at the mosque. When Jin Biao Ahong, one of the most prominent imams in Xining, was shot and wounded after receiving a prestigious new post in 2004, many claimed it was because he was too permissive of Salafism. However, when I interviewed him (see chapter four), he denied this was the cause, and he characterized Yihewani, Salafiyya, and Tablighi Jama’at as different methods of worship, refusing to condemn any of them. Most Yingpai imams are educated in China, preach in rural Qinghai or Gansu dialects, and Salafis characterize them as quintessential old-fashioned and provincial-minded Hui.

Even though some accuse party functionaries of discouraging propagation of Salafism, others acknowledge that the CCP policy of religious freedom has protected the movement. Indeed, the party lifted Ma Bufang's ban on Salafism in 1949, and it has not been singled out for prohibition (outside of Xinjiang) ever since. Ahmed, Ma Debao's grandson, who served as schoolmaster at a Salafi mosque in a predominantly hard sect village outside Xining, said that Salafis risked being beaten or mocked when walking the streets in the past, but nowadays, people were more civil, largely due to government protection of religious freedom (see chapter four). Hard sect members would now speak to Salafis, but would not eat meat that Salafis had slaughtered or allow their daughters to marry Salafis, as they still did not consider them to be true Muslims. Ahmed mentioned one case in which hard sect members even refused to let an old Salafi woman be buried in the Muslim cemetery, repeatedly filling in the grave her family had dug. Only the intervention of the Public Security Bureau and provincial minority affairs officials persuaded them to allow the burial to proceed.

In spite of Xining's tendency towards sectarian prejudice, I encountered numerous friendships and several marriages that crossed sectarian boundaries. I knew some young Salafis who said no one would let their daughters even consider marrying them, but I also knew a Salafi man married to a woman from a Sufi family. Discussing this situation at their house, he dismissively said that her family "worships old men" (拜老人), and she argued that he did not understand. He teasingly asserted that she would follow him in faith, as the Qur'an mandates, but from her defiant attitude and the fact that she prayed at home and he usually prayed in the mosque, I got the sense that she would continue to

pray as she pleased. I even knew a man who married a woman from a hard sect Yihewani family after he agreed not to try to convert his wife to the Salafi way of thinking or discuss theology with her family (see chapter seven). During Ramadan, I witnessed him lecture a female friend of his wife about the differences between Yihewani and Salafiyya, but he never said anything directly to his wife about the issue. When I had a chance to talk to her and her brother when her husband was out of town, I learned she knew enough Arabic to perform prayer, but had no knowledge of theological issues or even how the prayer times are determined by the sun's position in the sky.

For the most part, doctrinal and sectarian differences are only important to a vocal minority that takes them very seriously, but even those who are unaware of precise theological conflicts stubbornly oppose variations in practice. Once, I was walking with an Yihewani friend to Shu Lin Xiang Mosque and casually warned him that there might be a few unexpected variations in prayer practices because this was a Salafi mosque. He vehemently argued that we should go elsewhere, saying that “we” (presumably referring to Yihewani or perhaps Chinese Muslims in general) were against Salafism, but he could not explain the reason behind the opposition he felt so strongly beyond saying that their prayer style was incorrect. After prayer—which he insisted on performing in Yihewani style—and chatting about Salafism with a few friendly Salafis for about an hour between prayers, he said that Salafi prayers were 90% the same as the manner to which he was accustomed, and he was confused as to why so many imams object so strongly to Salafism. Most Chinese Muslims, whether they participate in revival movements or not, perceive plurality of practices and theology as a significant problem. They denigrate the

majority of Chinese Muslims as too disparate and argumentative and look abroad to imagine themselves as members of a more perfect, unified, transnational community believing in the one, true faith. However, increasing interactions between China and the outside world are making the plurality of foreign Islamic models all too apparent.

Tablighi Jama'at: Habitus of the Sahaba

While Salafiyya and Yihewani movements strive to return to the original texts of Islam, the Tablighi Jamaat movement aims to immerse participants in the experience of the prophet's companions. Arriving from South Asia in the 1980s, Tablighi Jama'at is another relatively small, but influential revival movement among Chinese Muslims. It may be the only new modality of Islam to arrive in China after post-Mao reforms and the only one to successfully include members of all of China's Islamic sects. This movement transcends theological and ethnic divides by encouraging all Muslims to reinvigorate their faith by incorporating Hadith into every aspect of their lives. They learn how to do this by embarking on trips called "jama'at" of three days to four months in which every day is devoted to studying, preaching, and praying with a small group of traveling companions, also called a "jama'at." A set curriculum of six key virtues of the sahaba and a prohibition on discussing sectarian or political issues help maintain unity among this group. Every day after morning and late afternoon prayer, participants gather to study in private homes, mosques sympathetic to the movement, or certain hotel prayer rooms. They send out groups of four or five people to invite other Muslims to study with them, and every study session ends with an exhortation for everyone present to sign up to go on a short jama'at to nearby towns or villages, or a longer jamaat across China or even

abroad where they will engage in similar study sessions and evangelism every day. In spite of Tablighi Jama'at's inclusive philosophy, many in the generally conservative population of Chinese Muslims view such an unfamiliar movement of foreign origins with a sense of suspicion or even hostility, especially as many participants in the movement act as if Islamic practice that does not include the method of jama'at is inadequate. Like Salafiyya, the enthusiasm and dedication of Tablighi Jama'at participants make up for the movement's modest numbers.

The Tablighi Jama'at movement began among Deobandi¹² scholars in northern India during the 1920s as a response to British colonialism and Hindu nationalist movements to “reconvert” South Asian Muslims to Hinduism. Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) came from a family of prestigious Deobandi scholars. He adopted the contemporary reformist desire to return to the original Islam, but placed a unique emphasis on the ascetic lifestyle and evangelism of the prophet's companions. He combined this with the Sufi method of self-cultivation through reciting dhikr that would almost magically earn blessings from Allah. Moreover, the movement he founded devolved responsibility for teaching and representing the ideal Muslim lifestyle to common lay Muslims, which is a role traditionally reserved for Islamic scholars. Rather than just studying Hadith and other stories about the prophet's companions, jama'atis attempt to experience the sahaba's struggle to spread and purify the Islamic faith.

¹² This Sunni Hanafi revivalist school of thought named for a city in north India formed after an 1858 failed uprising against British colonists. The founding Indian scholars sought to reverse the decline of Islam by building madrasas, returning to the pure Islam of Muhammad's time, and promoting Sufi mysticism.

Even though participants spend their journeys urging others to be better Muslims, they do so with the conscious goal of internalizing this message and continuing to practice it themselves after their jama'at is over. Those devoted to this methodology often dress in Arabic-style clothing, they study tales of the sahaba's lives and deeds while sitting in a circle on the floor, they recite phrases in Arabic numerous times in hopes of gaining blessings, they eat simple meals (often using only their hands) while sitting on the floor, and they constantly urge everyone to be better Muslims, especially by going out on a preaching mission three days each month, 40 days in a year, or at least four months in a lifetime. There is no prerequisite knowledge or training; one learns by doing, and even I was able to go on a three-day jama'at and then encouraged to go on a longer one in the future, once I had completed my graduate studies in America. However, the tendency toward rejection of the material world, de-emphasis on in-depth study, and rejection of the importance of learned imams and scholars provokes criticism both in China and abroad. Critics claim that the movement encourages men to neglect their families to go on jama'at and enlists the blind to lead the blind, with a high risk of propagating erroneous ideas about Islam.

The earliest recorded arrival of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in China was in 1986 when a group from Malegaon, India went on a four-month jama'at around China. They were appalled at the unorthodox practices and lack of gender differentiation among Chinese Muslims, and they also felt that local Muslims were reluctant to assist their movement for fear of the CCP (Metcalf 2003). Because religious practice had only recently become legal again when the movement arrived in China, and evangelization

was still technically illegal, the movement was slow to grow in China. In spite of this initial reticence, persistent South Asian jama'atis and Chinese Muslims returning from study abroad in Pakistan or other Islamic nations gradually built the Tablighi Jama'at movement within China. Of the dozens of jama'atis with whom I conversed, the person who was involved with the movement the earliest went on his first jama'at in the mid-1990s. He told me that virtually no one was familiar with the movement at the time, and many mistook these wandering preachers dressed in Middle Eastern garb and advocating strict orthodoxy for Salafis. Participants agreed that the movement only began to grow rapidly in the 2000s, and that is when most of the movement organizers I met first encountered it. In 2013, it seemed virtually everyone I talked to had at least heard of something called "Da'wa work," which usually turned out to refer to the missionary visits of jama'atis, even when informants did not know the name *Tablighi Jama'at*¹³. Veselič (2013:108-9) had a similar experience during her fieldwork in Qinghai and Gansu in the 2000s. She recognized university students participating in the methods of Tablighi Jama'at, but never heard anyone use the movement's name.

Of course, proselytization and any religious activity outside a state-approved institution are still not legal in China, but the government mostly tolerates the movement (except in Xinjiang where all promotion of Islam is banned) because it is understood to focus on revitalizing old Muslims rather than converting new ones. Among Chinese Muslims, even some non-participants admire the Tablighis' enthusiasm and dedication,

¹³ This deemphasis on identifying the movement likely downplays any notions of sectarianism or exclusivity. Participants describe doing da'wa work simply as the responsibility of good Muslims, not the modality of one specific movement. Noor (2012:19) recalls how he went on a forty-day jama'at at age nineteen in Britain but did not learn the name of the movement until one year later.

but others believe their single-minded devotion to their missionary methodology is unsustainable and unorthodox and that their codification of the sahaba's noble attributes in the twentieth century amounts to the sin of innovation (Arabic: *bid'a*), or worse, worship of Ilyas, the founder of the movement. Educated Muslims and learned imams in particular find the lack of training and downright ignorance of many traveling evangelists troubling. Several times, learned Muslims recounted to me they had heard jama'atis tell stories of sahaba showing their love of the prophet by drinking his urine or blood, evidence that some jama'atis did not even realize these substances were unclean and forbidden and that their preaching missions actually spread ignorance. Oddly, many Salafis said that jama'atis' emphases on experience, emotionalism, and endlessly repeating dhikr amounted to Sufi heterodoxy, while Sufis, Gedimu, and Yihewani sometimes said that their scriptural orthodoxy and strict standards for behavior amount to Salafism. So the Tablighi Jama'at movement is accused of heresy at both ends of the sectarian spectrum. As a missionary activity, Tablighi Jama'at is banned in Xinjiang, but tolerated in other provinces. Some informants told me that the party fears that Tablighi-inspired enthusiasm could have a destabilizing effect, but others argue that the party has begun to realize that when the movement revitalizes communities of Muslims, they stop drinking, gambling, committing crimes, and basically become better citizens.

I have been emphasizing the importance of these new revival movements, but it is important to remember that most Chinese Muslims are not particularly interested in supporting or opposing them, which is one reason devout Muslims, whether they participate in these movements or not, agree that Chinese Islam is in a state of disrepair

and in need of revival. After several months of immersing myself in daily prayer and study of these revival movements, many people began to tell me that I knew more about sects and theology than they—or most Chinese Muslims—did. It is important to remember that religiously observant Hui are constantly and fretfully aware of their status as a “minority within a minority” (少数中的少数) as a Salafi informant put it. This anxiety about waning religiosity is a major motivating factor for China’s Islamic revival. Salafis generally strive to perfect Islam within themselves and their families in the hopes that others will observe them and follow suit, while the Tablighis dedicate themselves to encouraging others as a means of internalizing their message and perfecting themselves. Their methods differ, but the need to organize jama’ats or acquire a good Salafi education has led both of these movements to build a strong national network, which is linked to an even more powerful transnational network.

While the Salafi are not nearly as evangelical as the Tablighi Jama’at, they also reach out to their rural brethren with educational and public welfare projects (see chapter six). In doing so, these revival movements build a religious community that transcends ethnic boundaries and gradually supplants state-sanctioned ethnic identification with a religious identity that transcends the boundaries and control of the Chinese state. Both of these revival movements are avowedly apolitical, but their religious networks are giving rise to civil society organizations that in some ways parallel and subtly critique state programs. This project cannot fully encompass state campaigns to aid rural Muslims or the intricacies of party ethnic minority policy, but it will suggest that while the CCP attempts to co-opt the virtue of its constituent religious minorities, in some instances,

Chinese Islamic movements are also subtly co-opting the traditional role of the state. Chinese Muslims see a past and present characterized by a parochial Chinese identity and dominance of an atheist, materialist state, but they envision a future enchanted by membership in a global community of Muslims and a more moral Chinese state.

Chapter 3 - Huizu 回族 Learning to be Muslim 穆斯林:

Reaffirming and Redefining Modern Islamic Identity

When it is said to them: "Follow what Allah has sent down." They say: "No! We shall follow what we found our fathers following." What? Even though their fathers lacked wisdom and guidance? (Qur'an 2:170)

“Are you Hui or Han?” (你是回族还是汉族?) is one question Muslims asked me more than any other during my time in western China. When an old Hui man making one-foot-high tables for use on a kang (heated platform bed) asked me this question for the first time on the streets of Linxia, I told him that I am “American ethnicity” (美国族), and said that we do not use such categories. But in China, the categories of Han (often used as a catch-all term for non-Muslims) and Hui (similarly used to denote all Muslims) are not just religious and ethnic designations but legal identities inscribed on one’s identity card that partially determine one’s level of mobility within China, as well as access to university education, passports, and visas. However, modern revivalists like to point out that Hui (or Huizu) is an ethnic category (民族) that does not necessarily indicate one’s faith. They claim that one inherits ethnicity from one’s parents, but one must find faith for oneself. Learning to identify oneself as Muslim is an inward and outward journey of discovery, an exploration of one’s spiritual agency and assertion of a connection to the global ummah. Many reaffirmed Muslims do not participate in revival movements but exhibit what Veselič (2013:102-3) calls “modern Islamist type of religiosity... characterised by high levels of literacy, an ability to use modern information and communication technologies, an emphasis on personal responsibility in leading a

pious life and the denunciation of sectarian differences for a ‘purer’ form of Islam.” I do not use the term “Islamist” as none of my informants used this or a similar term in Chinese, nor did they identify with politically active Muslims or extremists to whom the English term usually refers. While my informants also do not call themselves “reborn Muslim (huigui de musulin)” as Veselič’s (2013:102-3) do, they share a similar goal of “learning to distinguish between ‘the customs’ of their parents and the ‘real’ Islam.”

For most Chinese Muslims, religious identity is fused with the ethnicity inscribed on their identity card and remains an unexamined and a priori part of who they are. They are Hui, so they do not eat pork; should not drink alcohol; probably learned at least a smattering of Qur’an as a child; and perhaps they even pray, attend mosque on Fridays, and/or fast during Ramadan. One prestigious Salafi ahong estimated that maybe twenty percent of China’s Muslims pray once a day, so far less pray the required five times, and he spoke from the perspective of more conservative Qinghai, where Muslims tend to be much more observant than those in eastern China. Some Hui have embraced orthodox Islamic practices since childhood, but others only discover and embrace them as teenagers, twenty-somethings, or even later in life. Most Hui at least refuse to eat pork, and many go through the motions of Islamic practices with varying degrees of commitment, but such people are increasingly seeking a deeper understanding of the rationale behind Islamic practice, and this quest often is inspired by or leads them to movements like Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama’at. Almost all of the members of the Salafi mosque, including learned imams, can recall how they or their families gradually came to realize the flaws of Yihewani practice and discovered a more authentic form in Salafiyya.

And nearly every jama'ati, including the local organizers of the movement, can recall the day a jama'ati came to his door and first invited him to a study group.

Participants in these movements and numerous other Muslims are consciously moving from an inherited, ethnic form of passive religiosity to a voluntary and proactive, transnational form of revivalism. They shoulder an individual responsibility to pursue new practices that will make them part of a global ummah. In a sense, Tablighis, Salafis, and all others who have newly embraced strict Islamic practice may be termed "reaffirmed Muslims," because in their minds, none of them are adopting a new movement or methodology, they are simply pursuing authentic Islam for the first time.

Revival movements may be the most visible and vocal forms of Islamic revival, but revivalism is not relegated to discrete sects or movements. The Chinese Islamic revival is based on individuals independently making choices for religion, and so they often reinvigorate their commitments to ancestral beliefs by more actively embracing Islamic study and practice without participating in a specific movement. Adopting strict religious practice in a society dominated by official materialism is a radical choice even without jeopardizing one's social ties by joining a minority sect like Salafiyya or evangelical movement like Tablighi Jama'at. In this chapter, we will meet some individuals who have become more devout in their study and practice of Islam without expressing this newfound devotion through a specific movement. Of course, in order to understand the purported laxity and assimilation among the Hui that revivalists strive to rectify, we must first establish a sort of baseline of average Chinese Islam. In order to provide some idea of this, I will introduce one Hui who very loosely follows the tenets of

Islam, is unconcerned with and uneducated in theological issues, steadfastly embraces his Hui identity and downplays sectarian divisions among Chinese Muslims. He certainly is not without his own idiosyncrasies, but I will highlight many of his opinions and practices that represent common tendencies among nonobservant Hui or Chinese Muslims in general. Then I will examine cases of a couple young Muslims who were born into traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, but only began to study and practice the faith as they grew into adulthood.

Mr. Ma: an ethnic Muslim

Mr. Ma is a 53 year-old retired grandfather. He shares the most common surname among Hui, which literally translates to “horse,” but is also short for Muhammad. I met so many people surnamed Ma that I called most of them by their Arabic names, names given to them by an imam and often called “scripture names” (经名). Tablighis and many other devout Muslims exclusively use these names. But I never learned Ma’s Arabic name, because like most nonobservant Hui, he exclusively uses his Chinese name, or what many observant Muslims would call his ”Han name“ (汉名). He was born in Gansu and worked as a cook most of his life, and he credited a lifetime of working in restaurants with giving him a good grasp of standard Mandarin for an uneducated man. He told me that he is illiterate, but he manages to keep abreast of the news, always commenting on the latest current events in the U.S. during our conversations.

I met Ma as I was taking an exploratory walk through his neighborhood at the base of the cliffs to the north of downtown Xining. This was less than a month after I first arrived in Xining, before I had met any participants in the two revival movements that

would become my focus. He was the first Muslim who agreed with me when I said, “I believe in everything” (我什么都信), and this created instant camaraderie between us. He invited me inside his house for tea and we talked for hours about China, the United States, religion, and human nature. Ma is what a more observant Muslim would call Han-icized (汉化). He is married to a Han woman who converted to Islam, but he rarely prays and goes to a mosque only on holidays. He drinks alcohol with Han friends (and foreign anthropologists), and he celebrates Chinese New Year in addition to Islamic holidays, but he would never dream of eating pork. When he invited me to his house for Eid al Adha, he even sent his more observant son out to buy beer for me, and the young man returned with a couple bottles secreted inside his coat. Ma is an extremely friendly and gregarious person, but our relationship became strained when I began practicing Islam and no longer fit the mold of his foreign friend. To old-fashioned believers, religion is something inherited from one’s parents and there is an uncrossable line between Muslim and non-Muslim.

Like many Muslims, Ma rationalizes aspects of faith by citing their practical and scientific benefits. More devout Muslims also cite these benefits as proof of the Qur’an’s divine origins, but they tend to specify that it is important to obey the Qur’an and Hadith even if one does not understand why it is beneficial. Ma claims that the physical movements behind prayer are a type of exercise, and generations of not eating pork have resulted in the meat disagreeing with Muslims’ stomachs. Both of these practices have proven to be beneficial to a group of people, and so they persist in following them. He does not cite the prohibition on eating pork that dated to Abraham or the importance of

complete submission to Allah through prostration. He repeatedly asserts that the essence of Islam is authenticity, a belief that what one says and does must match what is within one's heart, a principle on which Confucians and communists also agree. I was at his house several times when the time for obligatory prayer came and went unnoticed, and the only time I am sure that he went to a mosque to pray was when he called on Eid al Adha and told me that he was at Yang Jia Zhuang, the Gedimu mosque. He speaks about the Islamic faith as an insider and makes no apologies for the laxity of his practice. In contrast, Ma's twenty-something son seemed a little embarrassed by his father's unorthodox behavior, and he once told me that he does not drink alcohol because he is a "real Muslim" (真的穆斯林). Indeed, many young people find traditional forms of ethnic Islam to be so lax as to be meaningless and tiresome, so they seek to rediscover Islam through various brands of revival.

Ma insists on maintaining the façade of Muslim unity that Chinese Muslims almost always present to outsiders. He specifically told me not to write my dissertation about infighting among quarrelsome sects of Chinese Muslims (and I hope it comes across as more complex than that). This illiterate chef often spoke like a party cadre, wary of threats to "minority unification" (民族团结), emphasizing the value of harmony (和谐), and fretting about saving national face. All Chinese Muslims proclaim that Islam is the same all over the world. When I asked Ma how Hui are different from other Muslims, he and his elderly neighbor responded indignantly in unison, "The same!" (一样). Shortly after meeting Ma, I traveled to Linxia, China's "little Mecca" in Gansu Province, where a very erudite Hui high school student took me to numerous mosques and identified them

all by sect. Although she did not wear a headscarf like most devout Hui, she explained that her family was Yihewani and her grandmother explained to her all of the sectarian controversies. When I told Ma about this trip, he still insisted that sectarian differences were irrelevant. I suggested that this might be the “old teaching” perspective, in contrast to that of my “new teaching” Linxia tour guide, and he just laughed and said, “You understand too much!” (你懂太多了!). There is a tremendous sense of community among Chinese Muslims, but from within the community, one begins to perceive how the community is rife with division that Muslims perceive as very problematic.

Countless sectarian controversies create division among devout Muslims, and the practical challenges of Islamic practices also drive a wedge between observant and nonobservant Muslims. After I began praying five times a day, I had several awkward encounters with less observant Muslims. Once I met a young man on the street who was eager to practice English and thrilled to learn that I was on the way to a mosque to pray. We played phone tag for a few days and eventually agreed to meet in front of Dongguan Mosque at one pm. I assumed meeting at a mosque shortly before prayer time meant we would pray together in addition to having lunch. When we met, I mentioned that I still had to wash before prayer, and he looked shocked and said, “Oh, you want to pray!” There was an awkward pause before he quickly and sheepishly said that we would have to meet another day. Another informant named Bai, a young Hui engineer working for the city, never went to a mosque except once on the anniversary of his grandmother’s death (a practice tolerated by the Yihewani sect to which he belonged but condemned by Salafis). When he returned, he was wearing a white hat, the only time I ever saw him

wear one. He never ate pork or drank, but he smoked constantly, to his wife's chagrin. Once when we were walking past a mosque in Bai's hometown of Minhe, we heard the call to prayer and I casually asked if he ever goes to a mosque to pray. He seemed a little offended and said, "Of course!" in English, and then explained that he goes when he has the time. Months later, Bai was shocked to see me exiting Shu Lin Xiang Mosque with the post-prayer throng, and he mistook the students wearing Saudi-style red and white keffiyah draped over their heads for Arabs. He knew his family was Yihewani, but had no knowledge of the Salafiyya movement. Bai seemed happy that I was praying five times a day, but he had no interest in going to any mosque with me and grew annoyed when he called during prayers and I would not answer my phone. We gradually lost touch.

Ma is easy-going and frequently brags about having numerous Han and Hui friends, but he finds my attempt to cross the line from Han to Hui to be very troubling. The only time I saw him get angry was when I told him that I was learning to perform Islamic prayer. He told me that I should know better as a "college student,¹⁴" and that I should know the difference between doing research and worshipping. He kept saying I was cheating myself and whoever taught me, and they were cheating me and Allah too. It seems that he did not fully understand what I had meant when I told him that I believed in everything during our first encounter. I explained to him the method of participant observation and tried to convince him that I both believed in Allah and was doing research as well. He said if I really believed he would take me to the mosque immediately

¹⁴ "College student" denotes someone that has a university or collegiate education, and does not necessarily indicate that one is currently a student. This is what is known as one's "cultural level" (文化水平), commonly listed with vital characteristics such as sex, age, and ethnicity.

and we would pray together, but this statement was clearly for rhetorical effect only. Instead, he eventually changed the subject, took out a bottle of liquor, and talked about how we would drink and play mah jong to celebrate Chinese New Year. Ma could not or did not want to relate to me as a Muslim convert as many revivalists did, so he rejected my attempt to cross the boundary from unbeliever to Muslim. When I told others that I learned to pray before professing faith in Allah and Muhammad as his messenger, some Muslims agreed with Ma that this is inappropriate, but Salafis and Tablighis tended to support this gradual introduction to the faith as Allah's work. Most Muslims were shocked to see a white American praying among them, but eventually, news of the "American Muslim" spread throughout Xining, and soon I began meeting local Muslims who would just nod knowingly when I told them about my research. My presence was merely a freak show for some, but it was a powerful representation of Allah's guidance and the veracity of Islam for revivalists.

Once mosques became my principal field sites and devout practice my methodology, I became part of a daily cycle of practice that forged community bonds, but appeared to alienate non-Muslims to some extent. Migrating to and from the various mosques of Eastern Xining at regular intervals each day and rushing to eat in the early morning hours and right after sundown during Ramadan creates shared space and experiences among Muslims, but for those who never enter a mosque, such hustle and bustle is barely distinguishable from mundane urban life. Once a Han acquaintance protested that the Hui had lied to me about the rules for daily prayer because he had plenty of Hui friends and none of them prayed five times a day. In Ningxia Hui

Autonomous Region, I also learned from Han and Hui alike that few realize fasting during Ramadan is required of all Muslims because the only people who seem to do so are eccentric old men. When discussing Islamic revival in China, it is important to remember that a complete lack of any religious knowledge and wholesale dismissal of any religion as feudal superstition is common among both Han and Hui. Thus, the decision to pursue one's faith avidly, or even to abandon one's hereditary tradition for a new religion or sectarian belief, takes on a radically independent connotation. Thus, Islamic revival is a way for individuals to express their identity in a way that subtly and safely contradicts the materialist rhetoric of the communist regime and piously wrests some degree of autonomy from parents and ancestors.

This project encompasses countless Muslims, from illiterate believers to learned imams, anyone who makes an individual decision to independently study Islam and pursue more authentic Islamic practice can be considered part of the Islamic revival. The focus of this research necessarily drew me toward more religiously inclined Hui, and while many such people participated in one or both revival movements on which I focus, many of them did not. Indeed, most Chinese Muslims consider both Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya, especially the latter, to be so unorthodox that some even place them outside the bounds of Islam. Many reaffirmed Muslims and converts regard revival movements with great wariness, but still share many traits of Islamic revival with these movements. Many of these reaffirmed Muslims do not identify themselves as members of any specific sect, and often they do not wear white hats or other external identifiers that reveal them as Muslims in public. For some who have grown up as lax Muslims or

atheists, engaging in basic Islamic practices is a radical shift, even when it does not entail any sort of sectarian activity. Indeed, most Muslims are happy to remain ignorant of sectarian distinctions and simply attend the same mosques and carry on the same practices in the same way their parents did.

Reaffirmed Muslims

The following two cases illustrate how two young men not only pursue a more authentic form of Islam, but also seek knowledge of the English language, the world outside China, and other faiths besides Islam as additional components of modernity. Many young Chinese people are fascinated by foreign (especially American) culture, and they often pursue foreigners to practice their English and learn about the outside world, but they rarely have more than a passing interest in religion. Habibi and Ayoob are two examples of young Muslims who find America fascinating not just because of the NBA, Hollywood, and other elements of popular culture that captivate the rest of China, but they admire how American culture is unabashedly shaped by the Christian religion, which they view as being very close to Islam. Wide-eyed Muslims frequently asked if it were true that all American currency bears the slogan, "In God we trust." Many of China's Muslims have heard that Islam is growing rapidly in the United States, and they view the Islamification of the world's most developed nation as evidence of Islam's veracity and modernity. For ambitious young Muslims, revitalized Islam is a key component in a set of cosmopolitan and modern aspirations that stand in stark contrast to the old-fashioned status of hereditarily inherited Muslim identity.

Habibi and the College Student Study Class

Habibi is a 31-year-old, bespectacled, divorced accountant who studied Islam, Arabic, and English in a variety of informal settings after being raised by nominally Muslim parents on a mountain outside Minhe, a town a couple hours east of Xining on the border with Gansu Province. I met Habibi at an informal class for Muslim college students, a group that met on occasional Saturdays in a classroom across the street from Dong Guan Mosque to discuss everything from problems with Arabic pronunciation to issues Muslims face in Han-dominated workplaces. A graduate student I met at the Salafi mosque during Friday prayers had invited me to the study session. The class was composed of fifty to sixty young people including several non-Muslims who were accompanying Muslim friends or had become interested in Islam through the study of Arabic. Approximately equal numbers of men and women sat on opposite sides of the room, but as students trickled in throughout the morning, the aisle separating males from females almost disappeared. The class began with recitation of the Qur'an, then a speech on some Hadith that relate to life in a secular college, some pointers on properly pronouncing Arabic, and numerous other recitations, speeches, and small group discussions that went on for about four hours.

Habibi sat next to me and struck up a conversation in halting English before realizing that I could speak Chinese. Even though he had graduated from college many years ago, he attended these classes whenever he could. He expressed a sentiment that was reiterated by a few others, that these are the best classes because "the students are the teachers." Numerous students, both male and female, enthusiastically adopted the role of

teacher, lecturing without notes, writing on the board, and asking questions of their peers. I was surprised an hour or two into the meeting when one of the student emcees summoned the thin and unassuming Habibi to the front of the room where he gave a stern and inspired lecture about the importance of governing oneself by Islamic law, continually pursuing knowledge, and not being afraid to display one's faith. It seems that these classes provided a much-needed break from a Chinese education system built on strict hierarchy and rote memorization. Acting as instructor granted these students an outlet to express both religiosity and agency in creating a new space in which they could both explore their faith and vent frustration with an academic environment dominated by Han, materialism, and Marxism.

There was no mention of sects or revival movements during the class itself, but I later learned that several of the students participated in Tablighi Jama'at, a couple regularly attended the Salafi mosque, and one of them did both. At lunchtime, the class adjourned to a nearby restaurant where the owner treated us to a sumptuous lunch. At lunch, the students separated themselves by gender, but they walked together and chatted somewhat flirtatiously on the way there. After lunch, one student mentioned that he had seen me at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque, and I told him that was where I had met the student who invited me to the class. When others asked what mosque we were discussing, he quickly changed the subject. He turned to me and said quietly that we should be like this (putting his hands parallel) and not like this (bumping his fists together). He said that most of these college students do not understand sectarian issues yet, so we have to "bring them along slowly" (慢慢来) rather than shock them with new ideas. Attending an

informal class is just one modality of revival, and many attendees also sought deeper engagement in Islamic studies. During the Spring Festival, several members of this study group travelled to Shadian, Yunnan to study in one of the many Islamic institutions there. I also met a group of four of these college students in a hotel prayer room as they prepared to embark on what Yacub, a lead organizer of the movement in Xining, enthusiastically called a “college student jama’at” (大学生哲嘛提). In spite of state-sponsored educational institutions’ attempts to imbue these students with secularism and Marxist orthodoxy, these students were able to collaboratively forge identities as educated Muslims

Habibi’s Rediscovery of Islam

Habibi and I exchanged numbers at our first meeting and met numerous times over the next several months. He eventually confided in me a rather embarrassing story about how he became a devout Muslim five or six years previous. He was born Hui, but his parents did not pray and had never read any of the Qur’an, so the extent of Habibi’s Islamic identity growing up was an avoidance of pork and alcohol. Nevertheless, Habibi is one of many outgoing young Chinese who seek out foreign friends to practice English and learn about the outside world. So when Habibi met some Indonesians who wanted to study Qur’an with him, he began to study his faith for the first time. Everything they said jibed with what little he knew about Islam, until they immersed Habibi in water, fed him bread and grape juice, and then told him that he was now a “real Muslim” (真的穆斯林). Habibi recalled that this seemed strange to him at the time, but he had no frame of reference to recognize this as a Christian baptism. However, he grew more suspicious

when they told him that he did not need to go to the mosque and all he had to do was to recite alone at home and then speak to God in his own words. They taught him a recitation in Chinese that I recognized as the Lord's Prayer or Our Father, but told him it was from the Qur'an. The first surah of the Qur'an (Fatiha), which is always the first surah recited during prayer, is very similar to this prayer in meaning, length and format, but it is always recited in Arabic. Habibi never closely examined the "Qur'an" these foreigners had given him until a Muslim friend came over and asked what he was doing with a Bible. He incredulously insisted that it was a Qur'an, but when his friend opened it to the title page, he was shocked to see that it was printed by the Chinese Patriotic Protestant Association. Only then did he realize that his Indonesian friends had been Christian missionaries. To be perfectly clear, Habibi is not a stupid man, but the missionaries took advantage of the fact that he possessed the same level of religious knowledge as the average Chinese person, which is virtually none.

Instead of disparaging the Indonesian missionaries who deceived him, Habibi sympathizes with their goal of spreading what they believed to be the ultimate truth and remained intrigued by their message. The same day Habibi first told me the aforementioned story, he stressed that he "did not hate them" (不恨他们) because "they just have their own way of thinking" (他们只有他们自己的想法). He clearly disagreed with their deceptive methods, but respected the desire to share one's faith, saying that he would do the same thing if he were in their shoes and believed as they did. He even said that he would not be upset if Christians succeeded in converting all of China to Christianity, as this would be preferable to atheism, and success would clearly indicate

that this was the will of God. This came as a shock the first time I heard it, but it would not be the last time a Muslim told me that he¹⁵ would rather China become Christian than remain atheist. However, on multiple occasions, Habibi said that his greatest worry was that uneducated Muslims from the countryside would fall prey to other Christian missionaries masquerading as Muslims. At least half of the foreigners living in Xining for extended periods of time were Christian missionaries, and I never encountered any who pretended to be Muslim, but I often heard Muslims talk of them. More than once, other Hui mistook me, an American surrounding himself with Muslims and constantly talking about religion, as a missionary in disguise.

In spite of being visibly embarrassed at his previous ignorance, Habibi took a philosophical view of his experience with Indonesian missionaries and was thankful that it motivated him to diligently study Islam and learn to understand the Qur'an on his own so that no one could mislead him again. Besides attending the Muslim college student class and constantly talking about religion with friends, he also established an informal study class among his coworkers at the hospital where he worked as an accountant. I witnessed one of these sessions in Habibi's cramped apartment. He held a small marker board and led doctors and nurses in learning the Arabic alphabet letter by letter, reviewing an element of Islamic faith, and discussing a Hadith. When I attended his study group, they discussed a Hadith that explained how reciting the Islamic declaration of faith can earn one access to heaven. Habibi said that this seemed unfair, but Allah would still

¹⁵ I use the gendered form here and elsewhere to accurately describe my informants and convey the strong gender segregation common among devout Chinese Muslim men and women.

consider the sins one had committed and assign one to a level of heaven according to this. They also reviewed an element of belief that included the necessity of believing in all prophets, not just Muhammad, and he explained how the Golden Rule and other teachings occurred in the Bible and the Qur'an. He also talked about how prophets did not just give a scripture and leave, but they illustrated how to worship and behave, leaving behind an example of a good Muslim life. He clearly viewed the Bible not as a competing scripture or a source of delusion, but a secondary source for Allah's teachings that Muslims too often ignored.

Habibi and Christianity

Xining Muslims are so inquisitive about Christianity that I often wished I had brought reference materials to help me answer all their questions, but Habibi takes this curiosity to a whole new level. Due to Habibi's penchant for befriending foreigners in Qinghai, most of whom are missionaries, he hears much about Jesus, who is described in the Qur'an, but not in detail. Since the Qur'an states that the original revelations in the Bible and Torah are accurate, Habibi wants to find the oldest versions of these scriptures available to try to discern what elements of them do not contradict the Qur'an and thus can be believed. He was very excited when I sent him a link to a website with the Torah posted in ancient Hebrew, and he asked me to help him find a Bible in Greek. Of course, he is an accountant, not a scholar of religion or theology; he does not speak Greek or Hebrew, but he assured me that he would find people or resources to help him learn enough of these languages to increase his knowledge of the divine. He also is not satisfied with online sources, because he likes to read scripture on his knees with the

book resting on a small reading desk, as that is how he feels closest to Allah. Neither traditional Chinese Islam, nor the Islamic canon itself is enough to satisfy Habibi's quest for faith, he needs to launch his own scholarly project to understand Allah for himself. He wants hard copies of all of these sacred texts, so he can feel that he is alone with Allah while reading them carefully on his knees.

To help satisfy his curiosity, Habibi sought out the one Protestant and one Catholic church in Xining and attended services at each. I never had the chance to go with him, but Habibi told me how he identified himself as a Muslim eager to learn and engaged congregants and clergy in theological discussion. One of the main challenges to Jesus' divinity he cited was a passage in which Jesus says he does not know when the world will end. Clearly, an omniscient God would know this, and a purely benevolent God could not lie, but a prophet could be denied this knowledge, and Muhammad also said he did not know when the world would end. Habibi proudly told me that the Christians with whom he spoke simply said this was a mystery and one must have faith to understand how God become flesh is no longer necessarily omniscient. Blind faith is not enough for Habibi and other revitalized Muslims who eagerly seek rational justifications for their beliefs.

Habibi is extremely critical of Christianity, but he is open-minded enough to also express admiration for several aspects of this faith. In a chat with Habibi and his friend Ayoob during Ramadan, they both agreed that Christianity seemed more attractive to many because of its emphasis on God's love and forgiveness. They both observed that these attributes also appear as characteristics of Allah in the Qur'an, but imams tend to

focus instead on the restrictions placed on human behavior and the punishments enforcing them. Ye, a Salafi friend of mine who worked in the Xining city government, put this well when he said that Christians are always ready to put people in heaven whereas Muslims were all too eager to condemn them to hell. Indeed, Chinese Muslims tend to blame the modest growth and retrogressive reputation of Islam in China on misrepresentations of the true Islam by Muslims and imams who traditionally have been poorly educated. However, Ye also said that times are changing and younger imams are more willing to slowly introduce people to the basics of Islam, and once they accept the faith, gradually help them bring their lives into line with shariah law. Habibi, Ayoob, and other Muslims often speak with begrudging admiration of the success of Christian evangelization, and they are somewhat frustrated that more Chinese people are converting to Christianity than Islam. They also blame the comparative success of Christianity on what they perceive as its decadent laxity, saying that Christians believe one could do whatever one wanted with the knowledge that one would be forgiven. Unlike Islam, Christianity does not require observance of taboos on pork and alcohol, nor does it interrupt their daily lives with prayer, except for one hour on Sunday. Many Muslims doubt the sincerity of Chinese converts' faith and accuse them of simply copying Westerners. One can argue that both Christians and Muslim revivalists are looking for salvation outside a Chinese milieu that has left them feeling disillusioned.

Habibi was one of several young men for whom devotion to Islam only partially helps them forget that they lack a house or funds to buy one, which makes them virtually ineligible for marriage and something of a failure in the eyes of Chinese society. I never

got Habibi to talk about his divorce, but I know he has a daughter from this marriage living with relatives elsewhere. He (correctly) worries that this failed marriage further damages his prospects for remarriage. During Ramadan, Habibi told me that he just wanted to stay inside and memorize passages from the Qur'an in Arabic, as the hot weather meant he was confronted with immodestly clad women whenever he went out. He and Ayoob admired how Mahmoud, the Egyptian Arabic teacher, would walk quickly past attractive women on the street to avoid thinking lustful thoughts. Whereas most people memorize the Qur'an by starting with the easiest and shortest surahs at the back and systematically working forward, Habibi memorized surahs he found inspirational regardless of their length. He spent the entire month of Ramadan working on just one surah and still did not quite finish memorizing it. Like Ayoob, he studies both Arabic and English and seeks out foreign friends who can help him practice both of these and allow him to vicariously experience both modes of modernity they represent for him. In addition to studying, he seemed to work constantly, often picking up the night shift at the hospital, and even taking a second job at a cafe owned by an American missionary in order to practice his English. Habibi said that he did not mind working so much because it enabled him to take his friends out to eat and discuss religion. Indeed, Habibi constantly surrounded himself with many diverse acquaintances, consciously building community around himself and exploring new ideas.

Like most Xining Muslims, Habibi regularly prays at the Yihewani mosque nearest his house, but I also saw him at Shu Lin Xiang, the Salafi mosque, once or twice. Like most informed and observant Muslims around town, Habibi admires the Salafi Ma

Ahong's Arabic recitation, but he told me that the first time he went to Shu Lin Xiang, someone told him he was praying wrong, so he did not go back. Habibi also went to study with the Tablighis on occasion, and he has been on a three-day jama'at once or twice. Like many young Muslim men of his age, Habibi is a dabbler and a seeker, always eager to try new experiences and learn and discuss new ideas, an attitude that contrasts with many more traditional Muslims. This contrast came to light when Habibi and I sat in a teahouse discussing the differences between Christianity and Islam. The Muslim woman behind the counter told us that she could not help overhearing our conversation, which she found very interesting, but she was confused as to why we were so interested in other religions. She told us that the owners of the teahouse, which also served coffee and Western-style ice cream, were American Christians, and they would not accept a Qur'an the Hui staff offered to give them. Likewise, none of the Hui staff was interested in a bilingual Bible the Americans tried to give them. She even showed us the English-Chinese Bible they had left behind the counter, and Habibi half-facetiously asked if he could borrow it. She adamantly refused, saying it was inappropriate for Muslims to read it. We all laughed and parted on friendly terms, but she clearly represented the conventional Chinese and Chinese Muslim point of view that one should respect others' choice of religion, but not attempt to exchange ideas among faiths. For old-fashioned believers, an open-minded and curious attitude can be a dangerous challenge to orthodoxy, but it is integral for Habibi's revitalized faith.

Ayoob: The English Teacher

“My father drinks red tea; I want something different,” is the first thing Ayoob said after Habibi introduced him to me and offered him some red tea in the aforementioned teahouse with Christian owners and Muslim staff. This statement is not a reflection on Ayoob’s relationship with his family; instead, it symbolizes the way he self-consciously rejects many aspects of his Salar ethnicity that he considers old-fashioned, like mindlessly following his father’s religion or drinking his tea. Ayoob is a 32-year old English teacher from Xunhua Salar Autonomous County. Unlike Habibi, his parents are devout Muslims, but he often complains that he is dissatisfied with their unexamined and habitual mode of practice. Like Habibi, interaction with Western Christians has inspired in Ayoob a new, more avid practice and study of Islam. Ayoob worked as a translator for an American researcher and then an American couple whom he still calls his “grandparents,” spending so much time with them that he claims that he has come to identify with Western individuality and independent thought. They asked him difficult questions about Islam that inspired him to find answers, and Habibi credits their influence with making him more diligent in practicing and studying Islam. Gradually, Ayoob has begun to pursue an actively constructed sense of modernity in which he fuses his passions for studying both English and Islam.

Once Ayoob asked me how I could prove to people that God exists, saying that a feeling wasn’t enough, and I should have logical proof. He went on to give a proof he had seen in a video an American Muslim convert posted online. He, Habibi, and many others admire American Muslim converts like Yusuf Estes and Abdur Raheem Green, not just

for their ability to support Islamic principles with logic and science, but for the beauty of their spoken English, and the knowledge they had of other faiths. Ayoob dedicates himself to the study of Islam for his faith and English for his profession, but he also struggles to reconcile these aspirations with Salar ethnic traits and associated familial obligations.

Ayoob was born into a poor village in rural Xunhua Autonomous County where numerous once-impoverished Salar families have been among the first in Qinghai to take advantage of China's economic liberalization (Goodman 2005:327). With excellent spoken English and a college education, Ayoob is well-positioned to enter the business world like most young men from his hometown, but instead, he has found modest financial success, job security, and great personal fulfillment through a career in education. He lives and teaches English in Ping'an (平安), a town of around 100,000 mostly Han residents 20 miles east of Xining. Ayoob and his wife have recently purchased a new apartment in central Ping'an with money borrowed from numerous relatives, which is a great source of financial pressure and stress on Ayoob. He often points out the building in which he almost bought an apartment in Xining, and he spends so much time in Xining visiting friends that he clearly regrets not doing so. When I visit him in Ping'an, he takes pride in his home and says he enjoys the quiet sometimes, but he is often bored. A small sunroom on the roof of his building houses a simple prayer hall with an impressive view, and his neighbor is the imam. We prayed there a few times with about ten other people. The first time we went, he gave me a hat to wear and warned me that it would be better if I did not raise my hands three times in the Salafi manner to

which I was accustomed, saying his neighbors are village people and would probably not say anything while I was there, but may ask him some annoying questions later. (He didn't say so, but he clearly is afraid of losing face.) I told him that it was my habit to follow along and pray in the same manner as the imam and congregants, and he seemed to relax a little. While Ayoob generally criticizes those who blindly follow predominant religious customs, in this case, he encouraged it.

Ayoob is an intense and restless soul who often expresses disillusionment with his own life and dissatisfaction with the state of China and its Muslims. Old-fashioned, nominal Muslims frustrate him, especially those back in Xunhua, where men habitually wear white hats and women wear headscarves, but many of them drink alcohol and rarely pray. Sometimes women wear skirts or tight pants with their headscarves, and Ayoob complains that they clearly just go through the motions and do not understand the purpose of the hijab to preserve modesty. He complains that such Muslims are all about appearances and lack substance; they fail to realize that this world is like the tinsel hanging in the coffee-shop window where we first met, shiny but cheap. Han Chinese irk Ayoob even more, and he calls their atheism arrogant and ungrateful, like denying one's parents and giving someone else credit for one's creation and upbringing. Ayoob participates in Tablighi Jama'at, but is also dissatisfied with the movement as he prefers more critical conversations about Islam and how it applies to modern life, in contrast to Tablighi dogmatism and focus on the time of the prophet and his companions. He craves revival, but is wary of new sectarian movements and is not prepared to leave his ancestral sect behind.

Ayoob often finds himself torn between burdensome familial obligations and ethnic traditions on the one hand and modernist aspirations that include revitalized Islam and a sense of individuality. Like many young, urban Muslims, Ayoob has a fraught relationship with his rural roots and aspirations of giving his parents a modern life in the city. Ayoob's parents still live in a village in Xunhua County, the ancestral home of the Salar people. The Salar legendarily migrated there from Samarkand in the thirteenth century, taking with them soil and water from their home village, a camel, and a Qur'an. After much wandering, the camel turned to stone at a spring in a fertile valley among arid mountains in today's Xunhua County, so that is where the Salar settled (Goodman 2005:333-334). Ayoob's parents still live in the poorest village in this area, which is located up a hill and off the main road, and Ayoob contrasts it with the wealthier and more accessible "camel village" that draws tourists to see the camel-shaped rock and ancient Qur'an.

Like many rural Chinese villages, Ayoob's village is now home only to the very old and the very young. All the young adults have left to work in Xining or elsewhere, and their children often remain at home with their grandparents. The only time I met Ayoob's daughter was when I visited his family home in Xunhua. Walking around his ancestral village, Ayoob pointed out the empty houses of men who now own hotels and restaurants in Xining. When I admired weather-beaten, carved wooden doorways, he told me that these belonged to poor families; all those who were at least moderately wealthy had shiny, newly varnished ones. Ayoob's family hopes to move out of their charming courtyard house and into a modern apartment in Xining. His parents pray five times a

day, and his father prays with most male villagers at the Yihewani mosque down the street, but they disapprove of Ayoob's participation in Tablighi Jama'at. They aspire to material progress and spiritual maintenance, while Ayoob hopes to move forward in both realms. When I visited Ayoob's English class, he told his students that his determination allowed him to achieve fluency in English despite coming from this tiny impoverished village, so they should take advantage of the opportunities they have living in Ping'an and have the courage to practice the English he was teaching them.

Teaching English is a markedly modern profession in China, and teachers enjoy relatively high status in a culture that still bears substantial Confucian influence. Ayoob takes pleasure in inventing new and unorthodox tactics to teach Chinese students the arcane rules of English grammar, tutors independently on the weekends and summers in defiance of school regulations, and dreams of opening his own school one day. He clearly loves teaching and has a passion for the English language that leads him to seek out foreigners with whom he can practice. He finds it shocking that his fellow English teachers are reluctant to speak with his foreign friends, and Ayoob can only shake his head at how they would rather miss a rare opportunity to improve their main vocational skill than risk losing face by speaking substandard English in front of a foreigner. His experience with foreigners has made his English so much better than other teachers that the administration tolerates the short beard Ayoob maintains in defiance of school regulations. Public employees are forbidden to wear beards, hats, hijabs, or any other religious symbols.

Like many Chinese, Ayoob is frustrated with rampant corruption in Chinese society and repeatedly mentions that opportunities in China depend on connections, not ability. When we first met, Ayoob talked about how he could have had a more profitable job that would pay him to travel, but he would have had to “do something under the table,” so he didn’t get it. He often said he had a more Western perspective and admired the way things are done abroad, where ability is prized over connections. Ayoob credits Allah with helping him thrive in such a corrupt society. He was in a dead end job and dingy apartment that cost him 80 RMB (about \$13) per month before he began taking his religion seriously. After he began seriously studying Islam and performing prayer five times each day, he was married, had a baby girl, began making good money teaching and tutoring, and bought a nice apartment in central Ping’an. He pursues both his teaching career and his faith with an independent drive. And his definition of devotion goes beyond just persisting in prayer and other required practices. Ayoob says that one hour of thought is worth one thousand years of prayer, because the former contains independent pursuit of holiness and the latter is often just going through the motions.

Ayoob relished the contrast between his old-fashioned minority status and modern profession. One day he laughed about how he put on his white hat before butting into a conversation about English on a public bus in order to challenge the predominant assumption about Muslims being uneducated. Habibi, Ayoob, most Muslims under forty, and all those who worked as public employees donned hats only when entering a mosque if they ever did. While some Chinese Muslims would wear long, Arab-style coats, younger people, public servants, and many of those in more professional jobs favored

Western-style suits. Many combined these styles by wearing a long, Islamic-style coat over a western suit or a Western sport coat over an Islamic-inspired shirt. Ayoob laughed at how he used to wear suits all the time, even when traveling in the sweltering heat of Xinjiang. Eventually, he met many foreigners who favored a more casual manner of dress and rejected his suits as a Chinese affectation. Now, he self-consciously tries to adopt foreign styles of clothing, sometimes asking me if a T-shirt or baseball cap looked like what a foreigner would wear. He also rejects some Chinese social niceties that he deems tedious and unnecessary, so he often apologizes for being blunt and direct in his speech, saying that he thinks and speaks like a Westerner and doesn't like to "play games." In this way, he combines Chinese self-effacement and Western individuality, with its cosmopolitan connotations.

A seven-year relationship with an American couple who employed Ayoob as a translator and adopted him as an honorary grandson was instrumental to his success in English and his renewed faith. While he never called them missionaries, Ayoob did say that they were devout Christians who often spoke to him about religion. They told him that they hoped he would become Christian, and he also told them that they should become Muslim. They asked him many questions about Islam that he could not answer, such as why Muslims don't eat pork or why they are buried without a coffin, and this gradually prompted him to study and find the answers. He especially respected their deep understanding of the Bible, saying that they did not eat pork or believe in the trinity, as

they didn't find convincing justification for either in scripture.¹⁶ He recalled that they didn't share these unorthodox beliefs with other Christians for fear of provoking conflict. Ayoob often cites things they had taught him that were pertinent to Islam, such as the idea that all sin comes from the eyes, so it is essential to control one's gaze. More importantly, these elderly westerners inspire Ayoob to perceive religiosity as a vital aspect of transnational modernity as represented by the United States.

Ayoob often talked about the connection between language and culture, saying that English is more straightforward and amenable to individual manipulation than Chinese, and so understanding the language has helped him to appreciate American ideas like individuality and human rights. He also attributes studying English with giving him more respect for Chinese minorities like Tibetans who he feels have more "individuality" (个性) than the Han, and this has taught him to take some measure of pride in his minority status. He also watches foreign news in Chinese online via a virtual private network and realizes that one misses much just watching CCTV (China Central Television). He often says that now he perceives manipulation behind the news as presented in both Chinese and foreign media. After meeting many foreign travelers, he understands the desire to take a backpack and paltry savings and enjoy life cheaply, rather than vainly acquire possessions like most Han, Hui, and other Chinese do. However, he is still too bound by familial obligations to do so. He repeatedly mentions the *nafs*, the Arabic term for desire or ego, saying that so much evil comes from it, and he wonders

¹⁶ Ayoob cites a Bible quote in which Jesus says, "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person" to argue that Jesus never specifically claimed that eating pork was permitted (Matthew 15:11).

aloud if the romantic urge to travel is also one of its forms. Once, he debated all these ideas at a dinner with Habibi, several of Habibi's coworkers, and a South African who had just arrived in town, dominating the conversation and seamlessly intertwining Chinese and English, Islamic ideas and a self-professed "Western" perspective.

Ayoob tries to avoid being "too Chinese," but he seems to have even less desire to exhibit Salar traits, and although he does not specifically say so, many of the attributes he dislikes in Han Chinese are widely considered to be even more pronounced in the Salar. Chinese and Salar concern over face especially annoys him, and it is strongly pronounced in rural Salar culture in which it has become a sort of minority machismo. Once, he came to Xining to visit a relative who was in the hospital after being beaten by cousins who felt that he had insulted them and caused a loss of face. Ayoob complained of how he had to bring his cousin a few hundred RMB, which he could not really afford at the time, or else he and his parents would lose face. He hated the custom, but was trapped by the need to appease his family and maintain his parents' standing. Likewise, he was reluctant to let me pay him for some translation work, but agreed to accept money after he had to entertain all of his relatives to celebrate his new house. They gave him money to help buy the house, but then he had to give them money back in appreciation, so he complained that the custom was all about face and ostentatiously showing who can give how much money. Chinese and Salar culture required him to take me out to a huge dinner in Ping'an as most Chinese would have done, but in rejection of this, he took me out to a modest (but delicious and very filling) meal of Salar-style chopped noodles and barbecued mutton.

The way nouveau riche Salar people ostentatiously spend money on new mosques in Xunhua draws Ayoob's ire, and he says that it seems like a new one goes up every month in order for someone to show off their money. When I visited Ayoob in Xunhua, we walked together to an old mosque, which was being rebuilt in Chinese temple-style architecture with the help of a five million Yuan donation from a Salar who owns a shopping mall in Xining's main shopping district. He says that such grandiose new mosques being built while no one is praying is a sign that the end times are approaching. This ostentatious new mosque under construction has four huge minarets at each corner in the style of Arab-style mosques, but they are shaped like Chinese pagodas with sloping roofs and upturned eaves. Such Chinese-style mosque architecture is common in older mosques, but rare in new construction. When I brought this to his attention, Ayoob complained that people in Xunhua build mosques in this old Chinese style because their thoughts are old-fashioned.

Like any young, outgoing man, Ayoob occasionally struggled with lust, but he also admired faith and religious knowledge in women. Once, I walked with him to buy a baseball cap, and on the way he told me about how the salesgirl there was a Hui from Xinjiang, and it was clear that a chance for conversation with her was a larger motivating factor than the hat. He complains of the way Chinese girls try to fit an ideal image of what they should be when he just wants someone unique to talk to. He also likes to chat with foreign Muslims, and he often mentions meeting interesting Muslim girls who invite him to come visit their countries as a form of da'wah. He is clearly torn between loyalty to his wife, whom he finds physically attractive and suitable as a wife, and the need to

connect with someone on a deeper level, which he also fears is merely lust. He complains that his wife and her family were too traditional, but then he corrects himself, saying, “As a wife, she is good.” I asked if he would ever take another one,¹⁷ and he said no, that would be just acting out of lust. In Xunhua, we passed a multi-ethnic group doing Tibetan dances in a public square, and he shook his head and said one never would have seen this five or ten years ago. He viewed participation in this custom as a dangerous threat to the Salar and Muslim nature of his county (that also has a substantial Tibetan population) and worried that it would spark lust in young people and distract them from their faith. He also characterized his college experience in similar terms, as a time of being tempted by Han culture and materialism, an intensification of the daily experience of living in an atheist nation.

Ayoob and Salafiyya

I never heard Ayoob condemn any form of Islamic practice, but he remains loyal to the Yihewani tradition and is an admirer of the best educated Yihewani imam in Xining, Jin Biao (see chapter four). When I first arrived to visit Ayoob in Ping’an, we talked briefly about my research, and he suggested that Xining Muslims should be broken down into three major groups: Hui, Salar, and “new Muslims” (converts from other ethnic groups), favoring the state’s official system of classification over the sectarian divisions that seemed more relevant to some more partisan Muslims. I told him that I was more interested in movements that transcended ethnic divisions, like Salafiyya. Unlike

¹⁷ Polygamy is strictly illegal under Chinese law, but I heard many tales of wealthy Muslims with multiple wives. However, I never met anyone who would admit to practicing polygamy and most regard it as a decadent practice but did not entirely condemn it in principle, since it is understood to be traditional in Muslim societies.

most non-Salafis, he expresses support for the way Salafiyya encourages each person to achieve independent understanding of the Qur'an. Ayoob seems to embrace any sort of Islam as long as one studies and understands why one practices it. He came to the Salafi mosque once or twice, enjoyed talking religion with my acquaintances there, and was very impressed by the imam's Arabic. His only complaint was that the number of worshippers was far fewer than that at the other mosques in town. Ayoob seemed confused when I referred to Salafiyya as a revival movement, but ultimately agreed that it could be considered one when I explained how it advocated a return to the pure Qur'an and Hadith. However, he said that it would take "maybe 100 years" for Chinese Islam to revitalize this way, and he said that da'wah (meaning Tablighi Jama'at) was definitely a more important and effective movement. Then I described how almost every Muslim I met spoke pessimistically of Chinese Muslims and wondered aloud if it is accurate to speak of an Islamic revival in China at all. Ayoob laughed ruefully and said, "Inshallah."

Once, after I mentioned that I had prayed at the Salafi Shu Lin Xiang mosque, Ayoob asked me why foreigners seem to prefer this mosque. I suggested that the prayer practices might be similar to the way they prayed in their home countries, which I knew was true of one Egyptian, Mahmoud, who frequented the mosque. I also mentioned that some claimed the main difference between Shu Lin Xiang and other mosques was that those who attended Shu Lin Xiang believed Allah was located above heaven while others refused to name a specific position for Him. Ayoob listened to me describe the rationale for each side before siding with the Yihewani, which is the only sect in his home village. He had heard of this issue before, but asserted that such debates are counterproductive.

Later that day, we met Mahmoud and asked him to weigh in on the issue. At first, he evaded the question by talking about how there are some things humans cannot understand, and that the Qur'an is for all times, so some verses will only become clear in the future. However, Ayooob kept bringing him back to the specific issue, saying that answering such questions with "I don't know" is not sufficient in China as it tends to lead Chinese people to assume that one is ignorant. So eventually, Mahmoud said that if the Qur'an says Allah is above heaven, then that is what we believe, but we must also believe that his abilities are in this world because that is what the Qur'an says. However, if we describe him as sitting like a human or heaven as a material place, that is blasphemy. This is the conventional Salafi point of view, but it is very controversial among Chinese Muslims, most of whom feel that attributing human features or a specific location to Allah is akin to idolatry.

Ayooob was visibly unhappy with this conclusion and described how many Yihewani imams refuse to answer this question and actually accuse anyone who asks it of trying to spark argument and division or arrogantly trying to prove his or her scriptural knowledge. Ayooob said that some of these imams will say, "Why do you ask this question? Are you trying to start an argument?" If they persist, such an imam will say, "Can you pray like the prophet? Show me, right now." Ayooob and many imams feel that debating such ideas only provokes division and distracts from important practices like prayer and emulating the prophet. He repeatedly said that once controversial questions arise among Muslims, "Then, the Iblis [Satan] comes." Clearly, there is some tension between Ayooob's desire to achieve an individual understanding of Islam and Yihewani

orthodoxy that holds that some parts of the Qur'an cannot be understood. He later illustrated why many Muslims feel that knowing the correct answer to doctrinal debates is important, as he asked Mahmoud, "Is it okay to follow an imam in prayer if his ideas are haram [forbidden]?" Mahmoud laughed and said this is a big problem all across the Muslim world as well because it magnifies seemingly minor doctrinal issues. The Egyptian said that such doctrinal disputes should not divide Muslims, and anyone who believes in Allah, Muhammad, and the Qur'an is a Muslim. Few Muslims will dispute this basic formula, but Ayoob explained how the controversy of Allah's location continues to divide Chinese Muslims, even causing the Yihewani "hard sect" to reject Salafis and call them unbelievers. When asked about what struck him about Chinese Muslims, Mahmoud immediately said that sectarian conflict of the sort I have been discussing is much more intense in China than in Egypt.

The same day I discussed the location of Allah with Ayoob and Mahmoud, we went to Mahmoud's apartment and prayed evening prayer together. There, the two ran into further disagreements about how to lay out the prayer mats for three people, and then how to perform dhikr, and how to announce the *duai* (supplicatory prayer) at the end of obligatory prayer. Ayoob tended to defer to Mahmoud on most matters as Mahmoud had more formal Islamic education. However, Ayoob had learned to begin reciting each phrase of the dhikr (Al-hamdulillah, Subhan'allah, and Allahu akbar, repeated 33 times each) only after the imam recited each phrase aloud first. Ayoob also had learned to get up to leave the mosque after prayer only after the imam had done so. He stressed that this was intended to show respect, not to worship the imam (as there is a verse in the Qur'an

where Jews and Christians are said to worship their rabbis and priests because they obeyed them and not the word of God (Qur'an 9:31)). Mahmoud did not say that Ayoob's method was wrong, but he favored the more independent prayer style of the Salafis in which one does all of the non-congregational practices at one's own pace and leaves the mosque when one is finished. Unlike Mahmoud, Ayoob could not cite Hadith to justify his practices, but he said that we should ask Jin Biao Ahong for evidence supporting them because these were the practices he taught and he would not do so if scripture did not justify them. Mahmoud said this was a good idea, and suggested that we all might learn something from Jin Biao, but he seemed confident that what he had learned at home was right. Although he was a foreigner, Mahmoud's stance represents the Salafi method of staying open to new interpretations of authentic Islamic practice as long as the Qur'an and Hadith support them.

The Lonely Road to Authenticity

As reaffirmed Muslims, Ayoob and Habibi both share a sense of actively choosing Islam similar to that of converts to the faith. There are many fellow travelers on the road to authentic modern Islam, but each one walks long stretches alone. However, making a choice for Islam without immersing oneself in the new community of a revival movement seems to incur a certain amount of isolation. Ayoob expressed the solitary struggle to maintain one's devotion, saying, "It is very lonely. [pause] You have to give up so much." He explained that he had been lonesome while I was out of town during the Chinese New Year season and his other friends were not answering his calls or were out of town. He often said that Muslims should associate with each other as much as possible, because the

devil comes when one is alone. He feels that it is not enough for him to be “traditional” and pray five times a day like his parents. He also needs to feel a close relationship with God, but has no clear example of how to achieve this in the modern Chinese context, so he is constantly struggling to find his way. Islam is nothing if not work, a constant cultivation and purification of the self, but being stuck between the old-fashioned religiosity of his parents and a modernity he glimpsed through interactions with foreign Muslims only made Ayoob’s labors more difficult and lonely.

In spite of this sometimes solitary ethos, Ayoob and Habibi are not alone in their struggle; they live in constant interaction with a circle of like-minded friends of their age group. But all of them are inescapably surrounded by a Han world. I have described two young men among countless others faced with similar struggles. These two young men are remarkable for their outgoing personalities and above average intellectual abilities which place them in the vanguard of numerous young seekers who try to forge a path from tradition into modernity without forgetting where they came from or losing sight of where they want to go in the afterlife. The forces of modernity and requirements of life in modern China have driven these young people to reevaluate traditional perspectives and embrace what they perceive as a more authentic path. Others, described in later chapters, more radically transform their modes of practice and sectarian identities, sometimes breaking with friends and family, in pursuit of the same goal. Ayoob, Habibi, and numerous other Chinese Muslims feel that gaining perspective from the outside world is crucial to escaping the misguided ways of isolated, rural Chinese Muslims and the materialistic influence of the atheist Han. Even though Habibi and Ayoob have had much

interaction with foreigners, past experiences have made them wary of blindly adopting the practices of foreign Muslims without careful consideration and scriptural verification. Thus, Ayoob and Habibi illustrate how Islamic revival in China can empower individuals. They feel that they have improved upon the practices of their parents, but they do not lapse into blind rebellion, nor do they wholly subscribe to any established sect. Instead, they rely on their own intellect to engage with diverse viewpoints and independently interpret scripture in order to shape their own course toward a more authentic Islamic modernity.

Chapter 4 - Rectification of Names: Imams, Mosques, Sects, Boundaries

And We made from among them [Children of Israel], leaders [imams], who would guide by Our command when they were patient and believed in Our signs with certainty. (Qur'an 32:24)

Most ordinary Muslims are not concerned about theological issues and sectarian divisions, but these issues are a major concern for learned Muslims and religious professionals, both of whom are called “ahong.” These men explain sectarian differences to other Muslims who often have little understanding of these matters. Salafis devolve the responsibility for understanding such differences and as much theological knowledge as possible to each and every Muslim. Tablighis also implore each person to be self-sufficient in his or her faith, but participants in this movement also must act as imam in explaining the faith to others, and they ignore sectarian differences and complex theology, just focusing on basic, orthodox praxis, as epitomized by the sahaba (companions of Muhammad). Thus, the Islamic revival I am describing primarily takes place among lay Muslims, but the context they are transforming has been and still is shaped by imams of various sects. Even within individual sects, I encountered a tremendous variety of opinions on various issues, so I have chosen to present a somewhat representative sample of individuals rather than attempting to generalize too much. It is important to keep in mind that the stances of these religious professionals do not necessarily represent Chinese Islam as a whole, but it is *also* important to understand this more scholarly perspective before I continue describing lay Muslims in subsequent chapters. Imams and lay believers alike strive to find a role for Chinese Muslims as a

modern minority ethnicity in the post-socialist Chinese nation but also aspire to be full fledged members of the global Islamic ummah. The pronouncements of imams of different sects reveal different strategies of achieving this, but all of them unequivocally claim full membership in both communities.

This chapter will use interviews with Yihewani, Salafi, and a couple Gedimu and Sufi imams and descriptions of their mosques to explore different settings for Islamic education, theological perspectives, reflections on the state of Chinese Islam, and attitudes towards the Chinese Muslim and its non-Muslim constituents. Since the Tablighi Jama'at lacks imams exclusively dedicated to the movement and includes multiple sects, I will consider the Tablighi point of view separately later. First, I will explore the uses of the title *ahong* and the various roles those who bear this title play in the context of mosque communities. Then I will introduce the first imam I interviewed when I was a newcomer to Xining and a complete outsider to the Islamic community. This first interview was filled with the bland pronouncements of Islamic unity most Muslims make when talking with those outside the faith. An interview with Xining's most respected Yihewani *ahong* shows a more nuanced anti-sectarian attitude, refusing to condemn other sects, and also hewing to the state's official line by endorsing the utility and efficacy of the Hui ethnic category. Then, I will discuss three Salafi imams, all of whom studied at Medina University, and the mosque communities over which they preside. We will meet one imam who left Xining's Shu Lin Xiang Mosque for a simple village community. Then we will meet his well-respected replacement at Shu Lin Xiang, before traveling to Ningxia to meet an imam and schoolmaster who began life in the Yihewani movement,

experimented with the Tablighi Jama'at before coming to Salafiyya during his travels in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and returning to his home province to share his religious knowledge. In examining these men and their mosques, one catches a glimpse of how they form and maintain national and transnational networks, negotiate theological differences and concepts of ethnic identity, and attempt to mold young Muslims into worthy members of the global ummah and pious participants in the Chinese nation.

The Role of Ahong

Every mosque in Xining has one principle imam, or *ahong* (阿訇), who leads prayers and is in charge of educating between five and fifty mostly teenaged students called *manla* (满拉) (from the Arabic, *mullah*, a term used in the non-Chinese Muslim world to refer to clerics or imams rather than their students) (Gladney 1996:124). Both the imam, assistant imams in the case of larger mosques, and students usually live at the mosque (although the imam often keeps an apartment for his family elsewhere and stays with them occasionally); they lead prayer just before dawn, when it finally gets completely dark at night, and three times a day in between. When it is time for the prayer to begin, imam and students will file into the mosque together, dressed in identical long robes (Arabic: *thawb*, black in winter and white in summer). Salafis wear a keffiyah draped over their heads, and other sects wrap a turban wrapped around the crown of the head, leaving a few feet of cloth dangling down the back. Many regular congregants also leave a roll of fabric in the back of the mosque and wind it around their heads just before prayer. Every day except Friday and a week or two of vacation that falls around Islamic holidays, classes in Arabic language, Qur'an, and Hadith are scheduled between prayer

times. Those holding the position of ahong include village imams who recite heavily accented Arabic and understand little of its meaning while leading only a score of elderly men in Friday prayer; the imam of Dong Guan Mosque who is the grandson of the founder of the Yihewani movement and preaches to tens of thousands each week, many of whom cannot understand his thick Qinghai accent; and Jin Biao Ahong who holds a Ph.D. from al Azhar University, speaks fluent Arabic, travels to conferences all over China, and is vice president of the provincial chapter of the Chinese Islamic Association.

When I first arrived in Xining, I naively assumed that the ten to fifty young students studying at each mosque aspired to become imams themselves, but it seems most were interested primarily in appeasing their parents and acquiring language skill and connections that could lead to study and/or work overseas. Many parents send their sons to the mosque to study immediately after they finish six years of compulsory public education because they are fearful of their children becoming assimilated to the rampant immorality, materialist lifestyle, and atheist ideas they associate with the Han. During vacations from public school, most mosques offer classes in basic Arabic, theology, and Islamic practice for younger students, often including separate classes for girls as well. Chinese law still bans religious instruction for those under sixteen, but this rule is sporadically enforced outside Xinjiang and Tibet, and I regularly met manla who were only twelve or thirteen. During Spring Festival vacation, one can see dozens of elementary school-aged kids flooding into mosques every day. Most young Hui receive either a strong mosque-based education after completing (or abandoning) the compulsory six years of public education in Chinese, English, and secular subjects, or they complete

public high school and sometimes university, but only learn enough Arabic to perform prayers, if they study it at all. However, some college students study Arabic and become active in Muslim student associations while at university, and a few even study at a mosque after graduating from university or use a mosque-based education as a springboard to attend university abroad. The older generation often has little learning of either kind, and so both types of learning are highly valued cultural capital, and the rare scholar who is learned in both “Chinese and Arabic culture” (中国和阿拉伯文化) receives great respect.

The better acquainted I became with some religious students, the more they seemed like typical teenagers. I helped one student at Shu Lin Xiang named Ersal¹⁸ practice his English. He is sixteen and just dropped out of high school to study Islam. Whenever we walked through town, he was constantly pointing out different types of cars. He and his classmates are keenly interested in American music, with their favorites including Michael Jackson (most Hui admire him and are certain he was a Muslim) and Marilyn Manson (Ersal specified they just like his music, not his beliefs). One of Ersal’s Salafi friends transferred from a small Yihewani mosque in Xining to a large Salafi mosque in Linxia with a famed imam. I assumed that this move to “little Mecca” was intended to further his religious aspirations, but when I asked him about it, I learned that he disliked the Xining imam because he wanted all of his students to go on to lead mosques one day. The young man feels the imam in Linxia can help him perfect his

¹⁸ The name *Ersal* is a Sinicized version of the Arabic, *Aisa*, the figure Christians know as Jesus. This is an extremely popular Arabic name among Chinese Muslims, particularly those in their teens and twenties. I will transcribe the name differently depending on how it is pronounced, *Ersal* or *Isa*, to distinguish between different people of this name and capture the true linguistic fusion.

Arabic, which will allow him to study abroad and form the connections that will make him successful in business. He and the other students I met are mostly¹⁹ devout in their practice of Islam, but economic needs and material desires usually inspire them to aspire to secular careers. Mujahed, a young man who studied in the Arabian peninsula, told me it is his dream to become an imam, but after staying in Xining for only a few months after graduating, he left to seek work as a translator in Dubai in order to support a wife, young child, and aging parents. When I had the opportunity to freely converse with a group of students at an Islamic school in Ningxia Province (which was run by Aisa Ahong to be discussed later in this chapter), they also said they had similar economic motives for attending the school, but their motivation to understand and develop their religious faith has grown as they continue to study.

In China, dedicating oneself to full time study in a mosque for any length of time entitles one to be addressed with the title, ahong. Thus, the lead ahong at a mosque is distinguished with the title, “schoolmaster” (校长), and his assistant teachers are called “teaching imams” (开学阿訇). A small percentage of these people with Islamic knowledge actually work as imams or Islamic teachers, and most of these are paid so

¹⁹ Ersal and his friends skipped both evening prayers while playing pool at the hostel where I was living. Like most Muslims, Ersal had an alarm set to sound the call to prayer at prayer time. I asked a few times if he wanted to go to my room or a nearby mosque to pray, but he and his friends declined. It is acceptable to make up prayers later, they explained, and it is quite possible that they did so, but even they conceded that it is better to perform prayers at the specified time when possible. Of course, this was a small lapse, I could not imagine them committing major offenses like drinking alcohol or eating pork.

poorly²⁰ that they need to have other jobs as well. As someone studying Islam, people even addressed me as “ahong” once or twice in gross overestimation of my level of knowledge. And after I had memorized a few Qur’anic surahs in Arabic, acquaintances who knew the rudimentary nature of my Islamic studies sometimes would address me as “ahong” as a joking complement on my progress. I often observed grandfatherly men address teenage manla as “ahong,” which would elicit a sheepish grin from the latter. And when a theological question was posed to a group of friends, they often would turn to the one among them with the most Islamic learning and say, “You’re the ahong, what do you think?” Such a remark would be made partly in jest, but when praying in a small group, they would also turn to this same individual to lead the prayer, or “act as the ahong”²¹ (当阿訇). While the term often is used in facetious ways, it also is a term of respect used to address Islamic teachers, spiritual leaders of mosques, and learned Muslims regardless of their occupation. More educated Muslims sometimes would use the Arabic term “imam” to refer to such people, but they generally did not use it as a term of address.

Code-switching between Chinese or Sinicized Persian terms and Arabic ones is one way for educated Muslims, especially those involved in revival movements, to assert their educated status and connection to a form of Islam believed to be more pure. All Hui

²⁰ Professional ahongs told me that salaries in Xining ranged from an average of 500 up to 1000 RMB per month, but they said ahong in more rural areas often make about 300 RMB per month. One of the teaching ahong at Bei Guan Mosque (one of the oldest surviving mosques in downtown Xining) told me that he and most others declined a 500 RMB monthly salary because they taught out of service to the community and had other means of making a living. In 2013, the minimum wage in Xining rose from 900 to 1050 RMB per month. However, even without outside income, being appointed as an ahong usually includes simple room and board, frequent invitations to sumptuous meals provided by members of their congregations, and ahongs for sects besides Salafiyya and Yihewani include income from reciting Qur’an at private rituals.

²¹ When it was not clear who among a group performing prayer was the most learned in Islam, each person would belittle his own level of knowledge and defer to someone else until someone was politely shoved to the front of the room to lead prayer.

Muslims commonly use Persian-derived terms like *along* and names for each of the five daily prayers, words passed down from a time when most of China's Islamic scholarship was inherited from the Persian-speaking world. Educated Muslims tend to favor the more "authentic" Arabic terms over Sinicized Persian, but the latter still holds sway among rural populations, many of whom are unaware of the terms' Persian roots or their Arabic equivalents. All Chinese Muslims value Arabic as the language of Qur'an in which all Muslims pray, but they tend to use these Persian-derived terms as a matter of habit and convenience. Despite or because of this, reading and reciting Arabic is fundamental to Islamic education and the key factor in choosing someone to lead a congregation. Even those in Xining who abhor Shu Lin Xiang Mosque's Salafi affiliation, admire the ability of its Saudi-trained imam to recite Arabic in a manner everyone agrees is flawless and beautiful. Salafis frequently claim to consider imams' pronouncements and Islamic practices with more critical thinking than the Yihewani, who they claim blindly follow imams. Both groups entrust the leadership of their most prestigious mosques in Xining to foreign-trained imams. It is no surprise that all the prominent Salafi imams I met were trained in Saudi Arabia, while the most respected Xining Yihewani imam received his education at al-Azhar University in Egypt, and many other Yihewani imams have never left China.

The position of imam carries a good deal of respect and influence, but leading a mosque as a profession garners a very small salary and little actual power. Many imams live comfortably due to family wealth or side businesses, but mosques offer little material reward beyond connections with Muslim businessmen and free room and board.

However, the imam's wife and children generally live in separate apartments, sometimes in the imam's or their own family's hometown. Every three years, a mosque committee made up of elder, learned, and/or wealthy congregants (and allegedly controlled by the CCP in large and influential mosques) meets to select a new imam or chooses to retain the old one. Many Muslims express frustration that too many talented young Muslims use their Arabic skill to make business contacts abroad and profit at home without seizing the opportunity to improve the educational level of Chinese Muslims, which they perceived as sorely lacking.

Throughout my time in Xining, I was able to speak with schoolmaster imams of various sects, and some of them proved to be excellent resources, but they generally were less forthcoming than some educated Muslims who were not tasked with leadership positions. This is partly because the responsibilities of (often single-handedly) teaching up to several dozen students and running a mosque takes up most of their time. They also occupy politically sensitive positions, which candid conversation with foreigners can only complicate. In contrast, educated Muslims who were learned enough to be called along but without official office in any mosque—would talk to me about Islam for hours on end, teach me Arabic phrases, complain about the unscrupulous Han who dominated the country, and even condemn the party's policies regulating religion. Several imams frustrated my plan to become a student in their mosques, citing my nonnative language skills and lack of religious knowledge, but after being denied admission to informal language classes for adults as well, I learned that the CCP forbids foreigners to partake in Islamic education. Eventually, I managed to sit in on a class or two, which primarily

involved repeatedly shouting lines of Arabic from the Qur'an after listening to an along do the same, but regular attendance in even these rudimentary classes also could draw unwanted official scrutiny.

More than once, people told me that foreigners and Muslims were the two things the CCP feared the most. Thus, most Muslims were thrilled to meet me and learn of my project, but those in authority positions were wary of saying the wrong thing. However, after any informant had witnessed me recite some Qur'an or pray in a mosque, they ascertained that I was not a CIA spy or covert missionary, and they became remarkably willing to share their faith and experiences. Even though Gedimu is the most popular modality of Islam in China, and Sufism is very popular across northwestern China, these are both tiny minorities in Yihewani-dominated Xining. I had limited interaction with imams and believers from these types of Islam that have extensive internal diversity, so it would be impossible and distracting from my focus on revival movements to attempt to give a representative sample of their practices and theological perspectives here. However, these perspectives will be integrated into this and subsequent chapters. Below, I have recounted my conversations with one highly placed Yihewani imam who refused to teach me how to pray and eventually declined to continue our interviews, the most prestigious Yihewani imam in Xining who was used to talking with foreigners, and a few Salafi imams who had seen me pray in their mosques and were eager to share their knowledge and experiences with me.

Minyuan Ahong: The Uncrossable Borders of Traditional Chinese Islam

The first imam whom I interviewed was confused and a little hostile when faced with a non-Muslim seeking to learn more about his faith, a far cry from revivalists who were always eager to expound on the glories of Islam. I met him after chatting with some of the congregants at his mosques after prayer, and I asked a manla to show me to the imam's office. The imam sat at a desk piled high with books in Arabic and Chinese. There was Arabic calligraphy on the wall and a *kang* (炕, heated platform bed common in northern China) in the background that indicated that this space doubled as his bedroom as well. I told him I would like to study in his mosque, or at least occasionally observe his classes, and he looked at me quizzically and asked if I was a Muslim. I told him that I believe in everything, and this only made him more skeptical. I tried explaining to him that I was researching Islamic education and wanted to increase my understanding of Islam, and he asked, "If you aren't a Muslim, why do you want to understand more?" (你不是穆斯林, 为什么多了解?) He also asked if I was Jewish, which seemed odd at the time, but I would later realize that antisemitism and fear that Jews and Christians were infiltrating mosques was all too common among Xining's Muslims. When I told him that my parents were Catholic, he seemed to relax a little at being able to put me in an established category. He finally asked me to sit down in a chair next to his desk to talk.

As I explained my project, the imam, like many Chinese Muslims, reacted with shock and confusion when I told him that I had come to China to study Islam, and it seemed even stranger to him that a non-Muslim would be doing this sort of research. I told him that Chinese Muslims were the world's oldest Islamic minority and that I wanted

to better understand their lives in order to teach others. He asked if the U.S. did not have any Muslims for me to study, and I suggested that our two secular societies had much in common and that the long history of Muslims in China could inform understandings of America's fledgling Islamic community. He still repeatedly asked if I wanted to become a Muslim, and I tried to explain to him the detached and objective method of a social scientist. But in China, few people outside religious communities research religion and those who do, focus on texts and conduct interviews only with the foremost experts, so he still did not understand why I would want to learn from him. Nevertheless, he eventually asked what exactly I wanted him to help me understand. At this point, I had yet to shift my focus from Islamic education to revival movements, so told him I was just interested in the Hui methods and culture of Islamic education. This inspired him to give me a rundown on the basics of Islam, beginning with the creation story, then covering the Five Pillars, basic moral strictures including modest dress and moderation in consumption, and the two holidays. The information was all so basic it almost seemed insulting to my intelligence, but I would later realize that in China, non-Muslims lacked even the most basic knowledge of Islam and other religions, which despite the modern CCP's more tolerant stance, many Chinese still commonly call "feudal superstitions" (封建的迷信).

The imam never consented to let me attend classes, but he did give me an overview of his and his students' Islamic education. Before becoming an imam, he studied Islam for ten years, beginning in 1983 when he graduated from middle school, when most manla begin mosque-based education. He was rather fatalistic about his occupation, saying he became an ahong because that was what he had studied, not

because of a personal aspiration or higher calling. He confessed that he would have liked to learn English but never had the chance because it was not part of middle school curriculum at the time. He studied Islam for ten years, graduated from the mosque at the age of 25, and then taught at three other mosques around Xining. At this mosque that just finished being constructed in 2008, the imam supervised thirty students and one assistant teacher. He told me that class began one hour before the dawn prayer and various classes met until sundown with breaks only for prayer and meals. Subsequent interviews with students at other mosques indicated this schedule is fairly typical. Arabic is the first and foremost subject, and he claimed it is absolutely essential to understanding the Qur'an, but he also teaches classes on Hadith and theology. The mosque offers different levels of classes open to all Muslims, but none of these are truly entry-level because most Muslims learn the most basic practices from their parents, and the imam has little direct experience with converts. He reiterated that it is every Muslim's responsibility to study from cradle to grave, a refrain I heard often during my time in Xining.

This ahong always seemed rather standoffish and even surly when I came to visit, and he eventually told me that he had no time to instruct or converse with me if I was not going to convert. By the time I made my last visit to his mosque, I had been associating with many other Muslims, so I greeted him with "asalaam alaykum" as I had become accustomed to doing. He rebuked me, saying that I was not a Muslim so I should not say this to him. He then brusquely asked again if I were going to convert, and said that he had no time for me otherwise. I told him that I was unwilling to jump into the faith without studying it first and that I was willing to profess belief in Allah but not ready to reject

other faiths. He responded by emphasizing the impermanence of things and religions made by man in contrast to eternal and unchanging Islam. He also told me the Qur'anic story of Abraham smashing idols, with special emphasis on the errors of Buddhist idol worship. The imam told me that faith needs to start “in one’s heart” (心里), only then can one make the declaration of faith, and afterward, one begins learning how to perform prayer and other aspects of practice. When I recounted this exchange to members of revival movements later, they laughed at this imam’s old-fashioned thinking, saying that of course one needs to study Islam before becoming a Muslim. I was disappointed to be rejected as a student and acquaintance, but I also realized that the imam had inadvertently taught me much about the traditionally closed Chinese Muslim community and inherited nature of Islamic identity.

Jin Biao Ahong : Xining’s Foremost Yihewani Cleric

Jin Biao Ahong holds a Ph.D. from al-Azhar University in Egypt that makes him the best educated and most widely respected imam in Xining, and it is widely rumored that the committee of Dong Guan Mosque will select him to succeed their elderly ahong, meaning he will eventually lead the majority of Xining’s Muslims in prayer each Friday. He is also vice president of the Qinghai Province Chinese Islamic Association (青海省伊斯兰教协会), a branch of the national organization the party uses to supervise all mosques in China. He spoke clear standard Mandarin to me, but *Qinghaihua* 青海话 from the pulpit, a local dialect containing enough Tibetan and Mongolian influences to be nearly incomprehensible to outsiders, including myself and most Chinese from outside Qinghai. His accepting statements about controversial revival movements and the

patriotism of the Hui reflect the acute political awareness necessary for someone in his position. Moreover, he conceives of the Hui as essentially a product of state recognition, and asserts that this makes the Hui inextricably Chinese and gives them a role in shaping mainstream (Han) culture and Chinese identity, very similar to how Litzinger (2002) describes intellectuals of the Yao minority nationality resurrecting once-disparaged cultural traditions and asserting their place in the post-socialist nation.

Despite being very busy in his role as leader of Nan Guan Mosque, probably the second largest congregation in Xining, which was in the process of building a new mosque, Jin Biao was perfectly willing to converse with me. He supervises more than fifty students and several assistant teachers from all over China. Numerous people from various sects told me that talking with him would be beneficial for my research, but he frequently travels to visit other communities and attend Islamic studies conferences around China. (In fact, I first met him in Linxia, where he had traveled to attend one such event). Thus, I only managed to get one interview near the end of my time in Xining. I met him after morning prayer when he said he had thirty minutes to spare, but our talk ultimately went on for more than one hour. At first, he insisted on asking several questions about my religion, where I was taking classes, and where my ancestors were from, and he told me he had already heard the basics about my project. Once he had established all of the necessary contextual information, he relaxed into the familiar role of instructor.

Jin Biao emphasizes the typicality of the Hui among the world's Muslims and within the rest of the Chinese nation. When I asked about what problems and special

characteristics exist among Chinese Muslims, he turned the question around and asked about my impressions on this issue. I told him that countless Chinese Muslims had ruefully told me that Chinese Islam is chaotic and backward, but the Muslims I had met were very devout, and I could see from history that they had persevered through much hardship. Similar to the previous imam, he again emphasized the sameness of China's Muslims by saying, "Humanity has problems and cannot help but have problems" (人类有问题, 人类型不可能没有问题). He went on, saying that Chinese Muslims are a part of the world's Muslims and Qinghai Muslims are a smaller part thereof, and the problems they all face are just trials from Allah. Then, he cited the Qur'anic explanation for diversity, that Allah created variety so humans could learn from each other (49.13).

For Jin Biao, Hui ethnicity is a religiously defined category that is unique to China, which makes its persistence dependent on both Islam and membership in the Chinese nation. He acknowledged that I was correct in suggesting that the Hui, whom he defined as "Chinese-speaking Muslims" (讲汉语的穆斯林), have special characteristics that are not shared by the other Muslim minorities. He said that other ethnicities were first an ethnicity then a religion (and he cited previous religions of Uyghurs and Tibetans²² as examples), but Hui were a religious group first and then an ethnicity (in that they arrived in China as many different Muslim ethnicities before coalescing into a nominally unified group today). So, if the Hui were to give up their faith, they would no longer be an ethnicity. He said that this made the Hui "extraordinarily complicated" (非常复杂),

²² Before converting to Islam between the tenth and seventeenth centuries C.E., Uyghur people believed in Buddhism or Manichaeism. Likewise, the Tibetan people practiced their own brand of shamanism before the arrival of Buddhism in the eighth century C.E.

and capable of including many diverse ethnicities. He used my and his mixed ethnic backgrounds as an example, explaining that he is considered Hui but actually has some ethnic Tu (土族 or Monguor) ancestry. He considered the diverse ethnic stock to be merely the “body/meat” (肉) of the Hui, but the “faith is the soul of the ethnicity” (信仰是民族的灵魂), and like a person, the Hui could not exist without their soul.

The second characteristic Jin Biao mentioned, patriotism, or literally, “love of country” (爱国), not only occurred in many other discussions, it literally is written all over virtually every mosque in town as required by party policy. Jin Biao argued that this trait is intrinsic to the Hui because they speak Chinese, exist only in China, and are dispersed throughout China, so their very existence is inseparable from the Chinese nation. Jin Biao believes that the fact that they speak and look Chinese gives them the opportunity to study useful Chinese ideas through a native perspective. He said that this immersion in Chinese culture makes them susceptible to bad Han influences and creates danger of assimilation (literally, “Han-ification” (汉化)), but it also equips them to spread their belief to the Han, which Jin Biao described as their patriotic and moral responsibility as Chinese citizens and Muslims. Thus, Jin Biao and most others perceive their Chinese and Muslim identities and responsibilities as overlapping and noncontradictory.

As the leading along in Xining, Jin Biao answers sectarian questions like a savvy politician, neither condemning nor endorsing revival movements. This is not an unusual perspective, but he expresses it more eloquently than most. I asked his opinion on the Tablighi Jama’at movement, and he said, “We believe their perspective is inauthentic, but

cannot judge them.” (我们认为他们的观点不真确, 但是不会判决他们). He gestured toward an old man who was sitting silently and listening in on our conversation while he waited to get some Islamic literature from the ahong. Jin Biao introduced him as a friend of his who “does da’wah work” (做达瓦工作). He said that they were friends and he did not object to his work, but such “brothers require guidance and training. This problem can gradually be solved.” (兄弟们需要引导, 培训。这个问题可以慢慢解决). His primary objection to the Tablighi movement is that some advocate jama’at as the only method of practicing and spreading Islam, when there are, in fact, a variety of acceptable ways to promote and study the faith. Promoting jama’at as the one true way is “a type of extremism” (一种极端). He basically said the same about Salafiyya, saying, “Serious study is really not bad, so I oppose the judgmental perspective toward Salafiyya brothers” (认真的学习很不错的; 反对极端的看法对 Salafiyya 兄弟们). He advocated choosing the method that one believes is right, without arguing that others are incorrect. He characterized this as a matter of “absolute ability” (绝对能力) versus “relative ability” (相对能力). The belief that there is no god but Allah is absolute and undebatable, but the manner of understanding him is relative, and humans do not have the ability to make absolute pronouncements about it. He quoted one of the companions of Muhammad as saying, “I believe our perspective is correct, but it is possible that it is wrong; I believe your perspective is wrong, but it is possible that it is correct.” (我认为我们的观点是真确, 但是有可能是错的; 我认为你的观点是错的, 但是有可能是真确). For Jin Biao, the nonjudgmental approach was crucial to maintaining harmony and promoting humility, but this perspective also may have made his some enemies.

By the time of our conversation, several people had told me how Jin Biao had been shot in 2009 just three days after assuming his post as head of Nanguan Mosque. I was a little apprehensive about asking him about it, so I was glad he broached the subject when I mentioned Salafiyya. He said that the people who attacked him believed that he was not a Muslim (认为我不是穆斯林) because he doesn't condemn Salafiyya or those who pray with them. He said that such people "do not have a greater purpose" (没有刚大的目标) [than petty human conflicts]. Indeed, I met many Salafis who admired Jin Biao and said that he had many Salafi ideas, and posts in an online discussion forum for Muslims cited his translation of an article which included the Wahhabi idea of Allah being above heaven, which led people to accuse him of being a Wahhabi. However, others said the attack was only about power and not ideology. Many claim that certain wealthy Muslims were angry that a rival had not gotten the prestigious post. Others say that it was perpetrated by the Hui mafia, and the fact that the attackers actually had access to firearms would lend credence to this fact. Regardless of the attackers' motivation, Jin Biao refused to press charges and publicly forgave his attackers, a gesture which led to a flood of donations to help build Nan Guan's new Arab-style mosque. Jin Biao did not go into detail about this attack, he just used the perpetrators as counterexamples to his message of tolerance. Indeed, he said all Muslims are brothers and all humans are slightly more distant relations, so all of them should act like it.

In accordance with most progressive-thinking Muslims (but unlike the ahong, whom I just discussed), Jin Biao said that my presence was a sign of progress because I would not have been allowed inside the mosque a few years ago, and he denounced as

too concerned with superficial things those who criticized my appearance or presence. He derided Muslims who criticized my long hair, saying, “Trimming one’s head is not important, leaving one’s head is not important, bowing one’s head is important” (里头留头不重要磕头重要). Echoing something I had heard from numerous Salafis, he said that “appearances” (表面) are just “customs” (风俗习惯); inner faith is all that is really important. Like many others, he said that even though other religions are misguided, they are better than atheism and that interfaith dialogue is good for Islam’s development. Jin Biao maintains a blog, holds informal classes for college students, and can speak standard Mandarin perfectly, even though he preaches in the local Qinghaihua dialect from the pulpit. He starkly contrasts with Dong Guan Mosque’s current imam, who speaks exclusively in the local dialect, received his Islamic education in China, and holds his position largely because his grandfather founded the Yihewani movement. Jin Biao represents a revitalization within the Yihewani sect, so he has much in common with the Salafiyya imams and conflicts with more traditionalist “hard sect” Yihewani imams, but he still falls on the Yihewani side of crucial theological matters like the question of Allah’s location.

Ahmed Ahong: From Urban Strife to Village Life

Ahmed is the former head ahong of Shu Lin Xiang Mosque and is widely respected among Salafis. He gave me new perspective on this Salafi community that welcomed me and became my extended family in Xining. He was educated at Medina University; he was the eighth generation ahong in his family; and he was the grandson of the first man to preach Salafi ideas in China, Ma Debao, but in 2005 he still conflicted

with the mosque committee at Shu Lin Xiang over expansion plans until he was driven to resign his position and leave town. After he attempted to retreat to the world of business, Ahmed's former students and other admirers recruited him to teach at a quiet village mosque outside Xining, where I was able to stay with him and his students for a few days. He also maintains a house for his parents in his hometown of Linxia, and keeps his wife and two children in a Xining apartment. But even though he frequents Xining on the weekends, he no longer prays at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque. While he blames much of the inter-sectarian divisions on the way other sects obey imams instead of just the word of Allah, he also complains that controlling and quarrelsome personalities among mosque leadership also cause conflict within the Salafiyya movement.

Putting the best face on his withdrawal from the urban Shu Lin Xiang Mosque, Ahmed sees his village post as a refuge from the petty theological and material squabbles of the city. Despite his mosque's rural location, his students' graduation ceremony in 2013 drew over six hundred visitors including the head imams from Salafi mosques in nearby counties of Datong (大通), Hualong (化隆), and Minhe (民和) and others from as far as the city of Xi'an (西安), as well as Shanxi (山西), Henan (河南) and Yunnan (云南) Provinces. In spite of supporting Salafi critiques of other sects, he and other Salafi imams denounce the judgmental sectarian stance that has driven too many away from Salafiyya in the past. Ahmed even suggests that the Tablighi Jama'at movement has some advantages, even though he sees it as deeply flawed. However, in contrast to Jin Biao's view of Hui religious and ethnic identity being interdependent, Ahmed emphasizes the

need for people to understand the difference between ethnic Hui identity and their religious identity as Muslims in order to achieve a more authentic faith.

I met Ahmed for the first time when Mr. Ming, a man dedicated to da'wah work whom I had met at Shu Lin Xiang, drove me to Ahmed's rural mosque because he had heard that he was in need of an English teacher. Mr. Ming also was bringing a couple of Muslim converts to give a pep talk to Ahmed's students, as well. Ahmed was a diminutive man with such a casual attitude and easy smile that I did not immediately realize that he was the head of the mosque. But his role became obvious when he easily took on a commanding presence to address a room packed with about one hundred students and congregants. The simple village mosque had over thirty years of history, and congregants there told me that it and Shu Lin Xiang in Xining were the two first Salafi mosques to open in Qinghai Province after the post-Cultural Revolution reforms.²³ Numerous congregants at Shu Lin Xiang recommended I seek Ahmed's help for my project as he had a reputation as a knowledgeable imam and excellent teacher. The fact that he was looking for an English teacher illustrates his progressive nature as nearly every other mosque taught only Arabic and Islam. On my first visit, he said that it would draw too much attention to have me coming and going regularly to teach English at his mosque, but our paths crossed several times in Xining when congregants from Shu Lin Xiang would host dinner parties. Eventually, he invited me to come stay at his mosque for a couple days, which gave me opportunity to interview him at length, sit in on some of his classes, and even give his students an impromptu English class at his request. He

²³ Many mosques were closed and often repurposed for most or all of the time between 1958 and 1978.

obviously has lingering tensions with some people at Shu Lin Xiang, because he refused to attend prayers there, but I never heard anyone speak ill of him or explain the other side of the conflict that led to his departure.

Ahmed served as ahong at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque between 1999 and 2005. This mosque community dates to the early eighties, but it moved through several locations as it grew. When Ahmed was first appointed in 1999, its first large prayer hall that clearly resembled a mosque architecturally was just being completed. During my stay in Xining, this building was torn down to make way for a new one. Ahmed, at one point during his tenure, had over one hundred students. He wanted to expand the school to accommodate more manla, but the mosque committee told him that it would cost three million RMB, and no one had the means or will to raise the money. Ahmed said this was the basis of the conflict with mosque elders that led him to attempt to leave his post several times, but each time they would not agree to his departure. Finally, in 2005, he left a note for the mosque committee, sent his students on vacation, and went to Henan Province where he intended to pursue a career in business. Ahmed recalled that the faith of Henan Muslims was not very good, and the Hui there were mostly assimilated to Han life (汉化的), but he needed to escape from the stress of teaching and of mosque politics. Students and other Muslims clearly valued Ahmed's services because they were reluctant to let him leave Shu Lin Xiang, and former students and others affiliated with a small village mosque outside Xining relentlessly recruited him until he agreed to lead their congregation. He told me that at one point, fifty to sixty former students and acquaintances filled a couple buses and went to his house in Linxia, where they finally

persuaded him to resume teaching. He only agreed to serve for a year or two, but he had been there for four years in 2013.

Ahmed prefers the “peaceful” (安静) village mosque to the “fractious” (争权夺利) atmosphere in Xining, but he sometimes feels bored with rural life and frustrated with the old-fashioned and simple mentality of many people there. He wishes he could do more with the little country mosque, but the economic situation will not permit expansion and the space he has is already full of students. During my stay at the mosque, I slept in one of three beds in the back of a classroom, and this bed was vacant only because a student was temporarily staying with his family. In contrast, Ahmed claims that the other (Yihewani) mosques in the village have only two or three students each, who come from neighboring villages, while his mosque is packed with locals, both students and other villagers, at each prayer time. When we broke fast at the mosque, about one hundred children filled the courtyard to eat just before the evening prayer. He said the “religious atmosphere” (教门气氛) was good at the village; children as young as eight or nine would come to the mosque to pray on their own initiative²⁴ and they also began fasting during Ramadan at this age (before it is required by Islamic law)²⁵. While it was not uncommon to see such youngsters in urban mosques, I cannot recall seeing them come to the mosque unaccompanied. Ahmed admits that he sometimes gets bored in the village, but he frequently spends weekends with his family in Xining, and he says that he is

²⁴ Male and female children commonly attended mosque with their parents, sometimes participating in prayer and other times playing in the back behind the rows of praying men.

²⁵ Fasting is only required after the age of puberty, but many children will participate on some days, or a portion of the day in order to join their families in religious practice.

happy as long as he has students to keep him busy and can write Arabic calligraphy and carve Arabic rubber stamps in his spare time.

Ahmed's departure from Shu Lin Xiang coincided with part of the congregation splitting to form a separate Salafi congregation in a prayer room just two blocks away from Shu Lin Xiang, a conflict that is still so sensitive that few were willing to discuss it. Ahmed said that relations were so bad at first that the two groups would not speak to each other, but in 2013, many people would attend both mosques interchangeably, and some seemed genuinely unaware of any conflict or theological differences between them. Ahmed finally confirmed that the controversy was related to the position of Allah, the same issue that was one of the most contentious differences between Yihewani and Salafiyya. The verses dealing with creation say that Allah rises above heaven to his throne; some translations into Chinese say he is seated upon it, others say he is established above it. One Salafi informant explained that the Arabic verb used in these verses is translated "sit," when referring to humans or animals, but this is not appropriate with many other objects, including Allah. Ahmed, most people at Shu Lin Xiang, and most recent translators of the Qur'an feel that sitting is below Allah's dignity, but many others are attached to the Chinese translation of the Qur'an by Ma Jian (马坚) (1906-1978)²⁶, the one they had used from childhood, and these people ultimately split

²⁶ Ma Jian is one of the most renowned Chinese Muslim scholars of the modern era. While studying at Al-Azhar University between 1931 and 1939, he wrote about Islam in China, translated Confucius' *Analectics* into Arabic, and lectured on the state of Islam in China. In a 1934 speech, he staunchly defended Chinese Islamic beliefs and practices, and maintained that separation from the Islamic world had not degraded the practice of Islamic faith. But he bemoaned the general dearth of knowledge among China's Muslims and blamed it on a deficient educational system. Upon returning to China, Ma attempted to help rectify this situation by publishing an Arabic-Chinese dictionary and a new translation of the Qur'an which became the standard version used in China and is still the most popular today (Vacca 1936).

off from Shu Lin Xiang to form a smaller mosque. Differences over preferred translation of the Qur'an exist in every sect, but more Salafis prefer newer translations, and more Yihewani, Gedimu, and other traditionalists prefer the Ma Jian translation. Of course, Ahmed and most others say that the schism is really about conflicting personalities and power struggle, and this theological issue is only an excuse.

When I told Ahmed that I had been studying with the Tablighi Jama'at, he said cautiously that it is "okay to study with them" (学习跟他们可以), but that they focus too much on "superficial" things (表面) instead of "faith" (信仰). He specified that the "six great virtues" (六大美德) of the prophet's companions that the Tablighis emphasize are not the same as the universally recognized aspects of Islamic faith. Ahmed continued his critique by introducing the CCP name for Tablighi Jama'at, "Da'wah group" (达瓦教团), emphasizing that they are lesser than a sect and not recognized as such by the state. (It still amazes me that Muslims who criticize the CCP regularly cite as factual evidence pronouncements and categorizations the atheist state makes about Islam). He also emphasizes, "At the root, they have Sufi ideas" (根本有 Sufi 的思想). As an example of this, he recalls hearing of a Hui person from Henan Province who was involved in organized crime until interaction with a group of Tablighi Jama'at preachers led him to reject his crimes, stop drinking, and quit smoking. He also adopted the Tablighi practice of reciting dhikr to gain merit and began fanatically repeating Arabic phrases of praise and supplication until he withdrew into himself and went insane. Ahmed equates this with other Sufi sects whose members do not pray or fast, just perform ablution and meditate, which he calls a dangerous deviation. Of course, the Tablighi participants I met perform

prayer more than the five obligatory times each day, but doing too much and too little can both be construed as sinful innovation.

Ahmed acknowledges that the Tablighi Jama'at movement “has strong points” (有好处) such as tolerance and enthusiasm. Many Muslims in both Henan and Qinghai ostracize Ahmed for being a Salafi, but Tablighi Jama'at adherents have invited him to preach to their study groups in spite of this controversial sectarian identity. He realizes that Tablighi “enthusiasm” (热情) effectively reaches and motivates young people, but there is a danger that it only temporarily “moves” (机动) them and does not effectively deepen or spread their faith. Like Jin Biao Ahong and many others, Ahmed says that jama'atis need scholars to “show the way” (带路), and he also specifies that he does not wholly “reject” (排斥) the movement. He says that Allah requires faith (using the Arabic term, *iman*) and works (*amel*), but jama'atis only focus on the works without necessarily studying the full content of the faith. The latter is the root of the flower of Islam; no matter how much one waters a flower, it will not flourish without good roots. One must be “pious” (虔诚) and “follow the prophet’s road” (符合使者道路), but too many jama'atis just walk the road without understanding it. Indeed, Tablighis only study a small booklet of selected Hadith and surahs of the Qur'an that strongly support their method and theological perspective, so outsiders often argue that their knowledge and method of study are very limited.

Ahmed advocates a generalized attitude of tolerance, partially because he recognizes that a judgmental stance is detrimental not just to the spread of Salafiyya, but to the Muslim community in general. When asked whether a tiny minority of Salafis

could have an impact on the Chinese Muslim population, Ahmed compared them to gold nuggets amongst a desert of sand. He also quoted a slogan from the CCP saying that few are the people that completely grasp the truth from beginning to end. Since Islam started with only one believer, one should not underestimate the influence of what is now a small movement. However, Ahmed cited conflict between sects as perhaps the biggest obstacle to the spread of Islam, saying that this problem was especially pronounced among Muslims of China's northwest, literally saying, "Northwesterners²⁷ are not okay" (东北人不行). He traced this infighting to the fact that many Muslims were "not obeying Allah, but obeying people [imams]" (不服从真主, 就服从人). As a result, he compared the Islam one sees in China today to a river far from its source; it has split into tributaries and been polluted with garbage, urine and feces. Ahmed referred to an oft-cited Qur'anic passage in which Allah declares, "Today, I have perfected your religion for you," as justification that one must return to the Islam of that time (5.3). However, he feels that this purification can only be accomplished through education and persuasion, not judgment and condemnation. Salafi development has been stunted by Salafi imams in the past who were too judgmental (判断), and so Ahmed personally "has never attacked/slandered other people" (从来不攻击别的人). While Yihewani Muslims tend to warn people away from Salafi mosques, Ahmed actually urged me to attend Ramadan night prayer (Taraweeh) at various mosques, so I could judge for myself whether it seemed

²⁷ Even though Qinghai, Gansu, and Ningxia are geographically in the center of the Chinese nation, they are still considered the "Northwest" because this area is northwest of the historic political and economic centers of China.

more appropriate to do twenty-three cycles of prayer very quickly in the Yihewani fashion, or nine at the usual pace in the Salafi manner.

Ahmed expresses the need to separate one's inherited ethnic identity from a chosen religious identity that requires individual study and understanding. Ahmed takes the unusual tack of flatly stating, "Hui is not an ethnicity" (回不是民族), but just a catchall category created for convenience. Clearly, there are many Hui who are not Muslims and many Muslims who are not members of the Hui or any traditionally Muslim ethnicity. My research largely confirms his argument that young people realize this distinction, and primarily older and less educated people cling to the old practice of using the word Hui as a religious category and referring to Islam as *Hui jiao* (回教) or "teaching of the Hui." Ahmed emphasizes how Islam transcends all ethnicities, saying that Allah doesn't look at one's appearance or wealth, he only cares about what is inside one's heart and one's works. Ahmed echoes many other Muslims in stressing that one needs a fearful heart to prevent one from doing bad things, and that "regardless of one's faith, believers and nonbelievers are not the same" (不管什么信仰, 有信仰的人跟没有信仰的人不一样). Yet, simply claiming to believe is not enough.

Ahmed told me that once a divorcee with a young child came to him wanting to convert. He asked her why she wanted to convert and she "could not say" (说不上). So he told her, "This is not faith, it is interest" (这个不是信仰, 是兴趣), and he told her to go and study and come back when she understood what Islam was about and had good reason to convert. In a decision indicative of the Salafi emphasis on study and understanding, he was not willing to accept blind adherence. At this, I told him how the

aforementioned imam had demanded that I convert before consenting to teach me, and Ahmed laughed, saying this was the typical old-fashioned view that religion was a static part of one's identity, not something that could be learned.

While Jin Biao saw Hui ethnicity as an asset, a liminal category between Islamic and Chinese identity that had the potential to spread the former within the latter, Ahmed perceived it as a limitation, a firewall isolating Islamic belief from non-Muslim ethnicities and neutralizing it by placing it into the same category as other antiquated minority customs. The contrast between these viewpoints captures how Yihewani, and Gedimu and Sufis even more so, take pride in the tradition of Chinese Islam, while the Salafi tend to blame this non-Islamic atmosphere for gradually corrupting their faith, and seek to maintain the dualistic identity in a more compartmentalized fashion. Both ascribe different meanings to the ethnic category, but both also believe that Chinese Muslims are in need of education and revitalization.

Ma Ahong: New Shepherd of Xining's Salafiyya

Like Ahmed, Ma Ahong studied Qur'an in Linxia before going on to Medina University for advanced study. Their terms in Medina did not overlap, but when Ahmed is in Xining, he often meets his successor on social occasions. Ahmed even says that Ma Ahong tries to persuade him to come back to Shu Lin Xiang and pray at the mosque when he is in town, but Ahmed refuses. Ma Ahong's father is a constant presence at Shu Lin Xiang prayer times, and the ahong's wife and child live with him a short walk away from the mosque. Ma Ahong was one of four sons, and their father sent all of them to Arabic schools since they were little boys. One of them is still studying at Medina

University, and another brother has gone into business in Guangzhou. He came home during Ramadan and took the whole mosque out to dinner.²⁸ Ma Ahong and his brothers were born in Minhe (民和, a small city about two hours east of Xining on the Gansu border), and he had been educated at a Linxia Mosque before studying at Medina University. Economic circumstances required him to turn to business to make a living for a few years upon his return from Medina, but then he eventually came to Xining's Shu Lin Xiang Mosque in 2008. This reflects a common plight among Islamic scholars who study abroad; they are pulled between secular and religious careers and responsibilities, but material concerns are more often the victor. In 2013, the number of students he teaches varies between six and twelve, including several local teenagers and a couple Uyghurs from Xinjiang in their twenties.²⁹ He has a fiery speaking style that features mostly standard Mandarin, but sometimes lapses into Minhe dialect when he becomes impassioned. Congregants generally approve of his preaching, but consensus among Xining's Muslims is that his Arabic recitation in a deep, resonant voice is the best in Xining and sounds "just like an Arab."

In spite of widespread respect for the imam's skill and credentials, I observed the relative lack of power he holds (and the fractious atmosphere Ahmed despises) when Ma Ahong served as moderator of a debate about whether to relocate the mosque. The

²⁸ This sounds like an amazing act of generosity, but it is actually a somewhat regular occurrence, especially during Ramadan, for one family to treat the entire congregation, usually over one hundred people, to dinner at their house or a restaurant.

²⁹ Each Xining mosque seemed to have at least one or two students from Xinjiang where they were forbidden to study Islam in formal classes. One student at Shu Lin Xiang confirmed that local Public Security Bureau officers visit him when he goes home, and he tells them that he has been in Xining working. Likewise, he tries to avoid being seen when Xining authorities make occasional inspections at Shu Lin Xiang.

Yihewani Hui proprietor of a neighboring hotel wanted to build a new 30-story annex using land belonging to the mosque. The hotel owner, a self-made entrepreneur from Hualong Hui Autonomous County, had agreed to provide land for a new mosque about 500 meters north of the current mosque site, but the new site was not as big as the congregation had expected and many older members of the mosque wanted to refuse to move and rebuild on the current site. The situation became aggravated when the developer demolished buildings and began excavating on mosque-owned land before the deal had been finalized. I witnessed several shouting matches in the mosque courtyard, including one incident when a learned, elderly congregant shouted at the along with only inches separating their faces. He was accusing the imam, who was originally from out of town and had only been serving in Xining for five years, of moving the mosque out from under him and other local old-timers, and the imam could only answer by telling him that Allah can hear and see his aggressive behavior.

Three or four times over the course of several weeks, after obligatory noon prayers, Ma Ahong announced that there would be a meeting after everyone was finished with their individual sunnah prayers. Ma would begin each meeting with a brief prayer and then introduce the chairman of the mosque committee who would describe the current situation. Next, Ma would open the floor to others to state their positions. Many older men would say that the mosque belonged to Allah, was currently in a good location near a major intersection, and that it should not be moved. Others, including most of the congregants in their forties and younger, emphasized that the mosque had moved several times in its history and this move was a necessary step in its development. Between

speakers and when introducing these meetings, the ahong would emphasize the need for to “maintain unity” (团结). He urged that a decision should be reached by consensus and the sole Salafi mosque in Xining (the others who had split off were not legally recognized as a mosque) should not be divided.

In a speech before one of the post-prayer meetings, he adamantly opposed putting the issue to a vote as this could result in the losers feeling marginalized and leaving the mosque, but when the matter remained unresolved after a couple of weeks, he ultimately acquiesced. However, the day before the congregation was to vote, the city government posted a notice on the doors of the mosque enumerating policies and deliberations on the mosque dating back to 2004 and announcing the government’s final decision that the old mosque would be torn down in two months, and the hotel would pay a certain amount in compensation. Some grumbling persisted for a couple weeks, and most mosque members felt the hotel owner had exploited connections with the city government to win a decision in his favor. Some claimed that this would never have happened to an Yihewani mosque, but everyone was aware that neither mosque committee nor ahong could contest the government’s decision.

Ma Ahong repeatedly advocated unity among Muslims in his Friday sermons and at a graduation ceremony at Ahmed’s mosque. In private, he complained that Chinese Muslims are weak because they are “chaotic, lacking agreement in ideology and power” (乱, 没有同意的思想权威). He acknowledged that there are millions of Chinese Muslims, but he guessed that at most 20% of them pray twice a day, so of course only a tiny portion prays the obligatory five times daily. During a Friday sermon, he

mentioned how some very lax Hui had gotten caught up in heterodox sects like Falun Gong (法轮功), and he interrupted himself to explain, “Hui is an ethnicity, not necessarily [equivalent to] Muslim.” (回族是一个民族，不一定是穆斯林). In private, he agreed with my description of Chinese Muslim history as a series of attempted reform movements, and he lamented that China was the slowest of all nations to undergo “revival” (复兴). Ma largely blames this on the government, which he claims purposely keeps Muslims divided into sects and minority ethnicities, encouraging them to strive against each other. He used the example of how the party brings Uygurs to Beijing for anti-religious education, which turns them against their fellow Uygurs and other co-religionists. He admits that the situation for Muslims has improved since the post-Mao reforms, but he still complains that the present situation of constantly shifting and unevenly enforced policies is not much better because “We live but cannot relax” (我们活的不轻松). He refuses to speculate about the future, saying only Allah knows, but he is confident that the faith will persist as the Qur’an says Allah will not let it disappear completely.

Several Salafis who spoke with me compared the Islamic revival to the Protestant Reformation in that Salafiyya deemphasizes the role of the imam in favor of individual comprehension of the Qur’an and Hadith. Ma Ahong objected to this comparison saying, “We must not individually interpret” (不要自己独立判断) the meanings of Qur’an and Hadith. Instead, we should seek to interpret scripture in the manner of the sahaba (companions of the Prophet) because Islam has since been corrupted with Roman and European philosophical ideas. This is why imams still are greatly respected within

Salafiyya and their knowledge serves an important role in helping people rediscover the path of the sahaba. Ma Ahong asserts that secular knowledge is useless without knowledge of Allah, which is why today's science is wasted on all sorts of weapons and nothing really useful, because it lacks religious guidance. Like many Muslims, he maligned a Chinese education system and society that is centered around money, and complained that living in a culture that emphasized materialism and face was especially challenging for Chinese Muslims.

Ma Ahong usually avoids sectarian issues during his sermons, but he made a large exception to this unstated rule in featuring a series of sermons on the location of Allah and the differences between Yihewani and Salafiyya during Ramadan night prayers. In these speeches he even offered thinly veiled criticism of Jin Biao by referring to his alma mater, al Azhar, as a den of Sufi heretics. However, when he spoke at Ahmed's graduation ceremony, he stressed unity among Muslims and emphasized that Salafiyya is just a "method" (方式) and not a "sect" (教派) and urged the graduates to avoid arrogantly promoting their sect and criticizing others. After his lectures highlighting the Salafi interpretation of the location of Allah, I asked him if this was the biggest sectarian difference, and he just characterized it as one of many examples of how Chinese Muslims had gone astray because of limited access to authentic Islamic texts. He claimed that this misunderstanding about Allah's position arose due to attempts, inspired by Western philosophy, to reconcile Islamic theology with human reason, which could not fully grasp the divine truth. I then asked if he agreed with the Yihewani assertion that some parts of the Qur'an are too esoteric or incomprehensible to study, which is how the Yihewani

describe the verses placing Allah above heaven. Ma Ahong responded that the Qur'an "is not a bundle of secrets" (不是一团密); the only truly esoteric verses are the random, apparently meaningless Arabic syllables that sometimes begin surahs. Allah can be near and far because his nature cannot be understood, just like the Qur'an says that He speaks, but He does not use the same mechanism or speak in a voice similar to humans.

In spite of emphasizing the need for unity among China's Muslims, Ma Ahong is extremely suspicious of the Tablighi Jama'at movement. He characterizes the movement as Hanafi-based Gedimu or Yihewani practice mixed with some Sufi mysticism, which includes reciting many phrases and doing many extra prayers. He claims that many Tablighi leaders are actually members of Sufi orders and they will eventually steer Tablighis toward joining their sect. Ma believes that claiming not to speak of sects is only a pretense, and the more one participates, the more they gradually impose sectarian ideas and practices. Even if they did not have a hidden sectarian agenda, Ma Ahong believes that encouraging prayer and other practices among those who do not yet understand the faith or the reasons behind the practices is a major pedagogical flaw. Salafiyya teaches that one must first "know" (认识) Allah, Islam, and the Prophet, or else, "To whom are you praying? Where is the root?" (你在拜谁? 根在哪里?) Ma Ahong was circling around a stereotype of Tablighi Jama'at as appealing to less educated Chinese because it tends to stress superficial religious acts without requiring intensive study or deep understanding, perhaps in the hope that outward action would eventually produce inward piety. After some time, I finally stated this idea I had heard from other informants, and he was quite enthusiastic about this formulation that highlighted Tablighi Jama'at's contrast with the

Salafiyya approach of encouraging the cultivation of inward faith, with outward manifestations and practices flowing from it. He emphasized that the latter is the true way of the companions of the prophet.

Aisa Ahong: One Man's Journey

From Yihewani to Tablighi Jama'at to Undercover Salafiyya

In Ningxia Province, I discovered an Islamic school that starkly contrasts with the uncompromising sectarian divisions of Xining. The schoolmaster here was born into a strict Yihewani family, participated in the Tablighi Jama'at movement during its early days in China, then received a Salafi education at Medina University, and he kept true to Salafi scripturalist ideas in China, even while maintaining superficial Yihewani practices to maintain good relations with the congregation at his mosque. Teachers and students come to his school from all different sects and all over China, and this results in them praying together, but in slightly different styles, at each prayer. Some teachers or senior students raise their hands three times when leading prayer, and others do not. Gedimu, Yihewani, and Salafiyya sects are represented among the faculty, but as in most Islamic schools and mosques, the curriculum is focused on memorization, recitation, and basic comprehension of the Qur'an, which does not require discussion of sectarian ideas. One of the imams told me that the school was "national" (国家的) and so it transcended sectarian divisions. Perhaps it is more clearly described in English as "interdenominational." However, when I spoke with Aisa Ahong, the schoolmaster, privately, he had harsh words for both Tablighi Jama'at participants and Yihewani

stalwarts, who he saw as sharing a stubborn and usually unexamined devotion to a set of superficial practices without consideration for their deeper meanings or implications. Nevertheless, he cited examples of Muhammad's patience for unbelievers to justify restraint, toleration, and even participation in less than perfect practices in order to gradually purify Muslims' faith. This gradual exploration of Islam and hiding of one's true sectarian colors in order to preserve harmony is common among Chinese Salafis, and some even claimed that many Yihewani ahongs secretly hide their Salafi beliefs for fear of losing their positions.

Aisa Ahong's biography reflects the aspirations of many ambitious and devout Chinese Muslims. After studying under well-known Yihewani imams as a teen, at the age of twenty he became head imam at a major mosque in his hometown, a county-level city of one hundred thousand people, of which three out of four were Hui, one of the highest concentrations in the province. After completing a three year term, he attended an Islamic academy run by the Chinese Patriotic Islamic Association in the provincial capital and participated in a study group at the Central Institute of Socialism, the combination of which certified him as being in compliance with party religious policies, at least on paper. During the 1990s, Aisa became involved with the Tablighi Jama'at while he served two more three-year terms at two different mosques and went to study at a Salafi-influenced university in Pakistan. He followed three years in Pakistan by majoring in evangelism during four years at Medina University before returning to China and becoming assistant principal of the Islamic school in the Ningxia village where I met him. One year later, in 2005, he became the principal and lead ahong of the mosque. In spite of his formidable

credentials, the imam was so humble and soft-spoken that a stranger meeting him would probably never have guessed he was the head official of the school.

At this humble mosque outside a city of one hundred thousand Han and one hundred thousand Hui residents, Aisa oversees a staff of fourteen teachers and administrators, five of whom come from other provinces such as Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang. The mosque opened an Arabic school in 1945, closed it between 1959 and 1978, and then renovated and expanded the school in 2003. Except for one Salar imam from Qinghai, all of the teachers and most of the students are Hui. On my first visit there, my bedroom, which served as an office for two of the teachers in the daytime, was shared with one of five younger teachers in their twenties. My roommate taught Chinese language and history at this school while he finished up his final thesis for a bachelor's degree in history, a paper which argues against the historical materialist dogma that still dominates Chinese scholarship. He is one of two teachers who had received a secular education in addition to studying at mosques. The other teachers had studied at various mosques and Islamic academies, with most of the senior faculty studying abroad in Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, and Bangladesh. Of course, senior is a relative term, since Aisa is the eldest faculty member at 42 years of age. They teach about sixty students, whose ages range from twelve or thirteen years-old³⁰ to a couple students in their early twenties and one convert of twenty-seven years old. My roommate complained about the students' level of education, saying many of them did

³⁰ Chinese law bans religious education for children under sixteen, but it is enforced selectively outside Xinjiang.

not know the *Hanyu pinyin* (汉语拼音) system of Romanization and could not even speak standard Mandarin (普通话). In 2013, two new buildings under construction would soon more than double the school's capacity and provide separate facilities for female students.³¹

On my second visit to Aisa's mosque, I prayed behind the imam in my first experience performing Ramadan night prayer in the hours before the pre-dawn meal, instead of immediately following the night prayer as it is performed in most Chinese mosques. This prayer began at two a.m. and lasted until after the call to wake up and eat (around four a.m.), before the dawn prayer. Aisa's recitation was nowhere near the most beautiful I heard, but it may have been the most impassioned. He held each bow and prostration for a minute or more, moving so slowly that each movement seemed rife with meaning, silently supplicating in the predawn mosque. I began to sense the man's charisma and slowly began to understand the tremendous respect he commanded from those around him. When someone treated the teachers to a meal, he would quietly eat a small serving, say he was done, and then everyone would get up to leave. When preaching in the mosque, he would use a calm and conversational tone with none of the bombast or gesticulations many other imams favored. He did not offer much in the way of casual conversation, but when he spoke, everyone listened. I came to realize that this gentle charisma and diplomacy made him the only man to whom everyone in the congregation would speak.

³¹ I saw photographs of graduating classes of female students, and there was a separate area for women to pray in the basement of the mosque. However, the women's school was located offsite while the new buildings were under construction.

During my second visit to the mosque, most of the students were away with their families for Ramadan, so Aisa had ample time to talk with me at length. I explained to him that my research was about Chinese Islamic revival (中国伊斯兰教复兴化) and that I believed Salafiyya was an important aspect of this, and in response, his eyes grew large and he nodded approvingly. He told me of how he brought his family from the Yihewani sect into the Salafiyya movement, but his role as an ahong continually complicated this transition. Aisa comes from a long line of imams, and his family always tended toward strict observance of Islamic customs and refused to celebrate Han holidays like the lunar New Year. When he first started studying Qur'an at an Yihewani mosque, people told him he was a Salafi long before he ever identified as one. After completing his basic mosque education in the early 1990s, he began traveling with members of the Tablighi Jama'at. At that time, the political situation was much less tense than it is now, Jama'atis could freely stay in any mosque, and neither Chinese Muslims nor their government minders knew the difference between Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya. Aisa said that during these travels, the Salafiyya adherents he met tended to be the most "correct" or "orthodox" (正确), which informed his choice to study under Salafis in Pakistan and Medina. After returning to China, Aisa took over for the mosque's outgoing schoolmaster who was a closet Salafi who had introduced the congregation to the idea that some Hadith are actually fake. Aisa saw this introduction to the analytical study and verification of Hadith as the first of many small corrections he could gradually introduce to traditionalist Yihewani thinking.

Aisa continued quietly teaching some Salafi ideas while maintaining the mosque's traditional Yihewani prayer practices and legal registration.³² He said that the congregants accepted the Salafi methods like textual analysis of scripture relatively easily, but “new” methods of prayer were anathema. The schoolmaster claims that Chinese people in general, as well as their ruling party, place inordinate importance on such superficial practices, making them extremely resistant to change. He attributes this to the *nafs*, an Islamic notion of ego that the devout struggle to control. Aisa even started a study class for the old men of the mosque, but those who refuse to alter their prayer practice also refuse to participate in such study. Many such men are sons or grandsons of imams, and they refuse to consider the possibility that their forbears were wrong. Aisa can only shake his head at what he refers to as a form of “ancestor worship” (祖先崇拜). In contrast, Aisa was able to introduce Salafism to his family, which contained many learned Muslims who were able to change their ways. This prompted him to paraphrase a favorite verse among Chinese Muslims, saying, “Men with knowledge and those without are not the same,” (有知识的人和没有知识的人不一样) (Qur'an 39:9), and he added that “knowledgeable people are more receptive.” (有知识的人比较接受). This also indicates an ongoing division between those who have studied abroad and the traditional understanding of those who have only studied in China. As has been the case throughout the history of Chinese Islam, international travelers continue to import different ideas and practices.

³² In an effort to maintain harmony within the Islamic community, the Chinese government classifies all mosques by their sectarian affiliation.

Even though Aisa never raises his hands in the Salafi manner in his mosque (but he told me that he does so on visits to Xining), he does say, “ameen” (corresponding in meaning and origins to the English “amen”) aloud after the first surah of the Qur’an in the Salafi fashion, which contrasts with the way Yihewani whisper it or say it silently. He told me that the mosque adopted the practice of saying it aloud soon after he became schoolmaster. An unassuming middle-aged congregant returned from Mecca, and he inadvertently said, “ameen” aloud as he had grown accustomed to doing when praying behind Salafi imams in Mecca. He was such a soft-spoken man that he seldom spoke, even when treating the imams and students to dinner at his house during one of my visits. He must have been extremely embarrassed at this breach of protocol, but he explained to Aisa that the recitation was so good, it reminded him of being in Mecca. In private, he asked Aisa which practice was correct, and Aisa showed him that the majority of Hadith supported the Salafi practice. Afterwards, more people gradually began saying, “ameen” aloud, but others continued to resist. One of the senior students who often led prayer complained that the recalcitrant worshippers often gathered on one side of the mosque, creating a disorienting sensation when half of the mosque pronounced ameen aloud and the other was completely silent. Change was possible, but slow, and Salafism faced firm opposition.

Like Ahmed, Aisa does not believe that the CCP equates Salafism with terrorism or political Islam. When I explained that many in the West mistook Salafism for a political movement, he said that particularly in an Islamic nation, religion and politics are “inseparable” (分不开). Aisa asserts that shariah should be the law in an Islamic nation,

but it is not realistic in a non-Muslim state like China, so one must apply shariah to govern one's own actions. He claimed that government experts have studied Wahhabism and know that only a deviant minority advocates violence, but the party simply fears novelty, and it especially fears the potential of a new movement to upset the current balance of power among Islamic sects. He even told me that local government officials have privately told him that they are aware of his Salafi leanings, but they would prefer that the mosque retain its traditional classification. The government prefers religious matters to remain static to ensure that they do not interfere with its primary concern, economic development. Other Salafis had told me that the party blamed Salafi ideas for violent incidents in Xinjiang, but Aisa claims that they blame foreign terrorists in general, not a specific sect. However, the school (and all Islamic institutions in Ningxia) had not been allowed to teach Uygurs since 2006. But Aisa warned me that he could only speak with surety about Ningxia policies on religious education as local regulations and enforcement of national policies varied greatly, and the situation in Xinjiang is drastically different from elsewhere in China.

Like many Muslims, Aisa is intensely curious about the state of Islam in the U.S., and he shares a common Salafi conception that Salafism is increasingly popular in Europe and the United States. He excitedly asked me to confirm that the U.S. had numerous new Muslims and that the majority of them are Salafiyya. He claims that this is the trend among new Muslims internationally, largely because of the simplicity of the Salafi message. He also suggests that Salafism is more welcoming to new Muslims and other outsiders who do not understand the idiosyncratic traditions of different sects and

localities. Aisa attributes these differences to the fact that modern thinking is not the same as that in Muhammad's time, but returning to the ways of the first three generations holds an appealing simplicity in comparison to the complicated and contradictory traditions of latter-day imams. Bringing up one example, he claimed that one Sufi sect, the Jahariyya, believed that their founder can intercede with Allah and that prayers done without their distinctive hats would not be accepted. It is difficult to justify such heterodox ideas, so many new Muslims find it much easier to restrict their faith to a sole reliance on Islam's founding texts. He identifies a close connection between oneself and Allah as a characteristic of Salafism. Scholars still play a key role in settling differences among Muslims, but one has to understand faith for oneself, in the same way that one's sin or merit is between oneself and Allah without intercessors.

Rather than directly addressing contentious sectarian ideas, Aisa and his colleagues just focus on the Qur'an and Hadith. When I asked how he would answer students who asked him directly, "Where is Allah?" he said that he must tell them "above heaven" (天上). He explained, "Questions of faith, one must tell them. Superficial questions, can be slowly introduced." (信仰的问题必须告诉他们; 表面的问题慢慢介绍). He claims most students slowly come to understand things from the Salafi perspective, but he takes pride in the fact that he allows them to come to this realization on their own, rather than overtly indoctrinating them. There is really a fine line between Yihewani and Salafiyya, and many of the former's adherents have some of the latter's ideas. Aisa estimates that 90% of the ahong in Chinese Arabic schools have Salafi ideas, so the movement is growing rapidly. He said that the anti-Salafiyya "hard sect" exists all

over the northwest, but it is the strongest in Xining, so one living in Xining cannot tell that acceptance of Salafism is actually growing in China as a whole. When Chinese Muslims go on hajj, many attend Saudi-sponsored classes on Salafi orthodoxy which attempt to correct misconceptions about the movement, which he said is one reason the Chinese government controls who and how many Muslims are able to make the pilgrimage. Only those between 35 and 65 may register for a lottery to receive visas to make the hajj, and since the party limits the number of visas allowed for each province, it is especially difficult for those living in a province with a high Muslim population to perform the pilgrimage. Nevertheless, some well connected Muslims manage to complete two, three, or even four pilgrimages.

In private, Aisa readily shared his experience with the Tablighi Jama'at, but he told me that few are aware of his participation in the movement because it could cause trouble among both his congregants and the local government. He is uncompromising in his condemnation of the movement, equating their practices to worship of the movement's founder. He outlined how a dream inspired Ilyas to found the movement and said this sounded too much like prophecy. He was favorably impressed by the movement when he first came to know it in China during the 1990s, but during his time in Pakistan, he saw more unorthodoxy in the movement, such as members funding their jama'ats by begging and practicing the sort of extreme asceticism the prophet opposed. I asked him if there were some good aspects of the movement, citing how other Chinese Muslims found it to be tolerant of all sects, inspirational to lax Muslims, and full of passionate devotion to Allah and evangelism. Aisa said that in spite of their professed tolerance, jama'atis

believe in their hearts that no method but their own is adequate, and even if they inspire some people, they are inspiring them toward heterodoxy. I related how a Salafi friend of mine credits jama'atis coming to his door with rescuing him from a very lax Muslim life, full of much drinking and little prayer. In response Aisa said that leading someone from one wrong road to another was not progress. Drinking alcohol was a small sin and could be forgiven, but worshipping other gods beside Allah was the worst and only unforgivable sin, and this was what the Tablighis were effectively doing. He claimed that Ilyas made law that was not in the Qur'an, so following him was equivalent to worshipping him, just as the Qur'an accuses Christians and Jews of worshipping priests and rabbis (Qur'an 9:31).

After becoming disillusioned with the TJ movement, Aisa decided that continuing to spread the faith while teaching people to discern orthodox Islam from sinful innovation was his new jama'at, and to this end, he studied proselytization at Medina University. When I asked how one evangelizes by the Salafi method, he naturally denied sectarian particularism and said that there is no innovative method, one just emulates how the Prophet and sahaba dealt with unbelievers in their time. Basically, he described numerous instances where they patiently bore inequity, imperfection, or sinfulness for the sake of eventually winning long-term advantage and masses of converts. He cited the example of how Muhammad agreed to not enter Mecca for a year and to cross out "prophet of Allah" after his name so unbelievers would accept a peace treaty (Bukhari 3.49.86; Sahih Muslim 19.4404). A year later, Muhammad liberated the city and won a flood of conversions. In another instance, the prophet said he would like to rebuild the ka'ba on its

original foundation but refrained because he knew that since people had just recently converted to Islam, they would not be able to accept this change (Bukhari 1583). He even let a Bedouin finish urinating in his mosque before gently telling him not to, rather than having him beaten or killed as some of his followers suggested (Bukhari 8.73.54). Aisa also cited a Hadith that records the prophet's servant saying that in the ten years he served Muhammad, he never said to him, "Uff" (an expression of disgust) or asked, "Why did you do this?" or "Why did you not do this?" (Bukhari 1:622) In summation, Aisa said it is much better to patiently tolerate and teach than to judge or condemn. So for Aisa, not raising his hands during prayer or publicly embracing Salafiyya are applications of this sort of Qur'anic patience. As he told me, "As soon as I lift my hands, they think I am not the same and will not talk to me. If I do not raise my hands, I can slowly slowly slowly make them understand." (我一抬手，他们认为我不一样，不要跟我说。我不抬，我可以慢慢慢慢教让他们了解). Through denying difference and bodily conforming to superficial traditions, Aisa is able to spread a more authentic and universal Islam on a deeper level.

In this chapter thus far, I have been describing influential, professional imams who play a major role in shaping networks of students and educators and the discourse among them. It is important not to lose sight of the everyday influence of the majority of religious scholars who never deliver a Friday sermon or go to Islamic studies conferences. Chinese Muslims know who among their number is an among and routinely request their judgement on matters big and small. In some communities or in some sects, the imam's credentials alone might be enough to support such a scholarly opinion, but

Salafis require scriptural evidence to prove the veracity of an imam's words and to help them learn to independently determine the right course next time. I would like to close this chapter with the tale of one such consultation, when a 63 year-old informant brought me before an *ahong* to get a judgement on whether my long hair was appropriate for a Muslim.

The Role of a Salafi Lay Imam: A Consultation on Islamic Law

Few residents of Western China have seen an American Muslim before, so seeing a white man in the mosque is unusual, but my long, blond dreadlocks bordered on being an abomination. Some said it was inappropriate because “men cannot look like women” (男不能象女的) others said it was “unclean” (不干净). On my first visit to Dong Guan Mosque, I met a *manla* who complimented me on my hair and then told me that as a Muslim, he could not grow his hair past the shoulders. When I began praying in the mosque, this critique grew even more common. Even though most said it was too long, they could not cite specific scriptural evidence, and others would disagree and say that Muhammad, Jesus, and other prophets had long hair. Some said that cutting hair short is required by Islam, but others said this is just a Chinese custom. Eventually, a friend of mine in the former camp, named Musa, brought me to see an *ahong* he knew and respected to get his opinion on the matter. He chose not to trouble the main *ahong* in charge of the mosque, but he had to buy some cooking oil from a man who was trained as an *ahong*, so he decided that we should get his opinion on the matter while we were there.

When Musa and I arrived at the shop across the street from the Salafi mosque, the man's wife was minding the shop while her husband napped in the back. He quickly

awoke, invited us inside the back room to sit down, and stood up to hear our query. First Musa stated that my hair had surpassed the longest length of Muhammad's hair (which he claimed was shoulder-length³³) and that when people saw it, they did not believe I was Muslim. The ahong looked unsure, so I spoke up and said I had read the Qur'an, but not in Arabic, and some Hadith, but surely not as many as the ahong, and I had not seen a specific rule about cutting one's hair. I also mentioned that another informant who studied in Kuwait told me that many Arab Muslims had long hair. Then Musa said that some mosques would not admit me with long hair (his interpretation of why the Yihewani never offered to teach me to pray), and all Chinese Muslims have short hair. To this, I responded that I had heard varying opinions on the issue from different people, but it seemed to me that short hair was really just a "cultural custom" (风俗习惯). I used this term knowing that Salafis crusade against cultural accretions in Islam and mock other sects that mistake mere customs for religious commandments. The imam thought for a few long seconds and then cited one Hadith in which Muhammad told a dirty and disheveled man to wash his long hair, but he never told anyone to get a haircut. So the imam reasoned that as long as it was clean and neat, my hair was acceptable. I was quietly thrilled, and Musa never suggested that I cut my hair again.

Not only does this episode illustrate the influence of learned Muslims in interpreting scripture and Islamic law for the community, it also made me realize how much I had internalized the Salafi discourse. Reflecting on how I made my case, I

³³ When I recounted this story to Ahmed, he refuted this commonly cited assertion by showing me a Hadith that said Muhammad wore his hair in braids that hung down his back when he conquered Mecca.

realized that in addition to utilizing the devalued category of “custom,” I successfully deployed the two key sources of authenticity for Chinese Salafis: scripture from the Qur’an and Hadith and the practices of Muslims in the Middle East. The ahong’s ruling carried weight only because it was backed by references to scripture, and even if he disliked my long hair (which was likely the case), he could not insist that I cut it without scriptural backing. Even though Musa knew and trusted this imam, it was understood that whatever pronouncement he made must be justified in the Qur’an or Hadith. Months later, when the subject of my hair came up during an interview with Jin Biao Ahong, he agreed that the length of one’s hair does not matter, but he did not explicitly reference Qur’an or Hadith, instead he recited his own catchy turn of phrase, which I will repeat because it also underlines the revivalist commitment to putting submission to Allah above habitual appearances of religiosity: “trimming one’s head is not important, leaving one’s head is not important, bowing one’s head is important” (里头留头不重要磕头重要). All Muslims agree on the necessity of prostrating before Allah, but there is much debate over whether other superficial practices are means toward cultivating inward religiosity and a visible Muslim community or if they are simply side-effects visible in pious and learned Muslims. Nowhere is the debate over inward study versus superficial practices more pertinent than in the study of Tablighi Jama’at.

Chapter 5 - Performing the Path of the Sahaba: Walking with the Tablighi Jamaat

And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger saying: Serve Allah and shun the Shaitan. So there were some whom Allah guided and there were others among whom error took hold; therefore travel in the land, and see what was the end of the rejecters. (Qur'an 16:36)

And when a community among them said: "Why do you preach to a people whom Allah is about to destroy or to punish with a severe torment?" (The preachers) said: 'In order to be free from guilt before your Lord (Allah), and perhaps they may fear Allah.'" (Qur'an 7:164)

I met the head organizer of Tablighi Jama'at in Xining outside of Yu Dai Qiao Mosque, a large and newly built Arab-style mosque just over one block from Dong Guan Great Mosque in downtown Xining. I was there to meet Ayoob, the Salar English teacher introduced previously, who was helping me translate some sermons I had recorded. Ayoob emerged from the gates of the mosque amidst a throng of worshipers chatting with a thin man in his forties who wore a narrow little beard, white turban wound around a green hat, white, Arab-style man's robe (Arabic: *thawb*) under a Western-style sports coat, and brown leather socks under beige Crocs. Ayoob introduced the thin man by his Arabic name, Yacub, and said that he was the head of a da'wah organization, a term that could include everything from evangelization to education and social services for Muslims. Yacub was visibly happy to meet an American interested in Islam and spoke to me in good, but slow, English. He invited Ayoob and me to come with him to his house, saying he just had to visit a couple Muslims first. Yacub led us down an alley near the mosque and together we wandered in and out of buildings, knocking on a couple wrong doors before finding the right apartment. Once Yacub found the first two apartments for

which he was looking, the person he wanted to visit was not home. After several failed attempts and many wrong turns, Yacub remained patient and cheerful, and we eventually found one of the Muslims for whom he was looking.

The man did not seem to be expecting Yacub and certainly was not expecting me or Ayoob, but he invited us in for a cup of tea as local norms of hospitality required. Our host invited us to sit on his living room couch, and Yacub began expounding on religion, saying that it was vital to share our faith because if we do not, our sons will lose it (he specifically said, “sons³⁴”). He gave the example of Adan and Hawa (Adam and Eve) being Muslims, but their descendants went astray, so we needed to avoid becoming like those who died in the time of Noah. Later, he told me in English, “Shaytan also does da’wah. If you do not do the da’wah, then Shaytan will do the da’wah to you.” He actually faced me for much of the time we were in this man’s house, possibly to observe if I understood what he was saying in Mandarin. He asked our host his Arabic name and where he was from. After staying for only five to ten minutes, he discovered that our host had not yet performed Asr (afternoon prayer), so Yacub ushered Ayoob and I to the door and told our host that we were leaving so he could pray without feeling obligated to entertain guests.

As we left the building, Yacub quoted a Hadith saying that if you visit one Muslim in the morning 70,000 angels congratulate you until dusk, and if you visit one

³⁴ The Tablighi Jama’at movement includes a separate type of jama’at for women, but since the movement practices strict separation between genders, I did not have a chance to witness it or speak to participants. However, male Tablighis often spoke about Muslim men’s responsibility to take everything they learned home and lead their wives, sons, and daughters in study of the Qur’an. I often use male pronouns as participants of the movement did, but the reader should keep in mind that a female counterpart to this movement also exists.

Muslim in the afternoon, 70,000 angels will congratulate you all night (Tirmidhi 7.899³⁵). He also cited Muhammad saying to Abu Bakr when there were only three Muslims total, “Your job is my job,” which motivated the latter to go out into the world and find nine new converts over a couple of days. Then these converts recruited more Muslims, and so on³⁶ until the modern day Tablighi Jama’at movement began to continue this tradition. After one more attempted visit, we proceeded to Yacub’s apartment located in a modest apartment building behind the hotel he owned. As we walked, Yacub constantly quoted scripture and stopped to speak to numerous Muslims on the street, urging them to join him to study in his hotel prayer room after dawn prayer. Most people seemed to greet him fondly and smile and nod at this last part, but others seemed vaguely discomfited. I noticed that he asked each Muslim he met his Arabic name and his hometown. He also spoke only to men, and to virtually every Muslim man who would listen.

When we reached Yacub’s house, we sat on a carpet on the living room floor, on which he spread a plastic mat that served as a table. The room was bare except for a bookshelf filled with Arabic titles, a coat rack, a lamp, and a low table suitable for use when sitting on the floor. Qur’anic verses written in Arabic and a large map of China were the only decorations on the wall. After witnessing his door-to-door visits, one glance at this austerity immediately made me realize for the first time that the da’wah movement of which Ayoob spoke was the Tablighi Jama’at, and Ayoob confirmed this after we left.

³⁵ The actual Hadith specifies the reward is for visiting a sick Muslim, but Yacub did not specify this. To his credit, Yacub was speaking in English, a language he said he had not practiced in some time.

³⁶ I am unable to locate this Hadith. This does not mean that it does not exist, but it is possible that something was lost or paraphrased in Yacub’s translation

Yacub introduced the youngest of his five children who was one year and one month old, and Yacub joked that the one child policy does not apply to him. Apparently his wife was in the kitchen, but her presence was only evident due to an occasional knocking sound, after which Yacub would disappear and return with food. Yacub said the prophet preferred to eat in the same manner as we were eating, in a circle on the floor where everyone was equal, and no one could tell who was rich or poor. He also ate with his hands, “Arab-style,” even though chopsticks sat in front of him. He mentioned that this was the manner in which the sahaba ate, but he did not encourage us to forego chopsticks. In spite of constantly quoting scripture, he came across as constantly smiling and friendly. Later, Ayoob expressed admiration for Yacub’s remarkable state of contentment as well as his worldly wealth, which he did not display and which seemed incidental to his happiness. Ayoob told me that he had found Yacub’s overt religiosity tiresome at first, but he also claimed that Yacub had made him realize that daily prayer and supplications actually could bring worldly rewards.

Like many involved in the Tablighi Jama’at, Yacub is eager to talk religion, but reticent to talk about himself. He shrugs off questions about material concerns with a blasé smile and a simple statement that he has been blessed. Most of Xining’s Muslims know him as the ethnic Salar owner of a hotel in the center of Xining’s Muslim district. He studied to be a translator in Pakistan, became a successful businessman, and then became deeply involved in the Tablighi Jama’at eight years ago after being invited to a Tablighi study session and then embarking on his first jama’at. Now, Yacub organizes Tablighi Jama’at activities in a prayer room on the third floor of his hotel, and foreign

jama'atis³⁷ stay in one of several rooms devoid of furniture in the apartment building behind the hotel. Many times, he invited me to dine with jama'atis on the floor of one of these apartments, eating simple meals they prepared for themselves. Other times, local supporters of the movement would treat Yacub, jama'atis, and other local participants to substantially more sumptuous fare³⁸, but everyone would still eat while seated in a circle on the floor.³⁹

Despite being the leader of the movement in Xining, Yacub prefers to delegate authority and play the role of an organizer. People in his position are usually called *amir*, but I never heard anyone address Yacub by this title, possibly because of a combination of modesty, awareness of the movement's political sensitivity, and desire to maintain the appearance of an informal and grassroots structure. I will refer to several other Muslims, most of whom always wore Islamic dress, and who frequently led prayer and study sessions as organizers of the movement, as they all behaved as facilitators with no clearly defined organizational structure other than the fact that Yacub was clearly in charge.⁴⁰

³⁷ I use *jama'ati* as participants in the movement did, to refer to anyone traveling and carrying out Tablighi Jama'at-style da'wah work. The term *jama'at* literally means "assembly" in Arabic and usually refers to a group of people praying together or the congregation of a mosque. In the context of the movement, it refers to either the group of people traveling and preaching together or their trip itself, as in "go on a jama'at."

³⁸ This is not to say that locals treated them to expensive, gourmet cuisine, but the difference was substantial. Jama'atis would generally make one dish, noodles, and maybe some bread. Others would treat jama'atis to a meal consisting of several different dishes, fruit, noodles, and fried breads. The contrast is striking, but the latter spread is minimal according to local standards of hospitality.

³⁹ These dinners included only male participants who had left their wives and families at home. When a local family hosted jama'atis, the women of the household worked in the kitchen and men and boys served the food. There are separate jama'ats for women, but the movement keeps genders separated, so I never had access to them.

⁴⁰ Local, national, and international organizations are governed in the same manner as individual jama'ats. A single amir makes all final decisions, but he must first consult with all members of the jama'at or elders representing them in a process called *mashwara* (consultation or council). However, a three-person council has been serving as amir for the global organization since 1996, perhaps due to criticism of the hereditary transmission of leadership from the founder to his sons (Masud 28-29).

Past participation in at least one four-month jama'at is the only relevant qualification that such organizers possess. Yacub often recites the call to prayer into a microphone in the prayer room to broadcast it throughout the hotel, a job usually reserved for manla at mosques. Just before prayer begins, he often announces (without the microphone) that there will be a study session after prayer, but he rarely leads prayer⁴¹ himself and seems to prefer letting someone else run study sessions. Yacub often speaks in the study circle, offering a few introductory words or reading Hadith after the final prayer, but he usually has someone else facilitate the study session and deliver the sermon, while he quietly facilitates.

Even though most people addressed Yacub with the honorific term, *ahong*, I learned that he had not been trained as such when the two of us went to visit Muslims together. On this day, only Yacub and two other men who regularly lead study sessions remained after prayer, because all of the jama'atis who had been staying in town had gone “down to the villages” (下乡), so instead of the usual group study and proselytizing known as “ordinary visits” (普访, Urdu: *gasht*, or “patrol”), they decided that we should do “specialized visits” (专访, Urdu: *khusisi gasht*) in two groups because three is the largest group the movement recommends for such a mission. As Yacub and I walked out of an apartment complex at the same time as a Han man, Yacub asked about his faith and learned that he was atheist, like most Chinese. So Yacub began to introduce a common argument for the existence of God (a car must have a driver, a plane must have a pilot, all

⁴¹ It is permissible for anyone to lead prayer, but the responsibility generally falls on the person present who knows the Qur'an best in the view of those present.

things have a master and a maker...). The man cut him off and asked if he was an ahong. Yacub said he wasn't, but was only an Arabic student and Muslim. It seemed odd that Yacub did not claim the title, inasmuch as even the teenage boys studying in mosques are sometimes addressed as "ahong." But the distinction between lay and clergy clearly meant more to the Han man than it did to Yacub. The man acted as if Yacub's lay status validated his decision to say goodbye and briskly walk away as Yacub abandoned his spiel to invite the man to come study with us when he had the time.

A Tale of Two Movements: Tablighi Jama'at Versus Salafiyya

In China, the Tablighi Jama'at movement lacks exclusively dedicated mosques, ahongs, and educational institutions, but one could argue that its distinctive system of ritualized behavior constitutes a more distinctive and identifiable way of life than some more clearly defined and institutionalized sects. The Tablighi Jama'at movement removes Muslims from their secular environment and materialistic habitus in order to help them create a new Islamic habitus that will effect a transformation of their daily lives when they return from jama'at. While Bourdieu generally uses the term *habitus* to denote an inherited set of behaviors and predispositions, I have found the older Aristotelian notion of habitus more appropriate to Tablighi Jama'at as it represents a purposeful embodiment of virtuous behaviors in hopes that they will become internalized as part of conscious self-cultivation over the power-centric work of Foucault and Bourdieu. This is not to say that there is no power involved, but Chinese Muslims use Tablighi methodology to agentively define themselves as pious individuals in opposition to the secular lifestyle local structures of power encourage.

In her study of the (non-Tablighi) Da'wah movement in Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2007:136-39) uses this Aristotelian notion to describe how her informants internalize virtue through assiduous adoption of virtuous practices of personal comportment, study, and proselytization. Her Egyptian interlocutors refer to al-Ghazali's methods that were directly inspired by Aristotle, and even though Tablighis make no such direct connection, their texts and the carefully scheduled activities of jama'at also self-consciously shape a habitus that helps them to form more virtuous subjectivities. As Mahmood argues, Bourdieu's formulation consists of a habitus that is unconsciously inherited according to one's socioeconomic position, whereas the Tablighis, like Mahmood's informants, intentionally cultivate a virtuous mode of being in hopes that the desired behavior will eventually become effortless, a process more consistent with Aristotle's notion. Indeed, my informants repeatedly criticized those who merely perform Islamic duties out of habit rather than consciously reflecting on the reasons behind their practices and seeking to perfect them.

In the fundamental practice of Tablighi Jama'at, throughout the world, groups of four to ten participants embark on a tour of study and proselytization called a jama'at, during which they live communally and collectively schedule every minute of their time with ritualized religious study, practice, and preaching. The shortest jama'ats of three-days travel to villages, towns, or cities just two or three hours away. Jama'ats of forty days or four months travel all over China, spending a few days in each place, and they can even travel internationally if all jama'atis have the necessary documents and funds. When the jama'at begins, participants decide how much money they will spend, and they

each contribute an equal amount to a communal pool of funds. Regardless of their level of knowledge, those traveling in a jama'at adopt the role of religious professionals in proselytizing to everyone they meet. Organized religious activities conducted by untrained personnel and outside of state-recognized institutions are both in violation of party religious policy. However, such regulations are rarely enforced outside Xinjiang, as long as jama'atis keep a low profile. I encountered several jama'ats from Xinjiang in Xining, and they told me that da'wah work was very dangerous there, and many people had been imprisoned for it. There are online accounts of local governments outside Xinjiang sending Tablighis back to their home provinces (Taojiang County Government 2012) or preventing locals from going on jama'at (Shou County Government 2010), but in Xinjiang, Tablighi organizers and participants can face imprisonment (Zhang, Tang, and Long 2013), and the Tulufan (Turfan) government lists them as an "evil cult" 邪教 along with Falun Gong (Tulufan Administrative Office 2013).

The Tablighi Jama'at movement primarily centers on oral communication rather than the study of written scripture or theological tracts, so its spread and persistence requires each individual to make oral performances, a method that allows even uneducated and illiterate members to constructively participate. Practices that feature daily meetings and paying visits to absent members provide a pseudo-familial social network that may seem especially welcoming to those isolated by economically driven migration and the collapse of traditional clan and kin-based networks. The movement also provides some semblance of social mobility because it imbues all Muslims with the role of teacher traditionally ascribed to the learned ulema (Sikand 2002:255). Of course,

such factors are not relevant to many participants like Yacub who lack neither money, nor social and familial networks. However, Sikand (2002:257) argues that the movement's emphasis on the unity of all Muslims and its ability to transcend divides among sects and madhabs (schools of law) make it especially appealing as a unifying factor among the marginalized Muslim minority of India, and this seems to hold true for China as well. Just as the movement developed in reaction to Hindu attempts to "reconvert" Muslims, China's Tablighis see themselves as part of a similar struggle with a predominantly atheist society in which their children are educated in a Marxist framework and Christian missionaries tempt Muslim youth with the allure of Western culture and the unearned prestige of modernity.

Chinese participants in both Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya revival movements actively reject the predominant form of religiosity among Chinese Muslims, whom they accuse of blindly follow tradition without struggling to improve their piety or understand their practices. As such, Chinese revivalists eschew passive acceptance of a parochial ethnic identity in favor of an active pursuit of authentic faith and a universal Muslim identity. Both movements tend to be younger than the predominantly elderly crowd one generally finds at most mosques, and the enthusiasm and willingness to risk social censure that are both common among youth greatly increase the likelihood of a young Muslim participating in either movement. Most Chinese Salafis have left their sectarian roots behind at some point in their lifetime to join a movement that is disparaged in China but popular on a global scale. Jama'atis physically leave their homes in emulation of the prophet's companions and foreign Muslim who travel to China on jama'ats, but they

return as revitalized Muslims to their ancestral sects and mosques. This transcendence of sectarian bounds contributes to making Tablighi Jama'at the more popular of the two movements within China. There is no firm contrast in class between the two movements, but Salafiyya's focus on the individual responsibility to study Islamic texts seems to appeal to more educated Muslims. In contrast, the low barriers to participation, emphasis on oral study and performance, and an opportunity to travel to new places seem to attract less educated Muslims to Tablighi Jama'at. However, I also met an enthusiastic group of college students who have gone on jama'at together multiple times. There are many globe-trotting businessmen and foreign-educated Muslims among the Salafis, but there are also many with scarcely any education in Chinese or Arabic who have never left Qinghai Province. There is some overlap between the two movements, but most of the well-educated Salafis I met disapprove of Tablighi Jama'at.

These two movements share the goal of revitalizing Islam through returning to the ways of Muhammad and his companions, but their methods of doing so are drastically different. Tablighis frequently discuss how they hate being called Salafis, and Salafis say that the Tablighi Jama'at's twentieth century roots clearly make it bid'a (innovation), which is the complete opposite of Salafism. Nevertheless, a few individuals participate in both movements, and both of them are rapidly growing. Among supporters and detractors, both movements figure prominently in the consciousness of China's Muslims, but foreign origins make both of them suspect in the minds of many Chinese. Of course, Islam itself came from abroad, but followers of these movements are constantly accused of blindly copying the latest foreign fad, which is not uncommon in China, but Muslims

like to pretend that their faith is unchanging, and that they are above chasing trends. Many young people who have studied abroad in South Asia or the Middle East now support these movements in China as has been the case for each new Islamic movement to enter the Middle Kingdom. The Tablighi Jama'at is associated with India and Pakistan, from whence the movement originated, and from whence missionaries have traveled to China since the 1980s. On several occasions, I met (and occasionally translated for) South Asians on missionary trips through China, and the lucky few Chinese Muslims able to get passports travel to Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh to participate in massive international Tablighi gatherings that are the largest annual congregations of Muslims besides the hajj. Yacub often told me that what I saw in Xining was “just a copy,” and I had to go to Pakistan to see the real movement. The contrast between these two movements underlines the plurality and polycentric nature of Islamic revival.

Tablighi Jama'at advocates an all-encompassing regime of behavior, but only a minority of extremely active participants take part in study sessions and door-to-door visits on a daily basis. In Xining, many people drop by Yacub's hotel prayer room to study a few times each week or month, or go on a jama'at once or twice a year. One young man who had studied Arabic and Islam in Pakistan often regaled locals with tales of the “real” jama'atis in Pakistan, and he told me that he come to study to cheer up whenever he was having a bad day. Noor (2012:163) speaks of conversion to the movement, arguing that those who participate in jama'at seek to wholly alter their subjectivity, and a few extremely active participants effectively transform their lives. However, rather than leaving one's previous beliefs and practices behind, most Tablighis

continue attending the same mosques and view their participation as a deepening of faith rather than a conversion toward something new. Metcalf (1993:589) points out that Tablighi Jama'at is unusual among modern Muslim movements because its members do not take a stance on textual interpretation, or schools of jurisprudence, and there is no "litmus test" of prayer styles or ritual practices defining who is on the inside versus the outside. Indeed, I participated in Tablighi-led prayer behind men praying in both Gedimu and Yihewani styles, and no one ever commented or looked askance at me when I prayed in the Salafi manner. Noor (2012 (2013:166) also points out that Tablighis themselves view participation not so much as being a member of the movement but "a state of being, a process of becoming." My informants generally said that they "did da'wah work" (做达瓦工作) or "had gone out on jama'at," (出过哲玛提) but no one referred to themselves as "Tablighis," (although Ayoob said some relatives called him this derogatorily) and most devout Chinese Muslims I met had tried the movement at least once or participated in it occasionally. Thus I refer to all those who have embarked on a jama'at at least once, and approve of the movement's methods enough to intend to do so again as *participants* rather than *converts*, *members*, or *adherents* as this terminology captures the varying levels of engagement with and experiential nature of the movement.

Sectarian Considerations: What Tablighi Jama'at is Not

The Tablighi Jama'at largely eschews texts and institutions, so it has escaped scholarly study until relatively recently. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the movement's transnational nature, conservative interpretation of the Qur'an, and sheer number of adherents have drawn media attention and reevaluation of its self-professed

apolitical and nonviolent nature. Many authors focusing on security issues are wary of the movement because some violent extremists have participated in the movement at some point in their lives, and occasionally, such people have used the movement as a cover to travel internationally. A refusal to take a stand on political matters means that many Tablighis and the movement as a whole refuse to take a position on the use of violence in principle (Alexiev 2005; Burton and Stewart 2008; Langley et al 2006). Most social scientists who have studied the movement in depth interpret these attributes as indicative of a movement designed to appeal to as many Muslims as possible by remaining neutral on most theological debates, avoiding any sort of political stance, focusing on core Islamic values, and building brotherhood through travel (Ali 2003; Dickson 2009; Horstmann 2007; Janson 2006; Noor 2012; Sikand 2006; Tozy 2000). A young Chinese man recounted how while studying in Pakistan he had participated in a jama'at that preached to AK-47-wielding allies of the Taliban, saying, "Brothers! Jews are not our enemy. Americans are not our enemy. Our enemy is our own nafs [ego/desires]." (兄弟们! 犹太人不是我们的敌人。美国人不是我们的敌人。我们的敌人是我们的nafs). However, many criticize this neutral quietism for effectively supporting the local status quo, and the amorphous nature of the movement and lack of transparency among leaders contributes to fears of a hidden agenda or an eventual shift toward violence (Alexiev 2005; Langley et al 2006). It also is difficult to generalize about broad societal goals of a movement that is focused on individual piety. Tablighis strive to transform society, but at least collectively, they do not resort to force or politics. Instead, they urge individuals to reform themselves, one Muslim at a time.

Islamic political parties in many countries accuse Tablighis of shirking their responsibility to actively support the goal of establishing an Islamic state, and some even accuse them of aiding Western governments by weakening Islam. In a similar vein, some national governments, such as that in Bangladesh, support the Tablighi Jama'at as a counterweight to political Islamic movements (Sikand 1999:121-2). However, Chinese Salafis and other Muslims who avoid politics, which includes most Chinese Muslims, are hardly in a position to take issue with Tablighi abstention from sectarian and political matters. Instead, Horstmann (2007:114) draws the more important contrast in pointing out that Salafis primarily confine themselves to Salafi mosques and libraries, while Tablighis take their ideas of orthodoxy on tours of vast networks. In short, Salafism tends to be text-centered and introverted, albeit with some clear performative markers of sectarian identity; Tablighi Jama'at is experiential and emphasizes the transformative potential of external performance. Salafis believe that careful study can help a person establish correct practice in his home and within his family, and error is avoided because only qualified imams actively teach these texts, and then only to willing audiences. Tablighis see religiosity moving in the opposite direction, from the outside in: one leaves his surroundings to simulate the experience of the early Muslims in hopes that he internalizes (and spreads) this piety, brings it home to his family, and becomes motivated to continue study of Islam. The goal of reviving the original Islam is the same, but in some respects the two movements are complete opposites.

Wherever it is found, and not merely in China, Tablighi Jama'at endorses a brand of Islamic orthodoxy that Sufis and other sects tend to associate with Wahabbism, but it

also features some mystical attributes that lead Salafis to accuse Tablighi Jama'at of heterodoxy and Sufism. Most Salafis, and all of the Salafi imams with whom I discussed Tablighi Jama'at, condemned the movement to some extent. Some accused the movement of *bid'a* (innovation) in that Tablighi Jama'at canonizes specific virtues of the sahaba and a methodology of emulating them, a set of ideas and practices that are not specifically enumerated in the Qur'an or Hadith. Salafis also are uneasy with elements of mysticism, emotionalism, and a historical association of Deobandis with Sufism. Indeed, the son of the movement's founder, Maulana Yusuf, who took over leadership of the movement after his father's death, also performed Sufi initiation ceremonies in India (Masud 2000:14). Ali (2003:178) goes so far as to say that the movement "is a derivative of Sufism and in a way could be perceived as new-Sufism." However, Tablighis actually oppose some Sufi beliefs like the ability of Sufi saints to intercede with Allah and the hereditary descent of spiritual powers. They believe that such spiritual gifts are earned through sparing one's time and treasure to take part in jama'at and especially through maintaining the good conduct practiced on these journeys, not granted from birth.⁴² And Tablighis also criticize Muslim participation in local practices and commemorations such as a deceased Sufi saint's birthday celebration in the Surat district of Gujarat, India (Van der Veer 1992:557-8). In spite its attempts to transcend sectarian divisions, Tabligh Jama'at draws criticism from both mystical and scriptural elements branches of Islam, much as they criticize each other.

⁴² It is important to point out that in spite of decrying the Sufi practice of hereditary succession, the second and third amirs were Maulana Muhammad Ilyas' son and his sister's grandson, and his family features prominently in the council that leads the movement today (see Masud 2000).

Tablighi Jama'at does contain some mystical elements, such as emphasis on reciting dhikr, but the Tablighis I met did not recite dhikr to induce a mystical state, they carefully counted the number of times they repeated various phrases to calculate the rewards they would earn in heaven. This rationalized effort driven by tangible rewards (Horstmann 2007:110; Sikand 2002:76) is more akin to the Protestant work ethic than the trance-inducing chants of some Sufis. Both movements emphasize dhikr (repeatedly reciting relatively short Arabic phrases), which is a simple practice appealing to even uneducated Muslims, but while Sufi dhikr is part of a collective ritual at a mosque or tomb, the dhikr of Tablighi Jama'at is recited while walking down the street, idly sitting by oneself, as part of ritualized Tablighi practices, or as a means of ritualizing and Islamicizing daily life.

The Tablighi Jama'at rejects many forms of religious action on a collective level, such as political activism, Sufi rituals, theological debate, and sectarian claims of exclusivity. Instead, the movement embraces a strict code of behavior placed on individuals so that, "The life of a Tablighi is a permanent ritual, and his conduct is regulated in its minutest detail so that it conforms in every detail to the life of the prophet" (Tozy 2000:171). This ritual allows an individual to discursively remove himself from a world perceived as rife with sin and temptation, to be purified in the act of jama'at along with three to nine other similarly focused people. The identical behaviors, activities, and language of the movement unite believers from all sects, languages, and homelands in a common system of praxis. However, the performative aspect of the speeches that are so central to the jama'at leaves ample room for individual expression

within a well-defined structure. Even though many Muslims who receive Tablighi visitors react with hostility to the presumption that one needs the intervention of strangers to increase one's faith (Dickson 2009:111), the Tablighis' grassroots strategy to generate increased piety from the bottom up appeals to many Muslims disillusioned with attempts to impose orthodoxy from above through the sometimes grating authority of the ulema or Islamic governments. Ali (2003:181) asserts that the movement has "helped reassert the authority of Islamic orthodoxy" and "paved the way for the solidification of the Muslim ummah," but untrained and uneducated jama'atis also promote conflicting ideas of Islamic orthodoxy and sometimes alienate Muslims outside the movement.

Methods of Jama'at

Several scholars (Metcalf 1993; Noor 2012; Sikand 1998) have dissected the literature of the Tablighi Jama'at to uncover its discursive foundations and unifying principles. These scholars reveal that the movement primarily focuses on practice, and the texts themselves are manuals for action and stories to be read aloud, so I will focus exclusively on the practices of the Tablighi Jama'at and the experiences of participants. The most distinctive Tablighi activity is *gash*⁴³ (rounds), which the Chinese call "ordinary visits" (普访). This practice consists of a group meeting after prayer, usually in a mosque or prayer room but sometimes in a private residence, and listening to lectures while sending out a small group to knock on doors and invite others into the mosque to study. The other type of visitation, "special visit" (专访 or *khusisi gash*), consists of two

⁴³ Chinese participants exclusively used Chinese terms for all of these activities, but I have included the Urdu terms to maintain the usage of prior studies.

or three people making a more targeted visit to encourage a Muslim to join a Tablighi study session, to urge someone to follow through on an expressed intention to embark on a jama'at, or sometimes to visit a non-Muslim who has expressed interest in learning more about Islam.

These first two practices take place one to several times a week, but what the Chinese call simply “study circle” (学习全) or *talim* (learning) takes place in the prayer hall every day after dawn prayer. The practice consists of participants sitting in a circle, listening to someone recite the proper study etiquette, then listening to one participant read excerpts from the Qur'an or Hadith on the benefits of reading the Qur'an and practicing proper recitation of the Qur'an. They practice Qur'anic recitation by focusing exclusively on memorizing and pronouncing the relatively short and easy surahs at the end of the Qur'an. Activities also include reading Hadith and stories from the lives of the sahaba, and Chinese Tablighis refer to all forms of speaking about Islam, reading, and listening in a circle simply as “study” (学习). Tablighis encourage every Muslim man to spend at least 2.5 hours each day leading their families in such study. The preponderance of all-male gatherings might give the appearance of a male-centered movement, but participants frequently emphasize the importance of sharing what they have learned with their wives and daughters. The aforementioned practices of “common visits,” “special visits,” and “study circles” are the three most common types of organized activity in which Tablighis take part, but there are other practices and countless guidelines regulating the minutiae of these and other activities, producing ritualized behavior to fill every spare moment for those on a jama'at and others highly devoted to the movement.

I began this chapter describing one session of Yacub’s “special visits.” He later explained his methodology in detail when I alone accompanied him on another session months later. The primary goal of that day’s visits, he said, was to deliver encouragement to Muslims who had expressed the intention to embark on jama’at, but Yacub also began the evangelization process with others we met along the way. After visiting a man who was having trouble getting time off from work to go on jama’at, we encountered two Muslims in their twenties coming out of the elevator as we were leaving a building. Yacub asked their names and where they were from, then put their names, phone numbers and apartment numbers in his cell phone while casually inviting them to come to the hotel prayer room and study some time. It was a friendly, low pressure interaction, but as we walked away, Yacub told me that next time we see them, we will know their names, and they will be happy we remembered them. Then, he might pay them a visit or send a delegation on a “common visit” to invite them to come study, and perhaps they would meet more neighbors and continue the process. Eventually, this process will help the whole building to “elevate its faith” (提高伊玛尼⁴⁴). Then, this building’s inhabitants will worry about their friends in other buildings and start going there to visit them to urge them to study, and soon the whole neighborhood will know each other and study together.

In this manner, the Tablighis seek to expand a devout community by re-centering Muslims’ lives around a movement and a mosque, similar to the “cognitive mapping” Dickson (2009:111) describes within the movement in Canada. Rather than seeking to affect objective conditions, Tablighi Jama’at helps participants reshape their subjective

⁴⁴ The latter three characters —yīmānī 伊玛尼— are a transliteration of the Arabic term for faith, iman.

world into one focused on the mosque in which Tablighi activities occur, which also includes a community of believers that helps alleviate “problems of identity and community facing those living in modern urban spaces,” and projects outward to allow the individual to envision a global network of Tablighi evangelists and Muslims awaiting revival. At local Tablighi centers, participants can meet traveling preachers from far corners of the global Tablighi community who are quick to invite them to embark on a jama’at to visit their communities, and the standardization of Tablighi practices ensures that locals and traveling Tablighis have many daily activities and experiences in common, they have each constructed a similar habitus. Tablighis create a highly structured subjective world for themselves both locally and globally through the reproduction of self-disciplining sodalities. Every day, Yacub and his brethren send out emissaries in this manner to build faith within themselves and strengthen their Muslim community.

Tablighis assert that each person has a responsibility to call people to Islam and teaches a rough template for doing so. Yacub explained that when first meeting or visiting Muslims, one should learn their names and hometowns to establish a connection, and then discuss the power (大能 “great ability”) of Allah and the importance of reciting the declaration of faith in Arabic, *La illaha il Allah* (“There is no god but Allah”). The understanding of Allah’s power should encourage them to feel gratitude for everything Allah has done, and explaining the significance of the declaration of faith in driving home a sense of brotherhood among all those who declare that there is no god but Allah. The Tablighis also emphasize the power of this phrase to earn one admittance into heaven. Once these points sink in, one may begin explaining how Muslims should

express thanks to Allah by practicing daily prayer, proper comportment, frequently saying words of praise and remembrance (dhikr), participating in study sessions, and going on jama'at to urge others to do the same. Gently and gradually, one then begins to correct a lax Muslim's behavior.

Tablighis insist that embarking on a jama'at of at least three days is necessary to remove a Muslim from corrupting worldly influences, immerse him in proper behavior, and make all of these lessons sink in by having him teach them to others. Indeed, when I went on a three-day jama'at, I learned that giving an impromptu speech on Allah's great power to a study group was a basic requirement of each jama'ati, and the power of reciting the oneness of Allah was another frequent topic of such speeches. These speeches are often repetitive and quite boring for the listeners, but the point is not for the audience to learn, the audience is necessary primarily to enable and bear witness to the self-transformation of the speaker. On the surface, such performances are not dissimilar to the recitation of imperial edicts or study sessions on Chairman Mao's quotations, and so they may be pre-adapted to the Chinese tradition of self-cultivation through oral performance, but they also afford individuals some leeway to adapt the movement's material to their own experiences or vocal styles.

The aforementioned "specialized visits" are one method of Tablighi proselytizing, but "ordinary visits" are a more common practice for participants in the movement. Nearly every day a few local Muslims and groups of four to ten traveling jama'atis from all over China, and occasionally a few South Asians, form a circle on the prayer room floor after the late afternoon prayer. One of the local organizers present designates

himself or another experienced participant to introduce the afternoon's work. He speaks a few minutes about the importance of da'wah and its benefits before reviewing the division of labor for the work about to take place. No matter how experienced the others in the circle may be, it is necessary to ritualistically review the role of each person in the one or two groups that go forth to recruit others to come "study" (listen to one or two speeches and an exhortation to go on jama'at) in the prayer room.

The group of four to ten that is sent out will include an amir, the leader who walks behind the rest to deal with any obstacles or decisions the group faces; a "guide" (带路的人), a local person to walk in front, guide the way, knock on doors, and introduce the group; a "talker" (说话的人) to actually talk to people about why they should join the study session; a "doer of dhikr" (做dhikr的人) to silently recite praise for Allah throughout the group's mission; and a "speaker of *bayan* (讲bayani的人) to deliver a sermon (called *bayan* in Urdu, meaning "declaration") upon the group's return. The organizer who describes each role also specifies that this group should walk single file on the right side of the street and sidewalk with eyes cast downward to avoid seeing anything that could cause impure thoughts, removing any obstacles from the path that could cause others harm, and reciting *subhan'allah* when going down stairs or hills and *Allahu Akbar* when going up.⁴⁵ When visiting a home, the group should stand about three meters from the door, with each person's body turned 45 degrees to the side and looking downward to avoid looking inside the door when it opens. The guide should knock loudly three times and say, "Asalaam alaykum." The speaker specifies that if the household

⁴⁵ This is the general Tablighi procedure for walking, not specific to this activity, but certainly part of it.

“understands religion” (懂教门), a woman will not answer the door to strange men, but if a woman comes to the door, the jama’atis should avoid looking directly at her and ask for the man of the house. If a man comes to the door, they should introduce themselves as guests coming in the name of Allah, ask the man his Arabic name, urge him to join the study session, and list the benefits of it, but if he refuses, they should urge him to state his intention to do so in the future and move on to the next apartment. Tablighis believe that only Allah has the power to change minds, so it is more important to elicit his help by reciting dhikr than to attempt to persuade people with human language.

Several people in the group remaining at the prayer room during these ordinary visits are also assigned responsibilities to continue lecturing and listening, welcome new participants, and prepare for the return of missionary group(s). From those who remain behind, one is chosen to stand at the door of the mosque (or hotel), greet anyone the emissaries manage to recruit, show them to the washing room if they haven’t performed ablution, and show them to the prayer room if they have. Another is chosen to talk about Islam until the group(s) return; and one more (usually an older man and/or an imam) is designated to sit alone in a corner and pray for the session’s successful outcome. The introductory speaker always stresses that this last assignment is the most important job.

After maybe twenty minutes, the group(s) return and one of their number delivers a sermon, which invariably ends in a call for all those present to embark on jama’ats. Finally, someone retrieves a small notebook and stands up to ask who will commit to a four month jama’at. Some raise their hands, state their Arabic name, give a spirited, “Inshallah!” while raising their right hand clenched into a fist, and then often proclaim

when they plan to leave. Next, the man with the notebook asks for volunteers to go on a jama'at for ten days, more people volunteer or reaffirm their commitments in the same manner. Sometimes, the speaker will call out people by name, suggesting they should go. Finally, the speaker asks who will go on three day jama'ats, and a few more people volunteer. Now, even first time attendees are urged to go, and the man with the notebook records names, phone numbers, and addresses of those who acquiesce. Finally, no more than forty minutes after the meeting began (this time frame is also mentioned in the introductory description), the assembled Muslims recite a prayer in Arabic, repeating after an organizer or imam, and adjourn. When these sessions take place in a private home, food is served at this point, because eating is an essential part of all social activities in China, but it has to wait until the official Tablighi rituals are concluded out of deference to the movement's ascetic ethos. Just as these activities are organized down to the last detail, Tablighis emphasize such rules governing every aspect of life, including eating, sleeping, and using the restroom.

The potential jama'atis who express their intention during these sessions will receive prayers and possibly personal visits to encourage them to follow through. Tablighis emphasize the importance of good "intention" (for which they use the Arabic term, *niyat*), so eliciting and stating the intent to go on jama'at is important even if it never comes to fruition. Indeed, Ayoob once explained to me that "Inshallah" is actually a noncommittal answer because one cannot help but do what Allah wills, and if one does not follow through, then obviously Allah did not will him to do so. Tablighis recommend going on a three-day jama'at once a month, a ten-day jama'at every four months, a forty-

day jama'at once a year, and a four-month jama'at at least once in a lifetime. Tablighis believe that only Allah determines whether or not one ultimately goes on jama'at, converts, or becomes a better Muslim as a result of Tablighi activities. As it says in the Qur'an, "And when a community among them said: "Why do you preach to a people whom Allah is about to destroy or to punish with a severe torment?" (The preachers) said: 'In order to be free from guilt before your Lord (Allah), and perhaps they may fear Allah'" (7.164). Thus, Tablighis place importance on expressing devotion through completing every action in a ritually correct manner without regard for outcomes that they cannot control. Tablighis conceive of the world as a sinful place filled with unbelievers, which parallels the context of Muhammad in Mecca before he fled to Medina, and they consider every one of their preaching tours to be a re-creation of this journey (Metcalf 1993:602). Participants in the movement speak of da'wah as a means of ensuring the perpetuation of the Islamic faith, not by simply preaching to lax Muslims, or by persuading them to take part in jama'at, but by renewing the faith within themselves through experiencing the life of the prophet's companions. As the amir of my own jama'at said after being rebuffed by an old Hui man hostile to the movement, "We don't have qualifications to spread the faith, we can only correct ourselves." (我们没有传教的资格，我们只要改变我们自己.)

Tablighi Performances

The highly structured practices of Tablighi Jama'at center on speeches made to small groups and individuals, and the content of these is usually as formulaic as Tablighi behaviors. Participants hope the repetition of both actions and message allows them to

internalize the “six great virtues,”⁴⁶ (六大美德) of the sahaba, commonly called the “six points of Tabligh” in English. Generally, all Tablighi speeches focus on one or all of these virtues and the need to cultivate them through the practice of jama’at. Many inexperienced speakers will simply rattle off each virtue along with the specifically codified motives, methods, and benefits of studying each one. Seasoned jama’atis and trained imams usually pick one or two such virtues and weave the same information into an emotional and compelling lecture centering on the need for jama’at and featuring stories from the Qur’an and/or Hadith (including those in Xie 2010). Regardless of skill level, performing such speeches was a fundamental part of the jama’at, and even those going on a jama’at of just three days were required to give such talks multiple times. Performing speeches amidst trained imams and organizers of the movement who listen patiently and exclaim Al-ḥamdu lillāh (“praise Allah”) at the conclusion surely builds confidence within unlearned and inexperienced jama’atis and makes them feel like valuable members of the missionary project. Yacub illustrated how these speeches aim to shape a performer’s habitus when he compared the effects of da’wah work to the effect reciting the call to prayer has on the muezzin; he never misses a prayer because he is always calling others to pray.

I witnessed both teenage boys and old men mechanically recite Tablighi doctrine, and I translated for South Asian jama’atis who gestured so expressively and mixed in so many Arabic terms while they spoke in English that their words scarcely needed

⁴⁶The six points are translated into Chinese as follows: 坚定的信仰 (resolute belief), 虔诚的拜功 (pious prayer), 学习知识, 纪念安拉 “study knowledge and remembrance of Allah (dhikr),” 善待穆斯林, “respect Muslims,” 虔诚的也提 “pious intention (niyat),” 宣教和传达 “preaching and transmission” (Xie 2010).

translation into Chinese, but those who had not yet memorized the material sometimes produced the most interesting speeches. One day, Yacub called upon a member of a jama'at that was midway through its forty days of traveling from Hebei Province to deliver the bayan talk that would be the centerpiece of the day's general visits. The uneducated farmer said in a markedly rural accent, "I can't give a speech" (我不会讲), but Yacub and others urged him to just talk about his experience. He began by saying that he was born Hui, but originally didn't understand anything about religion. An along invited him to come travel, and he laughingly recalled that he thought he would be traveling just for fun. He said that had he known the purpose was study, he probably would not have gone. People he encountered in the beginning of the trip offered him liquor and non-halal meat,⁴⁷ and he refused only because others in his jama'at told him that it was forbidden. Then, at one point, studying with many Muslims in a big mosque, he began to cry as he realized the truth and necessity of the mission he was on. Such emotional experiences (and tearfully recounting them) are extremely common in the Tablighi movement, but not unusual among other Muslims. Several times, Muslims from eastern China who were used to praying in congregations of ten to twenty people told me how they cried when they first prayed among hundreds or thousands of Muslims in the mosques of China's northwest.

During the Hebei farmer's speech, an imam from his jama'at sat next to him and smiled knowingly as he recounted his transformation. At his other shoulder, a local imam

⁴⁷ Even most non-observant Hui will not eat pork, but many uneducated Hui are not aware that any animal must be butchered in a specific way to be considered halal.

who had led the prayer and often facilitated study sessions sat and looked at him derisively, frequently casting apprehensive glances at Yacub as the uneducated man rambled on in an unorthodox and excessively casual manner. The man's emotion was understated for a movement that advocates crying while making supplicatory prayers, but his speech did not even highlight any of the six points or exhort others to go on jama'at.. However, Yacub did not interrupt until the time allotted for the bayan had elapsed, and then he reiterated how the man had deepened his faith through jama'at as everyone should and began taking names of volunteers. On jama'at, every participant is a teacher, and no one interrupts, argues, or passes judgment during a speech, but a senior participant sometimes says a few words of clarification after a Tablighi's speech. Yacub cut off the farmer when the time limit for the activity was nearing, and an organizer would probably take action if a speech blatantly violated the principles of the movement, but these performances offer speakers considerable leeway to express themselves.

Individual Reform

To isolated Muslim minorities, marginalized Muslims, and disillusioned or restless youth, the Tablighi Jama'at not only offers an artificial kinship network, it also opens up a world of possibilities. All ages participate in the movement, with some jama'ats including both teenagers and octogenarians, but most organizers are in their thirties or forties, and the movement skews younger than most mosques, which are regularly filled with men of retirement age. Sardar's (2004) autobiographical work recalls how he first went to a Tablighi Jama'at meeting partially because of preachers shaming him for not being a better Muslim and partially out of rebellion against his parents (see

Dickson 2009). Janson (2006:17) also points out that young Muslims use the category of “cultural Islam” that is widely maligned among Chinese revivalists, to condemn their parents’ sometimes unorthodox practices and assert their independence. And Hollup (2006:297) shows how young participants in Tablighi Jama’at no longer recognize traditional local Islamic authorities. The movement is not only a means of dedicating oneself to Islam, it permits individuals a means to find an agentive role in building the faith and themselves. Indeed, Metcalf (1993:606) argues that the movement puts much emphasis on individual performance, salvation through devout actions, personal choice to participate in the movement, and the sort of transformational conversion narratives that are rarely seen in other Islamic movements.

Every jama’ati shoulders the burden of embodying the pure practices of the original Islamic community and claims the spiritual authority to spread and teach the faith that is traditionally reserved for educated ulema or descendants of Sufi saints. In southern Thailand, Horstmann (2007:126) observes how this egalitarian spirit gives impoverished and marginalized villagers new prospects and connections. Sikand (2002:255) points out, “By opening up access to valued symbolic resources of shari’at-centred Islam and ashraf ‘high’ culture, the movement provides them [participants] with an important channel for upward social mobility, typically seen as a ‘civilising’ project rescuing them from jahiliyat (ignorance) and leading them to ‘true’ Islam.” Even if participants eventually grow disillusioned with the movement, the experience of jama’at expands their realm of experience with travel, teaches them some new Hadith, and probably improves their Arabic pronunciation and public speaking skills. Elsewhere,

Sikand (1999:119) even suggests that the lower middle class could be considered the movement's "natural constituency." This seems to describe many (but by no means all) of the Chinese participants I observed, who had few financial resources or education, but made up for it with religious fervor.

It is possible to view the Tablighi Jama'at as having some elements in common with the Protestant Reformation in that it circumvents clerical authority, encourages pursuit of salvation through individual reform, and advocates propagation of the message throughout the world. Tozy (2000:164) compares the movement to an evangelical Christian sect in that it suggests, "The world is corrupt because men are corrupt. If one can reform mankind one can change the world. The characteristic activities of this type of sect are revivalism and public preaching." While Protestantism permits anyone to become a preacher, Tablighi Jama'at insists that everyone become a preacher.

Tablighi Jama'at challenges traditional modes of religiosity and authority in that it does not absorb Muslims into its own religious community, but rather it enlists participants to cultivate self-propelled individual subjectivities that will encourage the same transformation in others. Yoginder Sikand (2002:260) sees similarities to the Reformation in the Tablighi emphasis on each individual's responsibility before God as well as a capitalistic calculus to determine heavenly rewards for each virtuous action that amounts to an "inner worldly asceticism of the Protestant sort." Beyond these similarities in practice and distribution of spiritual authority, Horstmann (2007:110) argues that Tablighi Jama'at "paradoxically represents the force of modernity and rationalization" in that it deploys both transnational community and profit as motivating factors (in that

specific devout acts and recitations will receive calculable rewards) to urge its members to conform to certain behaviors (Sikand 2002:76). These pious practices and the universal brotherhood and sense of purpose they represent provide individuals with structure and confidence by linking them directly with a transnational community and, in doing so, circumvent fractious political or theological issues. Tablighi Jama'at is a thoroughly modern movement in that it is individualized and transnational in a way that tends to ignore or undermine customs, authorities, and identities of local, national, and traditional natures.

An Insider's Critique: Ayoob and Tablighi Jama'at

I began this chapter by describing how Ayoob introduced me to the leader of Tablighi Jama'at in Xining, and even though he studies with Tablighis about once every week or two, he still maintains a critical stance toward the movement. I previously discussed some Salafi critiques of the movement, but Ayoob also offers some insightful criticism of the movement from the standpoint of a college graduate, professional English teacher, reaffirmed Muslim, self-educated student of Islam and other faiths, frequent participant in Tablighi study sessions, and occasional jama'ati. This level of participation in Tablighi Jama'at was more than most Chinese Muslims who shun or have no experience with the movement, but far less than the daily enthrallment of those who are heavily involved in the movement. Ayoob perceives a need for revival in China and admires the dedication of many jama'atis, but especially from his standpoint as an educator, he denounces the Tablighis' non-interactive style of speaking, wholesale rejection of worldly concerns, and neglect of modern problems in favor of constantly

repeating stories of the sahaba and emulating some superficial elements of their lifestyle. He criticizes Yacub's pedagogical techniques without realizing that most of the faults he observes are part of the standardized Tablighi Jama'at program. Despite his frustrations, he still often prays in Yacub's prayer room and regularly attends Tablighi study sessions when he is in town.

After our initial dinner with Yacub, Ayoob and I discussed the movement over a light second dinner as the modest meal at Yacub's had not quite satiated either of us. His biggest complaint was that Yacub tended to tell people how they should behave and quote scripture to support it without pausing to listen to their problems or answer questions. Ayoob favored what he called a more "Western" approach, in which one engages people in conversation, asking and answering questions, would prove more effective, saying that Tablighis should study psychology. Ayoob argued that simply quoting Hadith and scripture without explaining their application in the modern world runs the risk of advocating simple escapism or alienating those in search of guidance in dealing with modern situations. I met Ayoob for lunch one day after he had been studying with Yacub and some Indian jama'atis, he expressed frustration that these jama'atis told him he should quit his job and leave everything to pursue da'wa, but they carried iPhones and drove expensive cars, showing that they had the means to stop working and still support themselves and their families. Ayoob also complained that every time he spent hours talking religion with jama'atis or friends, so many words without action would leave him with an empty feeling. He felt that material needs often get in the way of spiritual

progress, but he was frustrated with mere talk did not seem to accomplish anything in either realm.

Ayoob also complained that he sometimes felt used by Yacub. Earlier that day, Yacub had called him because he was sending a jama'at to the town of Ping'an where Ayoob lived. However, Yacub had not answered or returned any of Ayoob's calls in the past week. Indeed, Yacub is constantly taking care of jama'atis from out of town, dispatching others to destinations near and far, and dispensing wisdom from Qur'an, Hadith, and examples from the sahaba. Taking care of people in this manner is part of Yacub's religious practice and his duty as a local leader of the movement, but in a sense, he never really relates to people on a human level as individuals, they are jama'atis to be hosted, dispatched, listened to, and spoken at. Of course, the true mission of Tablighi evangelization is to perfect one's own faith, which makes it all too easy to treat others as inert pieces of a circle or interchangeable components of a jama'at. Yacub is charismatic, well-spoken, and a gracious host, but neither Ayoob nor myself were ever able to sneak a peek at the the human that might have existed behind his cultivated Tablighi habitus.

Many of Ayoob's relatives vehemently oppose the Tablighi Jama'at movement, so he is well-informed of the reasons behind this anti-Tablighi sentiment. He claims that most Chinese Muslims, especially the rural and uneducated, prefer a more traditional approach to Islam. And he personally fears that such evangelical zeal cannot be maintained and that it even could lead to an eventual rejection of Islam. Most Chinese prefer the ways of their ancestors, and Tablighi Jama'at is a relatively new and strange movement. Ayoob's family calls him, "Tablighi" or "Santai" (三拾, Salafi) because he

sometimes visits Yacub's prayer room. These old-fashioned, rural people do not distinguish between these two movements that are new, extremist, and foreign to them. Ayoob also compares the attitude of some Tablighis to that of a student at the Salafi mosque who claimed that those who do not literally interpret the description of Allah's position in the Qur'an are unbelievers. In the eyes of Ayoob and other moderate Muslims, single-minded devotion to a specific method distorts the Islamic faith and alienates other Muslims. He says that he continually strives to find a "middle way" between the unsustainable and preachy enthusiasm of Yacub and the blind following of tradition found among uneducated and old-fashioned Muslims, between making Islam too difficult and divisive and simply giving in to human laziness and allowing one's faith to become a habit devoid of deeper reflection.

Many admire the devotion of jama'atis, but many also question the appropriateness of ascetic methods in a religion that endorses engagement with the material world. Most participants characterize jama'at as a temporary retreat to be taken when life's circumstances allow. And they encourage me and other students to go on a longer jama'at after we finished our studies or when we have a break from classes. However, preachers often encourage everyone to take this work of promoting jama'at and Islamic orthodoxy into workplaces and schools. The movement also encourages participants to acquire advanced degrees and professional occupations to make them more effective evangelists.

Critics claim that this intense focus on jama'at sometimes causes participants to neglect worldly responsibilities. One day during Ramadan, a group of Tablighis sat

chatting after a study session when a jama'ati from Henan mentioned that a friend could not come with him because of an illness in his family. Musa, one of the local imams who regularly led prayer and study sessions, told him that one should go on jama'at regardless of one's household responsibilities or financial situation. He cited the story of an ahong whose elderly mother depended on his care and discouraged him from leaving town on jama'at. Musa recalled telling the ahong that Allah was really the one who cared for sick or elderly dependents, so wouldn't He care for them even better when their caretaker is doing the "work He likes best" (他最喜欢的工作)? Musa also shared how he once took a group of Malaysian jama'atis visiting Xining to see an ahong who ran an organization that provided food and clothing for the poor. Speaking Arabic for Musa to translate into Chinese, the foreigners gently derided the ahong's work by asking, "You should consider, after these people die, who will give them clothes to wear and food to eat?" (你因该思考一下, 他们去世以后谁给他们穿吃)? This is an extreme example, and Ayoob was shocked when I recounted the imam's words. Ayoob said that if he were there, he would have taken the imam aside afterward to challenge his extreme view. Musa's statements do not represent the views of most participants, but they illustrate the movement's radical emphasis on spiritual needs over material concerns as well as the variety of viewpoints that persist in spite of the movement's intensive standardization of behavioral forms.

Going Out and Looking In: Lessons from My Jama'at

Many Chinese Muslims occasionally accept invitations to attend Tablighi study sessions, but Tablighis only consider those who embark on a jama'at of at least three days to be participants in the movement. Movement organizers who regularly manage study

sessions have embarked on at least one four month long jama'at. Thus, months of daily participation in Tablighi study sessions in Xining is not enough to fully understand this experiential movement or constitute full participation therein. In order to grasp the subjectivity of participants in the Tablighi Jama'at, it is necessary to experience the communal living and daily regime of a jama'at. Arranging this was not difficult as the Tablighis urged me to embark on jama'at just as they did to everyone else present at their study sessions. Once I expressed my intention to go on jama'at, it took organizers another week to recruit three more people who would be willing and available to go with me. Finally, Yacub told me at the conclusion of one day's study session that my jama'at would leave the next morning after dawn prayer.

After prayer, an organizer with identical dress and similar gaunt build to Yacub introduced two jama'atis and me to each other and reviewed some of the principles and procedures of jama'at. Many jama'atis, including my two companions, are reaffirmed Muslims who were born into Hui families that did not strictly practice Islam, but they individually became inspired to do so later in life. Housseini was a 46-year old experienced Hui jama'ati who had moved to Qinghai from Shanxi Province as a young adult, and Ersu was a 47-year old Hui first-time jama'ati from a small town an hour outside of Xining. We chose Housseini to serve as amir as he was the only one experienced in this work. Neither Ersu nor Housseini had a formal education in Islam,⁴⁸ but I was constantly surprised at Housseini's extreme devotion that drove him to preach

⁴⁸ These men learned not to eat pork and maybe some basic Arabic phrases as children. They probably celebrated Islamic holidays (at least when it became acceptable to do so after 1978), but they did not grow up performing prayer on a daily basis and never studied in a mosque or Islamic school.

constantly to anyone who would listen (and some who would rather not). Unfortunately, I have no way of knowing if he was as vocally devout when he was not on jama'at. Housseini had graduated from public middle school but was self-educated in Islam. His father left the Muslim community of Henan at the age of eighteen to seek work in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province where he became immersed in Han society and ceased to practice his faith. Housseini said his father intended to return to Islam in his later years, but sickness overtook him too soon. Then, his father said that he would become devout if Allah cured him, but this never happened, and Housseini regretfully related how his father never made it back to the mosque. Housseini went on his first jama'at soon after his father's death; he didn't want to make the same mistake his father did.

We each agreed to contribute 100 RMB to pay for three day's expenses, and we selected the other rookie jama'ati, Ersal, to hold and disperse it. I recognized this other man from the previous day's study session, where I had seen Yacub persistently prodding him to volunteer for a three-day jama'at. He was very quiet, and seemed hesitant and apprehensive about participating in the movement. In many ways, Ersal was the opposite of Housseini, reticent to speak to anyone and unable to recite even the most basic verses of Qur'an. Ersal also spoke with a heavy rural accent, which made it difficult for me and some local people in the village to which we traveled to understand. During the first of our daily sessions of recitation practice, we learned that Ersal was unable to recite even the first surah of the Qur'an, which one must recite when performing every prayer. He claimed to be illiterate, but later when he tried, it became apparent he could at least make out many more basic characters. Ersal later told me that he only attended two years of

school before he had to start working, which was not at all uncommon for a Hui man of his age growing up in Qinghai. Housseini was distressed, but not surprised, by the fact that Ersa simply had been going through the motions of prayer with no idea what to recite, so when we returned to Xining, he took him to buy an electronic pen that played Qur’anic verses in Arabic and Chinese when one touched it to a page of a magnetically coded Qur’an.

The detailed and serious briefing that took place before our departure made it clear that we would be responsible for implementation of the movement’s guidelines without overt supervision. One of the organizers, dressed in Arab-style clothing, sat with us and earnestly emphasized “four things to keep in mind” (四个注意) during our jama’at: (1) that we were sent by Allah, (2) we must correct our faults, (3) we must tell everyone that there is no god but Allah, and (4) we should internally cultivate our faith and emanate it outward. Housseini and I both began taking notes, and the organizer told us not to, saying if we wrote it down, it would not be in our hearts. Housseini told him that he had to write it down, so he would not forget, and the organizer acquiesced as he continued to describe our mission. He went over “six “essential elements” (六个要素) of our work: we must (1) adopt the identity of students, (2) follow the amir to work as a team, (3) seize the time we have, (4) be of service to our hosts, (5) prioritize our activities, and (6) schedule our time carefully. Each day, time should be allotted for studying Qur’an, Hadith, and the sahabas’ lives for at least 2.5 hours each day;

participating in “ordinary visits” under the guidance of local imam(s) at least once each day; and sleeping, for a predetermined amount of time and in the manner of the prophet.⁴⁹

During our orientation session, the imam preparing us for jama’at told us how we should buy groceries and prepare our own food, so we would be self-sufficient and not burden our hosts. We expressed our intent to do so, but members of our host congregation repeatedly insisted on treating us, a case of Chinese cultural requirements of hospitality and the Islamic value of taking care of travelers infringing on the movement’s ascetic method. It is also likely that the presence of a foreigner required special treatment. We consulted with the Tablighi organizer at our host mosque before scheduling activities for our jama’at, but most of his plans for us consisted of telling us when and where different families wanted to treat us to meals. The organizer in Xining also told us that we should sit separate from each other and begin our work on public transit, so I was surprised when someone offered to drive us in his car, saying he had business on the way to our destination. Our driver and an escort, who would introduce us to the local imam, even took us out to a big lunch of noodles, beef, and chicken before we set off. The meal was not ostentatious, but not meager either. Nevertheless, Housseini tried to set the proper mood on our departure journey by telling us that we should turn off our cell phones, recite dhikr, and concentrate on the intention of our trip. When it was time to return to Xining, we asked our hosts how to get to the bus station, but instead, we found a car waiting for us after the dawn prayer. It is unclear if people were always so generous

⁴⁹ Hadith describe the prophet sleeping always on his right side with his head to the north, the right hand under the cheek, and the left hand on one’s side. Before going to sleep, one should perform ablution and recite specific supplications and surahs of the Qur’an. This also includes a midday nap, which Muhammad reportedly encouraged.

toward jama'atis or if they were excessively kind due to the presence of a foreigner. On the way back to Xining, he talked to the driver about the importance of da'wah and ceaseless study of religion for the entire journey.

Our jama'at was supposed to include a fourth member, but he could not come due to unforeseen circumstances, so a few organizers called around in search of a replacement⁵⁰ while we walked over to Yacub's apartment building for a talim study session, practicing proper Arabic pronunciation with other jama'atis who were staying in town. After an hour or two, the organizers showed us to a room with blankets and pillows rolled neatly in a row on the carpeted floor. They told us to rest awhile and that the jama'at would finally depart when we awoke. However, we were not simply killing time, this midday rest was a scheduled part of the Tablighi routine, and it was done in accordance with Muhammad's example. They still had not found another jama'ati when we woke up, so we embarked on a three-person jama'at when the smallest should be four. Even though rules govern every aspect of life in Tablighi Jama'at, it might be more accurate to think of them as best practices. Therefore, Housseini suggested we proceed as a three-person jama'at; we agreed, and no one questioned our decision thereafter.

⁵⁰ Although I focus on one group of Tablighis in Xining, they are also active in at least two more mosques and one other hotel in town. Multiple times, I met groups of Muslim men in Dong Guan Mosque who said they were in town for "da'wah work," and once I attended a Tablighi-style talk immediately after pre-dawn prayer at Dong Guan Mosque in a small apartment behind the mosque that was (un)furnished in the same way as Yacub's building, indicating that it was a space dedicated to Tablighi use. Likewise, I met an imam at Beiguan who was an enthusiastic proponent of Tablighi work and introduced me to more jama'atis. These Tablighi centers operate separately, but organizers collaborate on tasks like finding substitute jama'atis in a pinch. Since they conduct religious activities outside of mosques, they exist in violation of Chinese law, so maintaining only very loose connections might help create a sense of protection from the state authorities.

It is hard to tell if or to what extent my trip differed from other jama'ats that did not include a foreigner. I encountered several South Asian jama'ats as they passed through Xining, but they were invariably made up of foreigners traveling together, not one foreigner participating in a Chinese Muslim endeavor. Of course, my companions always introduced me as an American, but they also introduced themselves as people from Shanxi and Ledu. Even though they no longer lived in these places, they invited everyone to go visit these places on a jama'at of their own. One of the emphases of the practice of jama'at is to show people that no matter where one is from, the practice of Islam is the same and Muslims are all brothers. So emphasizing one's relative foreignness is actually part of the movement's method. The village we visited might have been more welcoming than most, but it did represent some of the movement's aspirations because one of the organizers in Xining later referred to our host mosque as "our model mosque" (我们模特清真寺).

When we arrived at a village in Hualong (化隆) Hui Autonomous County about two hours outside of Xining, one of our escorts made introductions to the main imam of the host mosque and the local amir, the lead organizer of the movement who would be facilitating our stay and study sessions in the mosque. They ushered us into a room with an oversized kang⁵¹ (炕) capable of sleeping six to ten people with bedding neatly folded and stacked on one side and covered with prayer rugs. There was a coal stove in the center of the room, and laminated posters describing fundamental Tablighi principles,

⁵¹ A heated platform bed common in north China.

procedures, and guidelines covered the walls⁵². Upon our arrival, we sat on the kang in a big circle with about ten locals, and our escort and the host mosque's main imam each made an impassioned speech stressing the importance of the da'wah work we were to pursue.

The organizer in Xining stressed that our jama'at should be participatory, which meant each person giving speeches and reading aloud study materials, including Hadith, stories of the sahabas' lives, and descriptions of the proper procedure for doing everything including studying, using the restroom, eating, and sleeping. The posters covering the walls of our quarters contained all of this information, and Housseini often read it aloud to us or helped Ersal and me struggle through some of the characters, which included many Arabic terms transliterated into Chinese. Not only do jama'atis perform pious behavior according to these guidelines, they also perform and reinforce them through this sort of recitation. Each participant in the jama'at is required to speak to a study group about Allah's "almighty nature" (大能), which includes describing his role as creator, manager (管理者), protector, and provider, as well as specifically enumerated methods and benefits of studying this principle. These talks took place after dawn prayer to members of the congregation sitting in a circle on the floor of the mosque. The information was part of the canon of the movement and many people simply memorized

⁵² These posters enumerated the Six Points of Tablighi with the benefits, methods, and motives of studying; things to pay attention to while traveling (游行注意事项), including the "four don't talks," "four protects," "four stops," "four seldoms," "four oftens," and "four don'ts;" four types of work for day and night; five types of work to be done in mosques; and proper etiquette for preparing to go on jama'at, carrying out general and special visits, consulting with each other to determine any course of action, eating, sleeping, entering a mosque, speaking, putting on clothes, and using the restroom. Whenever possible, we would read the proper procedure aloud before each activity, and we all dutifully photographed these posters with our cell phones before we left.

and recited the bullet points that were written on our walls; however, no one gives specific guidance on the structure or length of such speeches. Ersa was very nervous and tried to convince Housseini that he could not give this talk. He was lucky that the study session after dawn prayer was canceled on the morning he was scheduled to talk because a member of the congregation wanted to treat us to breakfast.

The host mosque serves as a place to rest and study, but much, if not most, of the jama'at is spent in public spaces, meeting and talking with other Muslims. Soon after arriving, we set out to find our way around the village. Ersa had been in the area before and suggested taking a cab to where the Yellow River passed through the village. Housseini agreed, saying that it would be a good way of appreciating the almighty ability of Allah. This is an accepted goal of jama'at that justifies some sightseeing. Afterwards, we walked through a street market to purchase some fruit for our hosts, and Housseini stopped to talk to every Muslim vendor. We greeted each Muslim man with a hearty "asalaam alaykum," and Housseini urged them to take the salaam (peace) home and share it with their wives and daughters, as apparently some rural Muslims believe this greeting is only to be exchanged among males. Housseini told them that even though we are outsiders visiting Muslims in their village, when we recite, "La illaha il Allah," we are all brothers. Then, he would invite them to join us for evening prayer and a subsequent study session at our host mosque, or come to our hometowns to visit us. Most people were happy to meet a friendly group of Muslims, especially an exotic foreigner, and they smiled and nodded patiently at Housseini's speech.

No one ever mentioned the name of the movement, and we did not even say that we were in town to do da'wah work; Housseini habitually explained that we were in town to “visit” (探望) Muslim brothers, but we still met with some hostility. When Housseini greeted one of several motorized rickshaw drivers waiting around outside the market, he had just launched into his spiel when the man interrupted to say, “Don't preach/proselytize to me” (不要传我). Housseini and he got into a rather heated exchange, which was largely in the local dialect and mostly incomprehensible to me. As we walked away, Housseini explained that the man argued that having faith in one's heart is enough, so he did not feel the need to attend prayer in mosques and certainly did not want to discuss Islam with us. Housseini said that this was a disappointing attitude, but just shook his head and said, “We don't have the qualifications to spread the faith, we can only correct ourselves.” (我们没有传教的资格, 我们只要改变我们自己). We discussed how the Qur'an states that it is a Muslim's responsibility to share faith with unbelievers, but also makes it clear that only Allah has the power to make them believe. As such, the Tablighi missionary endeavor is an outward performance that does not require positive reception or knowledgeable participants in order to help jama'atis embody a pious and humble habitus.

In order to persuade people of any ethnicity to embrace Islam, Tablighis often argue against the government's official narrative that describes religion as a passively inherited ethnic characteristic, instead describing it as a universal faith. Jama'atis generally focus their efforts on Muslims, but they do not pass up opportunities to share their message with unbelievers. In my three-day experience, we greeted every Muslim

and only Muslims as we walked the streets, but if a non-Muslim accompanied a Muslim, Housseini would not pass up the chance to preach to him as well. We also made purposeful visits to two Han men whom our local contacts considered to be prospects for conversion. The word *salaam* (“peace”) is used as a greeting throughout the Muslim world, but it is especially strongly marked as a salient religious and ethnic marker in western China, and non-Muslims tend to be reluctant to use it. Often, we would greet a Muslim on the street, and then learn that his companion was a non-Muslim because he did not return the “salaam” (or extend his hand to be shaken). Even after Housseini explained the phrase’s meaning, the Han would not return this greeting, but Housseini also encouraged them to say, “La illaha il Allah,” which he said would make us closer than kin without going into the implications of uttering the Islamic declaration of faith. Tablighis seemed to believe that there was some instrumental magic in the formula even if the speaker did not understand its meaning.

Upon a local Muslim’s suggestion, we visited the Han owner of a furniture store, who had been persuaded to recite this declaration of faith under similar circumstances, but still clung to the Han version of what he called “atheism” (无神论) that included a small shrine to the god of wealth in the back of his store. Housseini pointed out a do-it-yourself cross-stitching of the declaration of faith in Arabic calligraphy for sale in the store and explained what it meant. He seemed to view the presence of this item as an openness to accept Islam, and he argued that even Han swear to heaven because they are innately aware of the presence of God. The man was barely able to get a word in amidst Housseini’s preaching, but he did say that he was familiar with Hui culture as he grew up

in a predominantly Hui area of Gansu. In response, Housseini made it clear that Hui and Muslim are not the same, saying that many Hui do not pray or believe in Islam, so they will still go to Hell, and that Han can also go to heaven if they believe and pray.

Despite this universalist message, the effort at embodying and verbally emphasizing Islamic identity often created separation between jama'atis and non-Hui. However, shared regional identity created a sense of fraternity between Housseini and one Han man who was otherwise hostile to the proselytizing project. One of the regulars in our host mosque took us to visit his little sister's neighbor in a predominantly Tibetan village that was about an hour away by bus. The principal local organizer tried to dissuade Housseini from taking this excursion because he had a dinner and a session of comon visits planned for us, but Housseini persuaded him that we should make time for this special visit. Once again, we found the freedom to choose our own path within the structure of the movement and Housseini's prioritization won out over the local Tablighi leader.

The target of our "special visit" was an old grandfather from Henan Province whose daughter had converted to Islam. He was staying at her house and caring for his grandchild while his daughter opened a noodle restaurant in eastern China (as many ambitious young Hui do⁵³). Our local escort told us that he had been waiting for a jama'at who could communicate with the old man, who could not understand the local dialect. When our local guide and Housseini went up to the door together, the old man hostilely

⁵³ Unfortunately, I was unable to learn the details about this woman's conversion. It is possible that she converted when she married a Muslim, but it is still interesting that her religious conversion was followed by her entry into a Hui-dominated industry, selling halal noodle dishes. I also met some Han who worked in such restaurants, and some of them ended up becoming Muslims.

met them before they could even knock, saying, “What are you doing? I am not from here; I don’t understand what you say.” (你干吗? 我是外地人.听不懂). He obviously had been approached before, and he laughed derisively at Housseini’s claim that he was just coming to “visit” (探望). He repeatedly said that he did not want to hear about Islam because he was Han and too old to change his ways. Nevertheless, one’s hometown and home province are still significant elements of identity in China, so the fact that Housseini’s parents were also from Henan prevented the old man from turning him away. He clearly viewed Islam as an attribute of the Hui ethnicity calling it “Hui religion” (回教, which is the traditional term for Islam in China, used before it became transliterated as *Yisilan jiao*) and associating it with this village which was not his home, repeatedly saying he would be leaving before long. In the eyes of this old man, there was no difference between Islam, Hui religion, and Hui ethnicity. In spite of the man’s reticence to listen to Housseini, his wife brought stools out for us to sit on the porch while Housseini talked to him for around thirty minutes. He stubbornly clung to his atheism as part of his Han identity and did not want to hear Housseini translate the call to prayer when it sounded from a nearby mosque. He declared, “I am Han, I don’t want to hear your Hui talk!” (我是汉族人, 我不要听你回族话). Despite this recalcitrance, Housseini and our local guide viewed the mission as a success. The message was delivered even though it was emphatically rejected, and thus the evangelical role was fulfilled.

Only after returning from this jama’at did I realize how widespread the movement was. Immediately upon our return to Xining, I ran into an acquaintance from the Salafi

mosque and introduced him to my companions. He nodded patiently as Housseni launched into his spiel, but when Housseni encouraged him to go on jama'at, he said he had gone before. I met with similar reactions later in the day when I told other Muslim informants where I had been, with most nodding in recognition and saying that they had been on at least one jama'at themselves. Even most of those who expressed skepticism or criticism of the movement agreed that studying with Tablighis or going on one jama'at was a good experience. That evening, I met an imam at the historic Beiguan Mosque, located, as noted earlier, in an upper class, predominantly Hui neighborhood. He told me that one of his classmates from his studies as a manla had become a successful businessman and a major sponsor of the Tablighi movement in Xi'an. Another imam at the mosque invited me to come to his house the next morning when he was treating many jama'atis for breakfast, and then insisted on having me over for dinner that night when I told him I could not make it in the morning. There was one awkward moment over dinner when I mentioned that I usually attended the Salafi mosque. My host looked surprised and said, "They believe that Allah has a form" (他们信真主有性). I quickly clarified that I attend many mosques and "do not distinguish between sects" (不要分教派). They immediately nodded in agreement at this piece of standard Tablighi parlance, saying that all those who believe in Allah and Muhammad were brothers.

Local manifestations

The basic practices of Tablighi Jama'at remain reasonably constant internationally and are reinforced by massive annual gatherings and regular international travel of jama'ats. Neutrality (or ambiguity) in matters of political, sectarian, and regional

importance successfully devalues and separates these issues and modes of identity that often cause division among Muslims. Thus, Tablighis are united in the pure realm of religion, but have no unified approach to worldly matters. Individuals participating in Tablighi Jama'at accept the responsibility to cooperatively impose a code of behavior upon themselves that is sufficiently strict to render secular laws redundant and the local and national communities and leaders attached to them irrelevant. This unspoken transcendence of local and national authority constitutes "an implicit critique of the global nation-state system" (Sikand 2006:186), which in turn causes many national authorities to regard the Tablighi Jama'at with suspicion (Noor 2012:191-2). Paradoxically, the movement's renunciation of politics permits the movement to play a variety of political roles in order to perpetuate and expand itself in a multitude of political contexts (Sikand 2006:177). Sikand (2006) argues that this stance supports the status quo in the short term, but Tablighi Jama'at's ultimate goal is to improve the virtue of each individual Muslim and only then is it potentially possible that Allah will empower Muslims politically. In the short term, an apolitical stance allows the movement to welcome politically active participants and even benefit from their sponsorship without becoming closely associated with their members' sometimes controversial causes or political parties. Tablighi Jama'at's ability to provide a mode of agentive and potentially exuberant participation in Islam while maintaining political innocuousness has obvious attractions for many Chinese Muslims, who must contend with state suspicion, feel that renewal is necessary to prevent the disappearance of their faith, and for whom ambitions to political power are not even on the agenda.

Even though core Tablighi practices remain constant throughout the world, studies of Tablighi Jama'at reveal an astonishing amount of variety in the movement's manifestations and articulations. While the participants I met in China tended to deemphasize their stigmatized ethnic identity in favor of universal religious identity, Hollup (2006) reveals how Tablighi Jama'at revivalists in Mauritius do the reverse and strive to reframe themselves as an ethnic group in order to secure a share of political power. In Bangladesh, Tablighi Jama'at also fuses with local traditions by associating especially devoted jama'atis with the same sorts of miracles and supernatural powers usually attributed to Sufi saints in this region (Sikand 1999:108). On the other hand, Tablighis in Thailand clash with local Muslims practicing ancestor worship (Horstmann 2007). And Tablighi orthodoxy also provokes conflict with Sufis, madrasa teachers, and the locally prevalent followers of the Maliki madhab in Gambia (Janson 2006). In China and all over the world, many Muslims find the aggressive promotion of a foreign version of orthodoxy distasteful, but others find the transnational connection to the purportedly more devout land of South Asia alluring and sometimes useful for pursuing local individual or group goals.

Chinese Tablighis eagerly told me that I should go to India or Pakistan to see the "real" movement, and Horstmann (2007:125) argues, "Non-Arabian South Asia now has the status of being the centre in a new world order." The historical and cultural influence of South Asia makes Tablighi Jama'at popular among members of the South Asian diaspora, but this particularistic association can limit its appeal to other groups. Azmi (2000:232-233) suggests that the dominance of South Asian language and cultural

practices is one reason why participants of other ethnicities and those who have become acculturated to Canadian life usually do not become active in the Canadian movement. And Azmi (2000:236-8) argues that Tablighi failure to engage with multiculturalism and secular modernity has limited the movement's success in North America. Sikand (1998:189) reveals that that South Asian cultural baggage may play a role in the movement's failure to attract younger, British-born Muslims, who "do not think of themselves as Asians at all, but simply as Muslims." The movement's association with Pakistani and South Asian emigrants is a conspicuous feature in many countries, but this does not hold true in China, which lacks a sizable population of South Asian residents or immigrants. The Chinese manifestation seems to have successfully portrayed itself as a universal Muslim movement. Chinese Tablighis admire the devotion of South Asian jama'atis who travel through China, but the demographic reality of China means that most participants in the People's Republic are Chinese. Even though some Chinese condemn the Tablighi movement as foreign innovation, most Chinese Muslims tend to admire foreign Muslims and their nations as being more devout than their atheist homeland.

Tablighi in the Transnational Field of Power

Even though Tablighi Jama'at urges individuals to integrate Islam into every aspect of their lives, the movement also is well-adapted to Muslim communities living in secular societies. Tablighis often emphasize the distinction between *din* "religion" and *duniya* "worldly affairs," which justifies non-participation in the worldly realm of politics and peaceful coexistence with unbelievers in mundane activities (Sikand 1999:114).

Tablighis advocate a lifestyle that is solely dedicated to spiritual affairs, sparingly engaging in worldly pursuits only to the extent necessary to acquire life's necessities; however, few participants actually live an ascetic lifestyle full-time. This doctrinal emphasis on spiritual over mundane needs leads many Tablighis to only attend to others' spiritual needs, including neglecting their families' financial needs and preaching to the poor instead of giving them food, clothing, or money. This perceived neglect provokes much criticism of the movement.

Tablighis strive to overcome the divide between sacred and profane by encouraging participants to implement the religious comportment learned on jama'at in their daily lives, but this is not entirely successful. As Sikand (2002:271) notes, "In practice if not in theory, it [this division] has made, inadvertently, for an incipient secularisation of Muslim societies through the personalisation of religion." Most of the guidelines governing behavior on jama'at can be extended to mundane life, but the movement does not provide guidelines for behavior that belongs solely to the worldly realm like politics, beyond stipulating that one should always comply with Islamic law. Indeed, Sikand (1998:182) points out that in Britain the movement is more popular among Gujarati immigrants who have long been accustomed to their status as a religious minority in India and tend to avoid politics, whereas Muslim immigrants from Pakistan who have grown up in a majority Islamic society are more likely to support political Islam than quietist movements like the Tablighi Jama'at. From its origins in India to its manifestations in societies like China and the United States, the Tablighi Jama'at offers means of building community and accommodating internal diversity while permitting

individual Muslims the agency to decide how and how much to engage with non-Muslim societies.

It is difficult to theorize the type of power the Tablighi Jama'at wields over participants who are subject to the constant surveillance of their peers but are also free, given the exigencies of their situation in Qinghai, to decrease or cease participation in the movement at any time, usually with approval (or at least rarely censure) from the mainstream Hui Muslim community. Noor (2012:147) discusses Tablighi Jama'at as an individualized, voluntary commitment, but he also applies Foucault's notion of the modern soul as "a product of power in the regimes of control" to the movement. He claims this notion of the soul as a product of power parallels how Darius Rejali portrays the modern Islamic Republic of Iran as being concerned with "reforming the Self and creating the ideal Muslim subject." There are of course countless differences between a Shi'a Islamic government and an evangelical Sunni piety movement, but one of the more important contrasts is that Tablighis police each other's behavior through peer pressure without coercive enforcement from above. Noor (2012:151) likens the communal living arrangements among Tablighis during their jama'ats, especially a highly visible toilet area at a *markaz* in Jakarta, to a manifestation of the panopticon, where any violations of the rules are highly visible and subject to correction. Tablighis organize spaces and activities in which every participant can see and be seen by all others, as in the study circle, rather than simply being visible to the central authority of a conventional panopticon. Incessant performance of behaviors and speeches allows Tablighis to help

each other cultivate technologies of the self to refine themselves and each other into ideal Muslim subjects.

A centralized hierarchy manages the Tablighi Jama'at on international and national levels, but local amirs who constantly consult with participants and delegate responsibility allow it to function like and appear to be a grassroots community association at the local level, which is why the issue of hierarchy and authority might seem vague in this discussion, the movement strives to keep it this way. Neither Noor (2012:157-8) nor myself had access to the inner workings of Tablighi leadership, but we both observed a movement in which subtle peer pressure is the only *visible* force ensuring compliance with numerous rules governing every detail of life. Participation is highly variable and entirely voluntary, and everyday decision-making seems to be conducted in a transparent and decentralized manner. On my own jama'at, we made several independent decisions that contradicted local leaders' wishes or the movement's conventional practices. Indeed, Noor (2012:163) describes the situation by writing, "Life in and among the Tablighi Jama'at can be described as corseted as well but it remains a life where the individual remains free enough to initiate and determine his own process of personal transformation." Individuals choose to participate in Tablighi Jama'at as an implicit response to, and often rejection of, local, national, and transnational schemes of political and religious authority. However, as Noor describes them, and also in my own experience, most jama'atis are too focused on cultivating their own piety to think about such worldly concerns.

The Tablighi Jama'at movement in China is a highly structured system of practice with a surprising amount of room for individual agency. There is a loose hierarchy of organizers that tend to lead from behind, guiding, cajoling, and enabling an amorphous and porous band of jama'atis to complete a mission of self-reform. A certain performative method separates Tablighi Jama'at from other missionary movements in that participants judge success not by numbers of converts or participants recruited, but by simply performing scheduled tasks in conformance with the movement's guidelines. Even if jama'atis only lecture to one other person, who is more well-versed in the subject matter than the speaker, the lecture still must be given.⁵⁴ Even if all the local Muslims are unbearably hostile, they still must be invited to study, and it is not important whether or not they accept the invitation. A lack of objective results is not important, all that matters is that the repetition and constant self-discipline effectively alter each jama'ati's own habitus, which he will strive to maintain after the jama'at concludes.

The shared experiences of jama'at and glossing over of sectarian divisions helps to build unity among Muslims, but the incursion of a foreign methodology that implies laxity among those outside the movement also carries potential to sow division. The movement seems to be growing due to its evangelical nature, but its membership is porous and costs of participation high, so to what extent it can retain members remains to be seen. Tablighis emphasize the need to perform da'wah as the only way to prevent an eventual disappearance of the Islamic faith in China, a notion which many Chinese

⁵⁴ During my jama'at, I was once assigned to lecture to an experienced Tablighi twice my age, and only after much self-effacement and persistent persuasion did I manage to convince him that he should lecture to me instead.

Muslims actively dispute. Yacub specifically stressed the need to pass religion on to one's children, saying that people who merely pray five times a day wonder why their children don't carry on the faith. He said that simply practicing religion is not enough, one needs to "struggle" (奋斗, Arabic: jihad) in order to illustrate the meaning and importance of religious ritual for their children.

The movement's founder sought to encourage embodied religion as a means to encourage intensive study of the faith (Sikand 2002:76); however, critics today claim many Tablighis have confused the means with the ends. It is difficult to clearly define the end goal of a movement that is so spiritually and inwardly focused. To participate in the Tablighi Jama'at is to perpetually strive to perform a more perfect version of oneself. The carefully scripted behavior of the jama'ati protects him in his inward struggle against his desires and ego as he continually implores others to join the struggle against their own egos. Perhaps this method meshes well with a Chinese culture that has long relied on clearly defined public norms for acting, thinking, and feeling which are taught by memorization and recitation of moral parables and dogmatic texts. However, participants in the Tablighi Jama'at aim to not only internalize, but universalize a standard pattern of personal comportment, which promises eternal rewards, not just moral order in this life. Thus, all participants are locked in a struggle that is at once internal, communal, and universal. This struggle dwarfs all finite worldly concerns and belittles any mundane sense of identification. Tablighi Jama'at provides a subjective experience of the ummah and a venue in which to perform a more pious Muslim individuality.

Chapter 6 - Paths to Islam and Salafiyya: Harnessing the Transnational to

Empower the Individual

And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, so he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (Qur'an 14:4)

“Each person’s road is not the same.” (每一个人的路不一样) (Yusuf, A former Christian minister who converted to Islam)

On the second day of Eid al Fitr in August 2012, the festival at the end of the Ramadan fast, Mr. Ming hosted a celebratory meal at his apartment for numerous Muslim converts, as well as orphans, old people with no one to care for them, and families with handicapped people. This is a prime example of the services that his nonprofit organization, “Every Ethnicity Muslim Home” 各族穆斯林之家, provides to converts and Muslims in need. Limited financial resources mean that all of the organization’s activities take place in his home or other temporary, and usually donated, spaces. His son welcomed guests, and other young relatives rushed around refilling cups of green tea and goji berries and offering plates piled high with fruit, steamed buns, and melon seeds. Amidst the hubbub, Mr. Ming explained to me how conversion often causes new Muslims to become isolated or even estranged from their families. His organization provides encouragement and community support to take the place of the network of kin and friendships on which lifelong Muslims rely. In conclusion, Mr. Ming asked me earnestly, “Do you think this type of work can benefit Islam?” (你觉得这个工作对伊斯兰教会不会有好处?).

At this gathering, Mr. Ming introduced me to Yusuf, a former Christian minister from Yunnan Province who had converted to Islam. This new Muslim told me that he had studied Christianity for a long time, but could not resolve one dilemma. He explained how the Bible says that the “pious” (虔诚) and those with the “Holy Spirit in their hearts” (圣灵在心里) will enter heaven, but Christians also emphasize that those with faith will enter heaven. He complained that this latter claim contradicts the first and makes it too easy to profess faith and still live a sinful life. Thus, he explained how he used to worried about how to maintain piety and awareness of the divine, saying he felt the spirit on Sundays while singing songs of praise, but the feeling was only temporary. Eventually, he found answers in the Qur’an, which enabled him to maintain piety and feel the presence of the divine through daily prayer and countless outward appearances and behaviors. His conversion was not easy because his whole family had converted to Christianity in the 1980s, and they live in a predominantly Christian village. He related how his mother seemed understanding when he first told her about Islam, but she accused him of apostasy (叛教) after she discussed his conversion with fellow villagers. He had been a Christian missionary, traveling around China and helping to establish churches, and so now he returns to some of these places with other participants in the Tablighi Jama’at movement, but no one will listen to his new message.

When the program began, Mr. Ming welcomed his guests with a short speech over a microphone, which he then handed off to Yusuf. After some words of praise for Allah, he spoke about the situation of Islam in Xining, celebrating the fact that the city contains as many as 2000 new Muslims, but adding that their work has just begun because now

they need to focus on educating themselves to “develop new Muslims’ religion” (发展新穆斯林教门). This development will, in turn, advance their economic and cultural/educational (文化) position. To this end, he suggested that everyone should devote 10% of this or her time to studying, and should also travel to visit and encourage other Muslims. Naming a specific percentage of time to devote to study each time clearly indicated his participation in Tablighi Jama’at and the recommendation to travel confirmed it. He did not call for volunteers to go on jama’at as he would have if it were a Tablighi gathering, but he did repeat the Tablighi refrain that the Islamic faith will be lost if one neglects it. After numerous more speeches and a brief lesson on Qur’an by an older woman wearing a veil that revealed only her eyes⁵⁵ (she came into the main living room for this speech, but for the rest of the time she and all other women present occupied the interior, more private rooms of the apartment), the Ming family served all the attendees a large lunch, with many of us dining at tables set up outside in the apartment complex’s courtyard.

During this meal, a regular attendee at the Salafi mosque named Ameen who has studied Arabic in Malaysia got into a heated discussion with Yusuf, the former minister. Ameen was in attendance because his grandfather’s conversion at the end of the Qing Dynasty makes him a “third generation new Muslim” (三辈新穆斯林). Like many Salafis, Ameen often complains of uneducated Tablighis misrepresenting some Hadith, including claiming that a sahaba drank the prophet’s urine or blood. Ameen said that such assertions make him angry, driving him to demand the source of the Hadith and to ask,

⁵⁵ In Qinghai, the hijab is common, but it is very rare to see someone veiling their entire face.

“How can you not know these things are haram? What are you preaching?” (你不知道这些东西是 haram? 你传什么?) Ameen also reiterated the Salafi critique of Tablighis emphasizing travel as an essential religious practice. He argued that different sahaba emphasized different practices. Some did travel and preach like Tablighis, but others stayed home and memorized Hadith, raised families, or taught Qur’an. Thus, it is not possible to recreate a single, ideal sahaba lifestyle. Eventually, Ameen the Salafi and the Tablighi convert reached an agreement that Muslims must stay united and not judge each other, and the former minister gathered his things to depart while Ameen continued criticizing the Tablighi movement to others in the local dialect (which was unintelligible to Yusuf). Each companion of the prophet, convert to Islam, and newcomer to Salafiyya forges an individual path to become part of a faith and community he or she perceives to be universal.

Conversion to Islam is a momentous personal transformation under any circumstances, but it is an especially unusual and challenging transition in a predominantly atheist nation in which most people’s faith is assumed to be determined by ethnicity. Within Chinese Islam itself, conversion to a new and often-maligned religious movement like Salafiyya carries a similar stigma. Indeed, one’s ancestral faith is so significant that Ameen is still considered a new Muslim over 100 years after his grandfather converted. However, Chinese Muslims view conversion as evidence of the rising influence of Islam in China and around the world, and Salafis see the growth of their movement as a modernization of Chinese Islam. Converts’ own words reveal that they perceive their turn to religion not as a sudden, mystical realization or a return to the

wisdom of an ancient community, but as a carefully considered, rational decision made by independent individuals without regard for the traditional restraints of family ties, ancestral beliefs, and social expectations. In spite of popular Chinese conceptions of religion as old-fashioned, these converts are expressing what could be termed a modern subjectivity in that they are making independent rational decisions based, in theory, on careful study of texts and practical considerations. The same could be said of Muslims who convert from their ancestral sectarian affiliation to the Salafiyya, which is certainly a smaller change than the shift from nonbeliever to Muslim, but it also entails leaving the community of one mosque to join another, and this often causes alienation among friends and even family members. Conversions to Islam and Salafiyya both feature individualized pursuit of knowledge and self-cultivation, which challenges traditional ethnic identities and local authorities with the ascendance of transcendent religious identity and claims to membership in a global ummah.

In a nation that is 92% Han Chinese, it is not surprising that most converts to Islam are Han, but conversion alters this ethnic identity; after accepting Islam, they call themselves “Han-Hui” (汉回) or “ethnic Han Muslims” (汉族穆斯林). This clarification is necessary because Chinese Muslims tend to classify all local people as Hui or Han, Muslim or non-Muslim, but the terminology also notes the depth of conversion’s concomitant change in identity. I also met converts from Tu, Mongolian, and Tibetan ethnicities, and some of these converts were former Christians. A few people converted when they married a Muslim, which is historically common and socially acceptable, but this chapter will focus on several people who made the decision to convert due to their

own attraction to and study of Islam. Most of these converts had Muslim acquaintances who inspired them to learn more about Islam, and the Muslim community gradually became sort of a surrogate family for many converts who had left their ancestral homes to move to Xining. As Stark and Bainbridge (1980) have described, the deprivation of lonely migrants encourages them to find solace religious social networks, and Kose (1994:120) shows how these factors have drawn many British converts to Islam. Chinese as well as British (Kose 1994) and French (Lakhdar et al 2007) converts to Islam characterize their conversion as an individual choice involving much careful study, but one wonders why they eventually choose Islam (instead of the locally prominent faiths of Buddhism or Daoism or Christianity with its transnational and modern associations) besides the subtle push of deprivation and pull of Islamic community.

While the draw of Muslim brotherhood and sisterhood is not insignificant, it would be too simplistic to consider the diverse array of converts to Islam as an amalgamation of displaced persons looking for a sense of belonging. Islam also appeals to Chinese converts because it offers a spiritual alternative to the predominant materialism, but they still justify their conversions with materialist rationalizations. When asked for the reasons behind conversion, most new Muslims immediately cite the “scientific” nature of the faith. They refer to passages in the Qur’an describing the human gestation process (22.5, 23.14) and a female spider spinning a web (29.41), scientific facts miraculously proved to be accurate centuries after the Qur’an’s revelation. Converts also recall being impressed by the physiological benefits of performing ablution, performing daily prayer, and other practices found in the Hadith that include taking naps

and brushing one's teeth. Converts and other Muslims cite all these reasons, and the belief that an illiterate person like Muhammad could not have composed the Qur'an himself, as evidence that this scripture was divinely revealed. They also point out that the Qur'an is unaltered and unalterable nature as compared to the Bible, and this argument is especially relevant to the former Christians who seem to be disproportionately represented among converts. Perhaps the party's historical narrative has inspired suspicion of Western Christianity and disillusionment with backward and parochial Chinese religions to make Islam appear to be the religion of the future.

Since the Chinese educational system promotes the Marxist view of religion as a fading relic of the feudal era, most non-Muslim Chinese people express shock and confusion upon learning that any of their fellow Chinese convert to Islam. They are equally shocked to see a young, white American performing Muslim prayer and even fasting during Ramadan, behaviors they associated with old, Hui men. To highlight the backwardness of China's anti-theism, Muslims characterize the United States and European countries as belonging to "Christian culture" (基督教文化), and they frequently claim that there are huge numbers of Muslim converts in China's more developed rival nations, specifically naming the United States, Japan, and Europe. Chinese Muslims are always eager to ask about how many Muslims there are in the United States, and they often correct my (rather arbitrary) estimate of about three million, saying they have heard there are many more. They also excitedly ask me to confirm that all U.S. currency has "In God We Trust" written on it. Some Muslims unreflectively accept the party's claims to support "freedom of belief" (信仰自由), but most realize that

those in the West enjoy a greater degree of freedom, and they sigh in wonder when I tell them that the American government does not keep track of each citizen's religion. Chinese citizens are free to convert to Islam today without legal obstacles, but they face alienation from friends and family, the challenge of building professional connections without participating in drinking culture, and social stigma brought on by emphasizing foreign, spiritual values in a society that equated modernity with materialism.

Individual Transformation in Pursuit of the Universal

Converting to Islam and switching one's sectarian affiliation are radically different actions, but both of these are individual choices that are fundamental components of China's Islamic revival. Just as conversion to Islam often alienates many converts' non-Muslim friends and relations, joining the Salafiyya movement often causes division between a new Salafi and the members of his or her previous sect. Unfortunately, there are no recent published statistics on the numbers of Muslims or growth rates of each sect, but the fact that most Salafis can recall when they or their family joined the movement seems to indicate that the growth rate is substantial. The Salafis support this optimistic perspective, and the amount of Yihewani hostility seems to indicate that they perceive Salafism as a threat. It is possible that substantial numbers of Salafis are leaving the sect as well, but I never met anyone who claimed to be a former Salafi. Ma Zhi Qiang, a graduate student at Lanzhou University studying Salafism in Ningxia, claims that other sects grow in accordance with their birthrate, but Salafism grows much more rapidly because it attracts new adherents from other sects in addition to its natural growth through the addition of members' children (personal communication). He puts the

number of Salafis in Ningxia at 10,000 people in 101 mosques, with the biggest concentration at Hongsibao 红寺堡 in central Ningxia. He also confirms my observations that Salafiyya contains a disproportionate number of young people and Muslims who have studied abroad in Muslim nations. While Ma Zhi Qiang is primarily concerned with measuring the proliferation and present status of Salafism, herein, I examine the subjective experiences that lead people to convert to Islam or alter their sectarian affiliation.

Converts to Islam from Han and other traditionally non-Muslim ethnic groups are simply called “new Muslims” 新穆斯林 as opposed to “old Muslims” (老穆斯林), those who were born as members of the Hui or other Islamic minorities. While Ameen generally classifies himself as Hui or “old Muslim,” for the sake of encouraging converts, he also calls himself a “third generation new Muslim.” Yusuf’s estimate of 2,000 new Muslims in Xining might be an exaggeration, but other Muslims claim that Xining has the most Muslim converts in China, and there are no published statistics on this matter. Muslims from other cities admire the unity of Xining’s Muslims, who mostly live in the same district and congregate at the same mosque each Friday. This sense of community likely encourages conversion as well. My own observations indicate that new Muslims are disproportionately represented among the Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama’at movements, which is hardly unexpected, since both movements actively proselytize far more than more traditional sects. Informants make this claim as well, but they speak from the biased perspective of these movements. Salafis also suggest that Salafism is more welcoming to new Muslims and other outsiders who did not understand the idiosyncratic traditions of

different sects and localities. Several new Muslims self-identify as Salafis, but most converts refuse to claim specific sectarian allegiance. Popular disapproval of Salafism and of sectarianism in general might counteract Salafism's appeal for many converts. Conversion often includes estrangement from friends and family, so joining a disparaged minority sect within Islam has the potential to alienate a new Muslim from most of the new community he or she is joining. Even though Salafis argue that their sect is popular internationally and the only correct one, it is difficult to be a Salafi in predominantly Yihewani Xining without encountering some disapproval. A sense of belonging is a crucial component of converting to Islam or Salafiyya; the local Yihewani, Gedimu, and Sufi communities offer a larger local community, but Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at arguably offer a stronger connection to the international ummah.

Salafi Da'wah: Mr. Ming

Mr. Ming is constantly taking Muslims out to lunch or offering to drive them home from the mosque in his beat-up 1992 Volkswagen Santana. The first time I met him outside the mosque, he took me by the arm, put me in his car, drove out the gate of the mosque, parked the car, led me into a small noodle restaurant right across the street from the mosque, and treated me to lunch with three recent converts. He did not eat or even sit down; he just stood ordering food and encouraging the newcomers to Islam to get to know each other. I have chosen to call him Mr. Ming, not only because one student at the Salafi mosque who practiced his English with me refers to him this way in English, but everyone else calls him "Ming Ah Ba," which translates to "Mr. Ming" or "Uncle Ming" in the local dialect. "Ah Ba" is a term of respect used to address elder (usually Muslim)

men, but it also contrasts with “ahong” to denote that Mr. Ming lacks a formal Islamic education. He is 55 years-old and sold used cars for 40 years before dedicating himself to da’wah work full-time. He fits the mold of a stereotypical used car salesman, a fast-talker, constantly rushing around, quick to laughter, and always ready with a handshake and a mischievous smile that suggests he has some scheme up his sleeve. At one point, Ming told me that he was responsible for forty conversions, proudly stating that Qinghai has more converts than anywhere in China.

In general, Chinese Salafis tended to focus on individual pursuits like studying, memorizing, and achieving deeper understanding of Qur’an and Hadith, but a few of them also participate in Tablighi Jama’at or other sorts of philanthropic and missionary activities. Those Salafis who participate in the Tablighi Jama’at movement tend to be younger and not formally educated in Islam, but Tablighi Jama’at movement does not have a strict monopoly on evangelism.

In light of the small number of Salafis in China, many adherents work to share the movement’s ideas with more Muslims. But Mr. Ming is the only Salafi I met who dedicates himself to da’wah work as a full-time occupation of propagating Islam and supporting converts and Muslims in need. Unlike the Tablighi Jama’at, his organization is independent and locally operated and provides material support for poor Muslims as well as religious instruction, but like the Tablighi Jama’at, he attempts to transcend sectarian bounds. His “Every Ethnicity Muslim Home” (各族穆斯林之家) provides religious classes for children; hosts Muslim holiday celebrations for converts and other Muslims with no place to celebrate; brings food, clothing, money, and religious textbooks to rural

Muslims; and seeks to win converts to Islam. Its operations are entirely dependent on meager donations from local Muslims and volunteers, which mostly include Mr. Ming, his brother, his son, and about a dozen recent converts.

As of 2013, Mr. Ming's "home" organization does not have a physical home due to a lack of funding that caused him to lose the modest office space his organization once occupied, but his goal is to have an actual home where converts can live, study, and pray together. His organization prints a single-page wall calendar with a picture of Dongguan Mosque and the words "Every Ethnicity Muslim Home welcomes you!" (各族穆斯林之家欢迎您) above a two-story house with a two car garage, front porch, and lawn that would be typical of any middle class, suburban housing development in the U.S. This type of housing is nowhere to be seen in Xining, but such images are commonly used symbols of prosperity and happiness in local advertisements, especially for real estate. This materialistic imagery and Mr. Ming's organized provision of material assistance and conventional classes stands in stark contrast to Tablighi Jama'at methods. Ming himself attends the Salafi mosque whenever possible, but on philanthropic junkets to rural areas, he stops to pray at mosques regardless of their sectarian affiliation. The attendees on these junkets include many converts. Some of them regularly attend the Salafi mosque, but perhaps even more attend the Yihewani Dong Guan Mosque, and like most people in Xining, they place no obvious importance on sectarian issues.

Without the asceticism and established network of the Tablighi Jama'at, Mr. Ming and his family struggle to build his organization while coping with meager public support and onerous government hurdles. Ming complains that the local government is suspicious

of the activities of Muslim organizations like his, and he says that no mosque wants to help him or allow his organization use its facilities for fear of arousing the party's suspicions. Ming claims that the government permits Muslims to pray and study, but the party is wary of any other organized activities, even those dedicated to educating and alleviating poverty among rural Muslims. Such projects include religious activities outside of state-approved religious institutions, so they are banned under the state religious policy. In spite of financial and legal difficulties, Ming always seems to be in good cheer, and he often expresses how happy his da'wah work makes him. Since 1995, he has organized between 20 and 35 children's religion and Arabic classes each year. Classes meet after school and all day during national holidays, which Salafiyya, Yihewani, and some believers from other sects do not celebrate.⁵⁶ The number of classes constantly varies because Ming struggles to find enough teachers and classroom space to keep up with demand. These volunteers include housewives, teenage manla, and others with basic knowledge of Arabic and Islam and the patience to work with children. It is important to remember that teaching religion to minors is illegal according to the national religious policy. Even though virtually every mosque posts notices to enroll children in classes during the Lunar New Year holiday (even though party religious policy forbids teaching religion to minors), supporting classes like Mr. Ming's, which take place outside state-sanctioned religious institutions, involves a higher element of legal risk. A Salar ahong from Qinghai teaching at Aisa's mosque in Ningxia also helped to establish Arabic

⁵⁶ Strict Salafis and Tablighi Jama'at participants consider both traditional Chinese holidays like Chinese New Year and the Moon Festival as well as patriotic holidays like October 1 (Chinese National Day) and May Day to be idolatrous and un-Islamic. Observance of these holidays varies among adherents to other sects.

classes at a public school in Guangzhou for the children of Hui noodle shop owners and employees, many of whom are migrants from Qinghai and Gansu. He would teach Arabic when administrators were present and Islam when they left, but he argued that these naturally overlap, as in the case of the Arabic greeting, “Peace be with you.” (Assalaam alaykum), which is found in the Qur’an.

Mr. Ming arranges classes for children, who learn virtually nothing about Islam in public schools. In addition to teaching basic Arabic and encouraging them to persevere as good Muslims in a sinful world, he offers a new perspective on what it means to be Muslim and an implicit—but only implicit—critique of the Marxist view of religion. During the Chinese New Year holiday, Ming took me to visit several of his study classes in cramped, unheated classrooms on the fringes of town. When I agreed to come with him, I did not realize that I would become a prop for him to display the truth and universality of Islam. Each time we entered one of his classes, which were taught in private apartments or spare rooms of apartment buildings, he would have them recite basic declarations of Islamic faith and the first surah of the Qur’an in a singsong manner. Then, he would say a few words of encouragement and sometimes give the students books or inexpensive little toys. Ming would introduce me as proof that even Americans were coming to Islam and that the Arabic they were learning was of universal importance. Sometimes I would say a few words in English, urging them to practice saying, “Hello” and any other English words they knew. Most of these youngsters probably had never met a foreigner and never could have conceived that they held something in common, like the study of Islam, or even the use of English, with a

foreigner like me. My presence challenged students' assumptions about conflation of religious and ethnic identity common in China.

On occasion, Mr. Ming leads junkets to the countryside, delivering encouragement to rural Muslims in the same way he drops in on his children's classes. He also brings gifts of money, Islamic texts, and sometimes donated food and clothing to congregations with whom he has relationships. Several converts accompany him on these trips, helping him to encourage the villagers and showing them that Islam is strong and growing. He also encourages converts to get to know each other on these trips, consciously building community. One day after I first met Mr. Ming, he picked me up at seven a.m. to take me to Ahmed's village mosque a couple hours southwest of the city. This trip consisted of a single carload, but a later junket to a different village would fill three entire minibuses packed with people and donated clothing. For the first trip, he also picked up two female Muslim converts, a twelve year-old girl and Teacher Yang, a middle-aged kindergarten teacher, each of whom would later give a speech to Ahmed's congregation. Teacher Yang also was looking for a new site to expand her Islamic kindergarten. During my time in Xining, I rarely had the opportunity to speak with Muslim women, and so I was surprised when these women, who were not related to either of us, joined us for the trip. Mr. Ming, Ahmed, and everyone we encountered showed great deference to Teacher Yang. The Chinese Muslims I met speak very highly of women, saying they are more precious than men and must be protected, but they also say that women mostly exist in a separate sphere from men, so they generally are in the kitchen or a separate room when I or any other strange man visits their homes. However,

Yang's being a kindergarten teacher, quite aside from her religious commitments, gives her a more public position and a reason to collaborate with male educators, and the fact that she willfully converted to Islam makes her an inspiration to old Muslims who merely inherited their faith.

Teacher Yang: A New Muslim Teaching Old Muslims

Like many new Muslims, Teacher Yang is passionate about the study of Islam, is more orthodox in practice than most Chinese Muslims, and aims to inspire others to join the faith or become more observant of it. A frequent speaker at events for Muslim converts, she eloquently recounts how she inherited her Catholic mother's faith in spite of having an atheist father, but she never felt comfortable confessing sins to a priest. Her doubts increased when she learned in history class how the Roman Empire canonized and redacted the Bible centuries after its texts were revealed. She also emphasizes how it does not make sense that Jesus should take responsibility for the world's sins when they should be each person's individual responsibility. Such critiques of Christianity are common subjects of discussion among Chinese Muslims, even those who have far less personal experience of the Christian faith than Teacher Yang. Her hometown in Shanxi had few Muslims, so she had virtually no knowledge of Islam until she came to Xining to live with a relative of her father in 2000. Yang made Muslim friends and described having a "very good feeling" (挺好的感觉) about them, so she began reading the Qur'an and liked what she learned. Like many other converts, Yang finds the practical benefits of Islamic practice impressive, and she credits not eating pork or drinking alcohol with marked improvements in her health. She studied Islam as a non-Muslim until 2003 during

Ramadan when the sight of thousands of men and boys praying together in unison outside Dong Guan Mosque in bitterly cold wind and snow finally moved her to finally accept Islam. Highlighting a single moment of conversion is rare among Chinese Muslim converts who more often describe a gradual process, but Yang also specifies that this revelation was preceded and followed by intensive study and immersion in the Islamic community.

Yang recounts the first couple years after her conversion, 2004 and 2005, as being very painful. Her family angrily condemned her conversion, so she cut herself off to safeguard her faith. Several relatives died in these first two years, and she did not even return home to attend their funerals. She also was diagnosed with terminal cervical cancer and pleaded with Allah to save her so she could make a contribution to Islam. When Yang survived, she pursued her dream of starting a kindergarten by renting a 100 square meter apartment and going door-to-door to recruit students. Many Muslims in and around Xining send their children to Islamic preschools and kindergartens to teach them the foundations of Islam before they enter the compulsory public education system and begin learning anti-religious Marxist doctrine. In addition to Islam and Arabic, Yang's students also learn basic math, Chinese, and English. Yang recounts how one Islamic school rejected her as a teacher because she is a convert, but now Ming's organization has embraced her as a role model for other converts as well as lax old Muslims. Working in the field of education gives Yang relatively high status in the Islamic community, and being a convert dedicated to studying and teaching Islam has made her critical of many old Muslims' unorthodox practices.

Teaching kindergarten is just one aspect of Yang's broader goals of increasing education and orthodoxy among Chinese Muslims in general. When speaking at Ahmed's mosque, Yang shared the story of taking a trip back to her family home, where she hoped to convert her family and friends. She took her husband and children to pray at the one mosque in town, where only three other worshippers were in attendance. She also was the only one wearing a headscarf, so many thought she had no hair or that she was a foreigner. The other women wore long, modest garments only during prayer, and they were surprised when she did not change into something more suitable for the summer heat after leaving the mosque. Yang complained that there was no halal food available in town, and the local Muslims did not even realize that animals had to be butchered in a certain way to be halal. She also criticized those who said art and music are unIslamic, saying this is a gross oversimplification, and that the former is fine as long as images do not have eyes.

She is especially disappointed at the lack of education among Muslim women. While chatting with me at Ahmed's village mosque, she fumed at "backward" (落后) Muslims who believe women should be kept ignorant, in the home, and subservient to male relatives. To Yang, laxity in important matters and overzealousness in other matters are both symptoms of poor education and cultural habits superseding actual understanding of Islamic law. She approvingly toured the facilities at Ahmed's mosque where advanced female students teach women and girls the same basic curriculum boys study. During her speech to Ahmed's congregation, she also mentioned the history of women's mosques in China as evidence that Islam can and does empower women. (See

Jaschok and Shui 2000.) When Mr. Ming and Teacher Yang gave lectures at a meeting room adjacent to the village mosque, the young male students stood at the back, and women sat in the front rows, closer to a coal stove in the center of the frigid and drafty room.

Teacher Yang sometimes prays in Salafi mosques, and she often works with Mr. Ming, but like many converts, she refuses to participate in sectarian debates. During the 45-minute car ride in which I first met the teacher, Ming and Yang discussed strategies for winning more converts to Islam before eventually moving on to discuss the history of sectarian differences in China. Ming began this line of conversation, trying to gently push Yang to consider sectarian issues. He even suggested that people probably told her not to associate with him because he was “santai” (三拾 Salafiyya). She denied hearing anything of the sort, but said that people had told her that as a convert, she should be careful whom she believed. On the way back to Xining, we passed a beautiful old, Chinese-style mosque with a prayer hall at least twice the size of Ahmed’s mosque. Teacher Yang excitedly said that they must have room for a kindergarten and urged Mr. Ming to stop so she could inquire about using classroom space. Ming refused saying that they would certainly refuse and asking would only provoke conflict. As a nonsectarian convert, Yang naively felt that all Muslims would cooperate to advance the faith, but Ming realized (or assumed) that this and all of the other mosques in the village except Ahmed’s were adherents of the Yihewani “hard sect,” and their staunch opposition to Salafiyya would make cooperation impossible.

Yang holds a sentiment in common with many Muslims who are unable or unwilling to wade into sectarian debate: she believes there is no God but Allah, that Muhammad is his messenger, the Qur'an and Hadith are infallible, all who agree on these tenets are Muslims, and any other disputes are trivial. Ming wholeheartedly agrees, because Salafis believe that other sects have erred by complicating these simple elements of faith in denying some literal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. In discussing this with Yang, Ming brought up the history of the Yihewani, saying that its original intention was to return Chinese Muslim practice to the fundamentals described in the Qur'an and Hadith, but the movement has since gone astray, citing how families will hire an ahong to recite Qur'an in commemoration of a loved one's death.⁵⁷ Yang agreed that such practices are not described in Qur'an or Hadith and are therefore misguided, but she still refused to express preference among sects. She did, however, support the fact that the Salafiyya mosque had a women's prayer room in the basement, saying she had prayed there before and too many mosques did not allow women inside.⁵⁸ Sectarian issues certainly take a back seat to Ming's goal of winning converts and taking care of Muslims, but despite the nonsectarian nature of his organization, everyone knows he and his family are Salafi. The converts I met have nothing but respect for Ming, but few of them express any interest in sectarian issues, and Ming rarely dwells on them.

⁵⁷ This is one of many practices condemned by Ma Wanfu in the early days of the Yihewani movement, and it is still condemned by many strict Yihewani today. Today, commemoration of death days is a common practice among Gedimu and some Yihewani, but not Salafis. This practice gives Muslims a means of paying respects to departed loved ones that parallels ceremonies performed by Buddhist, Daoist, or Christian priests. This parallelism is both why such practices persist in the Chinese context and why revivalists condemn them as unIslamic.

⁵⁸ Many imams, especially those from the Yihewani sect, contend that women should pray at home. Other mosques contain a separate room or a curtained-off area for women.

Several more converts accompanied Mr. Ming on a two-hour trip to a rural village in Hualong Hui Autonomous County to deliver clothing, food, texts, and goodwill to a poor village mosque. A middle-aged woman from Henan Province told me how she first converted when she married a Hui man and moved with him to Inner Mongolia. He was not an observant Muslim, and he drank and acted irresponsibly until she left him and moved to Xining where she came to identify herself as a Han Muslim (汉族穆斯林). She began taking classes at a local mosque, reading the Qur'an, and studying Arabic. Now, five years after arriving in Xining, her goal is to return to Henan and teach all the "backward" (落后) old Muslims to pray five times a day, wear headscarves (for women), and do all the things she has come to believe that true Muslims should do. She had nominally converted for her husband, but only really explored her faith and discovered a calling to spread Islam only as an independent woman. She cited a verse in the Qur'an that claims Allah sent people to each nation/ethnicity⁵⁹ (民族), and then she asked everyone in the bus what this means (真主派出了人到所有的民族, 这是什么意思?). Then she answered her own question, saying, "This is me, and you, and you, and you!" (是我和你和你和你!) while pointing at each of person in turn. She kept saying how "most blessed/happy" (最幸福) they were to become Muslims in this atheist nation. She claimed that since Islam is only the third largest religion in the world, all Muslims are lucky that Allah has led them to the faith. Numerous converts similarly find themselves alone and somewhat outcast in Xining before finding a sense of community in

⁵⁹ The party uses the term *minzu* as a category to describe its 55 ethnic minority nationalities. However, this term often refers to all of the people sharing a government or religion in Chinese translations of the Qur'an, much as some English writing speaks of a "nation." Thus, the precise meaning of the term is ambiguous here.

Islam, she said, and they commonly try to bring others into the fold, but Muslims acknowledge that ultimately only Allah can lead someone to convert.

On the way back from Hualong, Teacher Yang and the other female convert chatted about whether it is allowable to obey regulations against wearing hijab at work.⁶⁰ Yang told her that one should wear the veil in public if possible, but she could go without it if her work required her to do so. Yang wore colorful headscarfs often adorned with rhinestones of the type favored among young, Muslim women. They refer to them as “Saudi scarves” (沙巾). Older married Muslim women and some young women, especially in conservative and rural families, wear more traditional “head coverings” (盖头). These are black velvet hijabs in Xining and elsewhere in Qinghai, pink hats ranging from a few inches to about a foot tall depending on the length of one’s hair in Ningxia, and the same style hats in a light blue color in Gansu. In 1999 Xi’an, Gillette (2004:37) also noticed a trend of women choosing these Saudi style garments they see as representing modernity over the “‘feudal’ or ‘backward’” styles traditionally favored in China. Yang and others also argue that in addition to being more stylish and colorful, the Saudi-style hijab leaves only the face exposed and is thus more authentically Islamic than the hats worn by Ningxia and Gansu women, and even the Qinghai-style hijab which often allows some hair to peak through as well. Thus, the Saudi-style hijab allows women

⁶⁰ Teachers, government employees, and workers in a variety occupations were not allowed to wear headscarves, small white hats, or other religious symbols at work. As an English teacher, Ayoob was criticized for having even a very short and neatly trimmed beard, and he put on a hat only when entering a mosque. On the other hand, some non-Muslim Han waiters and waitresses don white hats or headscarfs as part of the uniform for some Hui hotels and restaurants.

to connect themselves with what they imagine to be a more devout and modern global Islamic community.

Another tall, thirty-something male convert named Harun told of being drawn to Islam by a strong sense of community, conducting intensive study of Islam, and then eventually deciding to convert. He is part of a Christian family in Xining,⁶¹ but while working in Shanghai he often craved a taste of home and made friends with an Uyghur cook in a Lanzhou-style noodle restaurant (which is a popular and inexpensive cuisine available all over China). Harun said this man “had no Han culture,” meaning he was uneducated, semiliterate at best, and likely spoke poor Mandarin. Nevertheless, the man’s character and earnestness impressed him, and he met several of the man’s Muslim friends. This experience inspired him to go to a mosque to learn more about Islam when he returned to Xining. After months of studying Qur’an and consulting with Muslims he made the decision to convert. I asked if his family opposed this decision and he said, “Certainly they opposed, but it was useless, it is my own choice.” (肯定反对但是沒有用，是我自己的选择). This statement would be commonplace coming from an American, but it is a remarkably individualistic comment for conservative western China. Harun’s father had passed away before his conversion, leaving only his mother in his immediate family, so the aforementioned female convert urged him to convert her, even offering to speak with her woman-to-woman. Most Chinese people view going against

⁶¹ Xining is home to one Protestant and one Catholic church, both affiliated with the official national churches, and at least one Western-run house church. Dozens of unofficial Western missionaries study in local universities, run Western-style cafes, and work as English teachers. I also met several Chinese Christians from eastern China who had traveled to western China to share their faith, where Christians are presumably fewer.

their parents' faith as selfish and unfilial, so converts often see converting their parents as an essential task to preserve harmony in this life and aid their parents in the next. Weeks later, I ran into Harun on a public bus and told him I was on my way to Shu Lin Xiang, the Salafi mosque. As the bus passed two or three mosques on the way, he pointedly said that I could pray at any mosque and told me, "Don't split the religion" (不要分教门). Converts in general are happy to be a part of a newfound community, so they often see partisans of various sects as troublemakers who undermine the brotherhood they have come to appreciate so much.

Li: an underemployed college graduate

On the trip to Hualong with Mr. Ming, I met another young convert who is nonsectarian, but less evangelical than many of his peers. Even though his Arabic name is Muhammad, I will call him by his surname, Li, as he more commonly used his Chinese name. This bespectacled 27 year-old college graduate holds an associate's degree in economics from a local university but is now employed at a shop making window-frames. When asked about his conversion, he was not very forthcoming, but eventually explained that he came to Xining to attend university, made Hui friends who inspired him to study Islam, diligently studied the Qur'an and history of Islam, and then converted and adopted Xining as his home. His first response to questions about his conversion was to repeat a phrase his Hui friends told him that piqued his interest before he converted, "Islam is Allah's language." (伊斯兰教是真主的语言). Upon further questioning, he described the "scientific" (科学的) nature of Islam, saying that there were facts in the Qur'an that modern science had only confirmed as recently as the 1980s. He also

characterized Islam itself as a scientific development that first came to China in the Tang Dynasty when China was at its peak. When I asked again about how he specifically had come to know Islam, he said that a Hui friend from college insisted on the reality of the Qur'an, citing the sort of scientific evidence he had described to me. He had never had a religion before, but when he began to read more for himself, he became convinced and eventually converted.

On the first day we met, Li kept changing the subject to avoid talking about himself and to ask me about life in the U.S., but we exchanged telephone numbers and I had the opportunity to learn more about his conversion over several subsequent meetings. He had been in Xining for six years, and he converted two years after graduating from college, which means he had been a Muslim for just two years when I met him. When I visited the dingy shop in which he worked, he showed me a couple of the books that helped inspire him to convert. Both were unillustrated books published in Hong Kong and sold under China's strict censorship rules. One of them, entitled *Chinese Muslim Minorities* (中国穆斯林少数民族), highlights the attributes of Chinese Muslims that the party tends to emphasize: material and technological achievements, harmonious contributions to the Chinese state, and how sectarian differences are minor technicalities and not worth quibbling about. The other text, *The Muslim World* (穆斯林世界), is about the rise and fall of Islamic empires. Neither contained much scripture, theology, or promotion of the religion, and given their appeal for him, it seems that Li approached Islam from the same practical and materialist framework in which he was educated, and

he found the “scientific” elements and the triumphant history of Islamic empires to be especially appealing.

Li was not entirely estranged from his family, but he kept his distance. When we met for lunch during the Lunar New Year Festival, which Li and most Chinese Muslim’s refer to as the “Han Spring Festival” (汉族的春节),⁶² I learned that he had not been back to Henan to see his family for three years. He explained that they lived in a “Han place” (汉族地方) where the environment was not good there for Muslims, and there was nothing halal for him to eat. Before conversion, he sometimes would drink beer and smoke cigarettes, but he said he did not miss these much. He still sees some of his old Han friends on occasion, but he no longer associates with those who frequently drink and smoke,⁶³ and all the friends he has made since conversion are Muslims. He claims that his atheist family did not object to his conversion or his not coming home, as long as he was making money. However, he was always anxious about not making enough money. He said he wanted to start his own business (which was very common among Hui), but did not know what kind.

Like many converts and reaffirmed Muslims, Li turned to Islam when he was isolated from familial and social connections and had limited material prospects. Despite the overall strength of China’s economy, Li is one of many disillusioned college

⁶² Observant Yihewani and Salafiyya, participants in Tablighi Jama’at, and many Muslims of other sects do not celebrate Han holidays, but many of them do have time off from work and school, and so they tend to have big gatherings of friends and family at this time. However, they pointedly refer to these as “Han holidays” (汉族的节日), especially the “Han New Year “ (汉族过年), to emphasize that they recognize only Islamic holidays and the Islamic calendar instead.

⁶³ Chinese Muslims are far more likely to drink alcohol or smoke (especially the latter) than they are to eat pork, but devout Muslims stress that pork is the only one of these that is permissible, since it nourishes the body; however it is allowable only if one is in danger of starving to death.

graduates who are unable to find a good job upon graduation. This is one of many problems Chinese people tend to blame on overpopulation. Underemployment means that Li cannot afford to buy a house, thus he cannot marry, a common, yet shameful, position among young, Chinese men. As a college graduate, Li can speak some English, and he often would practice random phrases with me. On his request, I gave him the English name, "Larry." And he peppered me with questions about English and the United States, including how he could get a visa and where he could work. Islam seemed to be the one stable asset and source of connections in Larry's life, which could explain why he was critical and evasive of sectarian ideas that could divide the Islamic community. A nonsectarian stance could also be attributed to the influence of Tablighi Jama'at.

Like most Xining Muslims, Li usually attends prayers at the mosque nearest his house, goes to Dong Guan Mosque on Fridays, and has little understanding of or interest in sectarian issues. He has only a basic education in Islam and has memorized only two surahs (the minimum to perform prayer by oneself). When we climbed the small mountain on the southern edge of Xining together to visit the large Qadariyya Sufi tomb overlooking the city, I mentioned that some Muslims oppose the veneration of tombs. Li immediately asked if people at Dong Guan or the Salafi mosque had said this. He reasoned that if everyone on hajj visits Muhammad's tomb, then tomb veneration cannot be forbidden. On the way into the tomb, he warned me not to mention sectarian issues while we were there, and not to tell Ming or other Salafis that I had visited the site. Li was wary of my association with Salafism, and it seemed he always avoided walking into or out of a mosque with me for fear of being seen with someone praying in the Salafi

manner. He said he usually went to Dongguan because it was closest to his house. Even though he worked less than a block from the Salafi mosque and went there with me just once. However, during Ramadan, Li regularly broke his fast at the Salafi prayer room, where the congregants enjoyed a very simple, free meal together in the basement of the mosque. It is inconvenient and rather lonely for a single person to cook and eat a fast-breaking meal in the short interval between sundown and night prayers, so practical considerations superseded any sectarian concerns he might have had in this instance. Despite his attempts at neutrality, the way Yihewani ideas of orthodoxy had unconsciously influenced Li became abundantly clear during our visit to the Sufi tomb.

Neither Li nor I had been inside the tomb complex before or knew much about its history or sectarian background. The main gate was undergoing renovations, so we entered through a side gate while heartily shouting “asalaam alaykum.” Some older men sat in the courtyard facing a stone arch leading to the tombs themselves, the entrance under construction was behind them, a mosque lay to their left, and the office and quarters for ahong and students as well as the side entrance was to their right. Here, they welcomed some familiar faces and shouted at others who attempted to enter the tomb area and were not dressed properly, did not first perform ablution, or were otherwise obviously sightseers. Worshippers would burn incense in a cauldron outside the gate to the tombs while reciting verses from the Qur’an in Arabic and then proceed to the burial chambers behind the stone archway. Luckily one of these gatekeepers was from Henan like Li, so he not only allowed us inside (after learning that we had performed ablution), he also told us all about the tomb over some tea, and then gave us a personal tour. Li and

I asked about the significance of and justification for burning incense in Islam, but he was not learned enough to give a thorough explanation. However, a Sufi imam named Ishmael, who once led a congregation outside Xining, told me that the incense represents the Arabic letter *lam* (ل), which figures prominently into the Islamic declaration of faith and the name of Allah. He also cited a Hadith saying that Muslims will first wear green, then black, then gray, which he claimed represented the color of unburned incense, then burning incense, and finally, ash.

Our guide lacked Islamic and secular education, and was extremely critical of the Salafiyya and Yihewani, saying that the “old teaching” (encompassing Sufism and Gedimu) prized women, while other sects excluded them from mosques and funerals.⁶⁴ He proudly pointed out that more than half of the ten to fifteen people praying at the tombs that day were women or families including women and men together. And he compared this with a story of how he berated an Yihewani man for trying to prevent a woman from visiting her son’s grave. When Li and I went inside the mosque to pray, a group of women were sitting inside and chatting, and so they silently moved to the back of the mosque and spoke in quieter voices to avoid disturbing us. In other Xining mosques, I came to think of the mosque as a manifestation of the “men’s house where

⁶⁴ Women were excluded from Salafi funerals and graveyards in order to protect them from unclean places, or so Salafis told me at one of several funerals I attended. However, the one time I saw a woman in the courtyard of Shu Lin Xiang Mosque was when a man’s daughter came to weep over his body just before noon prayer, after which he would be buried. After the congregation had buried him and said a silent prayer over his grave, I saw her waiting for everyone to leave, behind the tinted windows of a minivan, so that she could say her final goodbye. Unfortunately, I do not know if she personally adhered to Salafiyya or any sectarian principles, but no one in the congregation overtly tried to dissuade her or criticized her, so strictures against women visiting graves are not necessarily strictly enforced. The subject is a matter of debate in the Muslim world because some Hadith encourage Muslims to visit graves (Sunan Ibn Majah 1.6.1569, Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2.5.1054), but others forbid women visiting or crying over them (Jami` at-Tirmidhi 2.5.1056; Jami` at-Tirmidhi 1.2.320; Sunan Ibn Majah 1.6.1575).

women were never present to such an extent that hearing a feminine cough from behind a curtain before Friday prayer was jolting. Li was surprised to see a relative lack of separation between men and women, burning incense in a manner similar to Buddhism and Taoism, and common neglect of basic Islamic requirements like the five daily prayers, all Sufi attributes that draw the ire of Salafiyya and Yihwani.

The unorthodox practices Li witnessed at the gongbei highlighted the conflict between Li's nonsectarian beliefs and the Yihewani environment in which he had studied Islam. Our elderly host at the tomb justified the veracity of the "old teaching" with its age and status as the first sect to arrive in China, and he also told us that this tomb was special because the schoolmaster and students there did not marry. When I asked Salafis about this aspect later, they shook their heads and said this was Buddhism, not Islam. Li was shocked, saying that Muhammad married and raised children, so he (and most other Muslims) considers it a Muslim man's responsibility to start a family. Unfortunately, the old man could not explain the justification for this, and the tomb's schoolmaster was not around that day. He also specified that the schoolmaster did not have the title of imam since he did not start a family and therefore could not lead prayer.⁶⁵ He gave a sermon on Fridays, but on other days, his students and others performed prayer independently. Eventually, our guide took us inside the building housing the main figure buried there, who had traveled from Baghdad in the Yuan Dynasty. We said a supplicatory prayer together, and then our guide went to the right of the entombed body, so that it was

⁶⁵ Anyone is allowed to lead prayer in other sects, but they specify that women should not lead men, and the man who knows the most Qur'an should act as imam. Celibacy and the inability of a celibate man to lead prayer are peculiar to Chinese Qadariyya.

between him and Mecca, and did two long prostrations facing the deceased saint and Mecca behind him. After he got up, Li said that he had heard that one should prostrate to no one but Allah, but the elder man said that the saint buried there worshipped Allah and was loved by him, so prostrating before him was the same as prostrating to Allah. Li was visibly troubled by this sight even more than the other unorthodox practices we witnessed, and it seemed clear that such practices would be very difficult for him to grasp compared to (and especially after being exposed to) the simpler orthodoxy of Yihewani or Salafiyya.

Like many new Muslim, Li immerses himself in Islamic circles while claiming to ignore sectarian divides. He not only takes part in some of Mr. Ming's da'wah activities, but he also occasionally participates in Tablighi Jama'at. He told me that Mr. Ming had asked him to speak at his events for new Muslims, but he refused and gave the reason: "Saying and doing are not the same" (说的跟做的不一样) Thus, I was surprised that he was willing to take part in the endless speechifying of Tablighi Jama'at. He does not constantly preach about Islam and attend study sessions like those extremely devoted to Tablighi Jama'at methods, but Li eventually told me that he studied at Yacub's hotel prayer room when he first became interested in Islam, and he first made his declaration of faith there. Li still supports the movement and went on jama'at twice after he first converted, but he feels that he has little time for such things at a point in his life when he needs to concentrate on making money. Once, we went to the Tablighi Jama'at prayer room together and Li expressed the intention to go on a jama'at after Ramadan (a few weeks from then), but for the time-being, Li was more focused on the material concerns

that Tablighis tend to ignore. Converts to Islam tend to immerse themselves in the Islamic community and attempt to alter their subjectivity like participants in the Tablighi Jama'at, and they usually engage in intensive and critical textual study like Salafis, so it is no surprise that some of them approve of both of these movements that are controversial among old Muslims.

Yunus: A Salafi Tablighi Convert

Even though both converts and Tablighis tend to de-emphasize sectarian identity, I met one convert named Yunus who embraced Salafiyya as the one true interpretation of Islam in addition to participating in the Tablighi Jama'at movement, and he did not see any conflict between the two movements. I first met this convert in the Salafi mosque during Ramadan when he approached me to ask for help translating an English caption to a picture of Muslim converts someone had posted on his on-line site on Weixin (a Chinese microblog). He is a convert of the Tu ethnicity (土族, also called Monguor), a group related to Mongolians and strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, from Huzhu (互助) Tu Autonomous County about one hour north of Xining. Like many Tu, Yunus' parents are Tibetan Buddhists, but he decided to convert after reading some materials about Islam. He was seventeen when he converted and was twenty-four when I met him. Yunus specifically cites the Qur'anic description of the development of a fetus' development as one of the scientific elements that convinced him of the Qur'an's truth. With one year of high school, he is the most educated among his three brothers, and he would like to convert his family, but he is frustrated by the fact that none of his relatives are literate. Yunus still managed to persuade a younger brother to convert, but his father

refused to allow this as he was afraid that no one would tend his family graves after his death. He blamed this stubbornness on his parents' lack of education, but he could not find fault with his brother for being filial and obeying them. In time, he began to associate the unexamined religious beliefs of many old Muslims with those of his non-Muslim parents.

After he first converted, Yunus began attending prayer at Dong Guan Mosque with most of Xining's Muslims. He had little knowledge of Islam or sectarian differences at this point, but he was dissatisfied because he could not understand any of the along's Qinghai dialect (Li and many other younger people and Qinghai non-natives had the same complaint). After making some Salafi friends and studying on his own, Yunus came to believe that Salafiyya was "the truth" (真理). He cannot read Arabic, and he can only recite enough surahs to pray, but he is struggling to learn more. He admires the preaching of Shu Lin Xiang's along because it is "very moving" (很激动), which emphasizes a sort of emotionalism common among Tablighis but sometimes disparaged by Salafis. Soon after converting, he went on a 40-day jama'at to Hualong County and various places in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Yunus spoke in jama'at study circles about being inspired by descriptions of fetal development in the Qur'an and converting to Islam, and he reported that his audiences found this "moving" (感动). Although I am not aware of the two converts ever meeting each other, performing Tablighi activities helped both Li and Yunus develop and rehearse a new Muslim subjectivity while they were separated from their habitual milieu.

Converting to Islam provided Yunus with a sense of fulfillment, a welcoming community, the ability to trust in his own reason, and the confidence to take control of his life away from his parents. Even before his conversion, he worked in a Hui noodle shop where he would eventually meet several other Tu converts. After his conversion, Yunus met his future wife at the restaurant, and he was married about one year after converting. His wife was Hui, but he chose to give his son his Tu ethnicity because this would allow his son and him to more easily obtain passports and visas for international travel. This choice of ethnicity is merely a legal technicality and has no bearing on him raising his son as a Muslim, as Yunus said, “Ethnicity and faith are two [different] matters.” (民族和信仰是两件事). He has no desire to be part of the ethnic Hui tradition of Chinese Muslims, and he relishes his identity as a one of many people of all ethnicities who have come together in a universal faith. Indeed, Tablighis often tell converts that in leaving their families, old habits, and ancestral beliefs, they have already accomplished the difficult task that the practice of jama’at itself tries to replicate.

For this young Tu and many other young converts, joining the Islamic faith serves as a sort of coming-of-age experience, a transition from obedience to family and social expectations to self-determination in the form of submission to a higher power. This young man laughed at the petty materialistic concerns of his former life as he said that he has found liberation from these worries in accepting that everything is under Allah’s control. Yunus recalled how, after his conversion, he initially missed wearing new clothes during the Spring Festival, but now he sees such desires as signs of immaturity. He explained how young people, “Think/desire haphazardly. After maturing, one does not

want anything, one just depends on Allah. Praying every day, now my heart is very calm. We only need two holidays.” (想的乱七八糟. 长大以后什么都不想, 只靠真主. 天天做礼拜现在我的心里慰的很。我们只需要两个节日。). Most converts become Muslims as young adults and, in retrospect, see the transition as part of the maturation process, becoming independent from one’s family, and moving past an exclusive focus on petty material concerns. Instead of perpetuating and honoring the human lineage, and giving offerings to better their parents’ fate in the afterlife, converts claim to study Islam to deepen their own understanding and improve their own chances of reaching heaven after death. Thus, both converts and Muslim revivalists conceive of Islam in a way that is more individualistic, forward-thinking, and accumulative, and so they perceive it as a faith better suited to the modern world than traditional Chinese or earlier Chinese-Islamic forms of religiosity.

Learning to Be Muslim: Two Han Islamic Students

Studying the Qur’an is an integral part of a serious commitment to Islam, and this is especially true of converts who do not benefit from the active or passive acculturation of being raised in a Muslim home. Before each prayer in each mosque, men sit and read Qur’an, reciting aloud in Arabic in a soft voice, alone or in small groups. Most converts (and other Muslims) also study Qur’an and Hadith in translation and view videos of sermons in Chinese and sometimes English. I also met two converts who had become students in mosques even though they were about a decade older than most of their teenage fellow students. Their relative maturity and the fact that these young men of twenty-six and twenty-seven had a late start in studying Islam seemed to make them even

more diligent in their studies. A young man who took the Arabic name Aisa left his home in Xi'an to work as a migrant in Shanghai and Guangzhou before converting and moving to Xining to study with Jin Biao Ahong. Another convert, a Jiangxi native, left a job in Yiwu 义乌 to study at Aisa Ahong's Islamic school outside of Yinchuan, Ningxia. Neither of these young men participated in the Tablighi Jama'at, and one of them mocked the movement, but both of them left their families and changed their lifestyles to become Muslims in a way Tablighis would have admired.

Aisa calls himself an “orphan” (孤儿) because of his parents' opposition to his conversion, and he mocks their “old-fashioned” and “oppressive” nature by calling the family a “feudal institution.” He complains that neither his family nor the Chinese government offer support for a powerless person like himself, but he has found many brothers in Islam to help him. He divorced his wife prior to discovering Islam, and his seven-year old daughter lives with his sister in Hong Kong. He is concerned that this failed marriage seriously damages his marriage prospects because he claims that Chinese girls assume that a divorce indicates a lack of appreciation for family. He decries the materialism prevalent in China that makes it difficult for someone with meager economic resources like himself to marry. Even before conversion, he had to leave home as a teenager to work in Shanghai and Guangzhou. There, he made many Hui friends and learned to make “pulled noodles” (拉面), an essential component of Chinese Muslim cuisine. His coworkers inspired him to study Qur'an and secular sources on Islam. He became the only Han studying at a Guangzhou mosque for four months before finally converting, which was two years before I met him. Six months later, he moved to Xining

to study under Jin Biao Ahong, where he plans to study for another 2.5 years before he hopes to go abroad to pursue further study of Islam (a goal common to most Islamic students). He laments Chinese people's lack of political power, repeatedly expressing admiration for the freedom and democracy in the U.S., as he understands them, and he sees the study of Islam as his ticket out of China, a goal he realizes will be much easier for him to accomplish as a Han than for his classmates who were born Muslim.

I met another convert-manla on my second visit to Aisa Ahong's Islamic school in Ningxia, this time during Ramadan. I had taken the overnight train from Xining and was napping in the mosque after morning prayer, when I woke up to him standing over me and greeting me in Arabic. Napping in mosques is common practice, especially during Ramadan, and is supported by Hadith, but I later learned that this convert sleeps in the mosque every night even though he does have a bedroom at the school. I confused him by explaining in Chinese that I don't speak Arabic, but soon thereafter a friend of mine arrived to introduce us. The convert, whom I shall call Ilyas, was from a small town, but he learned decent enough English to get a job at an Yiwu shipping company. However, he spoke to me exclusively in Chinese and claimed to have forgotten all his English, since studying Arabic was now his passion. In Yiwu, he met several Middle Eastern Muslims through his job, and he played soccer with them on occasion. He described himself as a naturally curious fellow, and his foreign friends introduced him to some Chinese-language websites about Islam. Over the course of two or three years, he began doing more research on his own and eventually converted to Islam.

This newfound faith inspired him to abandon a well-paying job in one of China's modern commercial hubs in order to travel over 2,000 km halfway across China to an Islamic school outside a third tier city. When I asked him about this momentous decision, he just smiled, said he had not traveled too far and that it was worth it to attend a good school. He was an athletic young man who practiced martial arts in the mosque courtyard in 90+ degree heat even during Ramadan when he could not drink any water. His sense of adventure led him to consider coming back to Xining with me. He asked if I would pray the night prayer with him on the train and said he likes to wear Islamic dress and perform prayers while traveling because it inspires others to ask him questions and gives him opportunities to teach them about Islam. He quoted the Qur'an saying that it is each Muslim's responsibility to tell people plainly about Islam, but only Allah can make them convert (Qur'an 16:82). In spite of such evangelical tendencies, he spoke derisively of the Tablighi Jama'at movement, mocking the shallowness of participants' Islamic knowledge and their repetitive use of simplistic catchphrases. Tablighis are especially eager to recruit him and other converts to participate in their study sessions, he said, because their presence would support the Tablighi message about the need to spread Islam. But in fact, these efforts seemed only to increase his distaste for the movement. He said that many people have suggested that he change his identification card from Han to Hui because this would make him eligible for three many perks of minority status, but he has no plan to exploit his faith in this way, and he did not seem to have much of a plan for what he would do with his Islamic education either. Unlike many other manla, he saw gaining knowledge of Islam as an end in itself, not a means to other goals.

Many manla hope that Islamic education and consequent skill in Arabic language will empower them to travel abroad, gain valuable business connections, and strike it rich. Many of them are extremely devout, but they are also typical adolescent students with desires common to young people everywhere. Many fourth year students (the most senior) at Aisa Ahong's school in Yinchuan confided in me that they entered the school with the goal of studying to become translators, but now they had discovered a sincere devotion to pursuing religious knowledge. The converts I met who had become manla never took their faith for granted in the way some ethnic Muslims tend to do, so there was no confusion about their motives for study: religion did matter to them. When naturally curious people with no preexisting religious ideas are exposed to Muslim influences, they still feel the need to embark on copious and self-directed study of Islam before converting. And even after conversion, converts see continual study of the Qur'an, Hadith, and other aspects of Islam as a religious obligation. The resulting Islamic beliefs and practice and the subjectivities and outward manifestations they inspire are still quite diverse. These people are not dappling or diving into Islam, they are slowly wading into it and gradually immersing themselves, seeking to understand the faith one step at a time, rather than blindly accepting the complete package. For converts, especially those who become manla, conversion is not an endpoint, but a milestone along an endless journey toward more perfect faith. Each of these manla's conversions inspired a literal journey to seek out a renowned Yihewani or Salafiyya teacher to continue Islamic education. For many Muslims, both old and new, adoption or alteration of sectarian affiliation

constitutes a similar point at which they made individual decisions to deepen their pursuit of a more authentic Islam.

Seeking Answers and Authenticity: Converts to Salafiyya

Movement from one sect of Islam to another is certainly not a transformational experience on par with a non-Muslim entering the faith, but both of these transitions involve a difficult individual decision provoked by careful study that results in alienation from the group one is leaving behind. In both cases, a desire for truth and authenticity motivated each of my informants, or so they recount. Amidst the numerous changes and temptations of modern China, Islam provides a clear structure and stable framework with which to order one's life. Of course, Islam is rife with opposing viewpoints, conflicting interpretations, and sectarian power struggles, but Salafiyya offers the simple method of empowering individuals to resolve such contradictions by personally consulting the Qur'an and Hadith. Both new Muslims and converts to Salafiyya describe a gradual process of coming to understand Islam, and old Muslims converting to Salafiyya emphasize their newfound understanding after the widespread ignorance and unavailability of Islamic texts before the reform era. It is important to point out that these latter Muslims do not use the term "convert" (皈依), because they tend to describe Salafiyya as a method and not a sect. Instead, they talk about discovering Salafi ideas or coming to understand Salafiyya. However, due to Salafis' preferential, if not exclusive, attendance in Salafi mosques, visibly distinctive prayer practices, hotly contested theological differences, and friction and estrangement between new Salafis and members

of their ancestral sects all indicate that habitually attending a Salafi mosque entails a change in sectarian identity and thus can be termed a type of conversion.

Hasan: A Tibetan-Speaking Muslim Reforming Himself through Salafism

Hasan is one of many Tibetan-speaking Hui from Hualong Hui Autonomous County living in Xining, several of whom had joined the Salafiyya. He was a jovial, rotund man in his early thirties who often invited me out to lunch, so he could practice English with me and we could discuss religion over noodles and a big plate of beef or mutton. Hasan studied landscape architecture in college, but like what seems to be the majority of Xining Hui, he does not have a regular job and simply calls himself a trader (做买卖). He owns a goji berry farm and is always working on construction or real estate deals, which in 2013, included a plan to acquire land in Xinjiang to build a wind energy development. His family lives in Golmud (格尔木), a small city of 200,000 in western Qinghai, but he hopes to move to Xining where he often stays in a borrowed Xining apartment with his wife and two year-old daughter. His son currently is studying in an Islamic preschool in Linxia, Gansu's "little Mecca." He is married to an ethnic Mongolian convert from Inner Mongolia. The two met in college, and Hasan gradually introduced her to Islam. After she read a biography of Muhammad that Hasan gave to her, she decided that the prophet was someone that she could follow and eventually converted. They eventually married, and he helped her enroll in an Arabic school for one year. Now, he proudly describes her as an extremely devout Muslim who aspires to translate the Hadith into Mongolian and convert her friends and family back home. Like many other young Chinese, Hasan was full of dreams of making money, improving his

family's lives, learning English, studying Arabic until he can recite like Shu Lin Xiang's imam, and getting his son and daughter into American universities (preferably Yale or Harvard). However, Hasan and many other Muslims have come to believe that only Allah can grant achievements such as these, so he is careful to put religious practice before secular goals.

Hasan came to Salafism when he had become disillusioned with his own and other Chinese people's practice of Islam and wanted to reform his "decadent" lifestyle. He recalled that he was not a good Muslim until a year before I met him. He used to drink, smoke,⁶⁶ hang out in karaoke bars, "play with girls" (玩儿女孩), and ostentatiously spend money. His business was doing well, and he said he would spend 300,000 RMB (\$48,000) each month on entertaining friends at karaoke bars and other frivolous activities. Then, his business crashed, he suddenly had little to no money, and he turned to Islam for support. He attributed this change of fortunes to Allah teaching him a lesson in humility, showing Hasan that he was powerless and that his success was due only to Allah's support, which could be withdrawn at any time. After a couple key experiences, began abstaining from forbidden and frivolous (and expensive) activities and praying five times a day, his financial situation improved, and he saw a definite correlation between faith and material success. He saw the Salafiyya movement as part of this deepening and purifying of his faith.

⁶⁶ Salafis, Tablighis, and strictly observant members of other movements consider tobacco a forbidden intoxicant. However, given the widespread use of tobacco in Chinese culture, Muslims are much more likely to smoke than drink or eat pork.

In contrast to how most people spoke of conversion to Salafiyya (or Islam) as the culmination of much gradual study, Hasan described two distinct experiences that drew him to Salafism. Once, while he was in Beijing during Ramadan, Hasan was despondent after losing 205,000 RMB (\$32,817) when the government denied him a business permit and refused to return his deposit. He went to a mosque to perform night prayer, which consisted of 23 ra'ka (cycles of prayer⁶⁷), each requiring the imam to recite one surah of the Qur'an. Instead of reciting a different surah each time, as is usually the case, this imam leading the congregation in prayer repeated the same very short and basic surah every time (Qur'an 112). Hasan recalled thinking to himself that, even though this repetition is not in violation of Islamic law, one should do better. He realized that when it came to Islamic practice, he had been doing the bare minimum, just as the imam was doing, and he decided that he should put more effort into his faith.

On another occasion, participants in the Tablighi Jama'at's "general visits" came to Hasan's door to invite him to study with them. He did not go with them that day, but went to study with them another day when he had time. Listening to them speak in their study circle, he admired their devotion, and they made him want to be a better Muslim. But after reading their literature about the "six noble virtues," he became troubled. The

⁶⁷ One ra'ka basically consists of reciting one surah of Qur'an, bowing once, and prostrating twice. The imam recites one surah during each of the first two ra'ka, aloud or silently depending on the time of day, and each person recites silently during subsequent ra'kas. Obligatory prayers range from two to four ra'ka depending on the time of day. These prayers are usually preceded and followed by two more ra'ka of supererogatory prayer. Ramadan night prayer features eleven ra'ka for Salafis and 23 for other sects, all of which are recited aloud. Those who perform 23 cycles of prayer usually recite some of the shortest surahs in the Qur'an at a pace about twice as fast as normal recitation during prayer. In my experience, I heard Yihewani repeat surahs once or twice during such prayers, but never did they recite the same one more than twice, let alone 23 times. Salafis tend to select longer surahs than those usually recited during prayer and recite them at the same pace as any other prayer.

prophet already enumerated the six core beliefs and five pillars of Islam, so what gave the Tablighi Jama'at the right to codify and propagate new tenets of faith? He did not object to the virtues themselves, which are noncontroversial qualities found in the Hadith, but he opposed the Tablighis' relatively recent and near-exclusive emphasis on them. He also had heard about someone in Qinghai who went on jama'at and failed to care for his family, resulting in a divorce. This experience made him wary of innovation in faith and inspired him to seek out the Salafi movement because it claimed to provide a means to deepen his faith that seemed more true to Islamic orthodoxy as he understood it, as well as less threatening to his worldly life. He admitted that the Tablighi Jama'at had some good points, and that it had a positive effect on him by inadvertently inspiring him to pursue a more pure form of Islam, but he had never been on jama'at and did not plan to try this method either.

In Xining, I met dozens of Salafis who had come to Xining from Hualong and a substantial portion of them were ethnically Tibetan. Hasan and his little brother assured me that Salafis are a tiny minority who face enormous stigma in Hualong County, which might help account for the presence of so many in Xining.⁶⁸ Hasan's brother told me that they were the first to become Salafi in their village, and at first, no one there would even speak to them. They said the situation is better now, and a Salafi mosque opened recently in Hualong, but an average of only five or six people attend each prayer there. Hasan's

⁶⁸ Some Salafis suggest that Tibetan-speaking Salafis face persecution in Hualong, so they migrate to Xining, where Salafis are not always welcome, but where at least there was a strong Salafi community. Others claim that the Tibetan-speaking Hui living in Xining tend to be more educated and independent-minded than their rural brethren, and these same traits also make them likely to migrate from their rural homes to the city.

younger brother is single and complains that it is very difficult for Salafis to marry. He is dating a server at a restaurant we frequented, but he said that her parents have opposed the relationship ever since they discovered where he usually attended prayers. As Hasan said, Salafiyya is still a small movement because Chinese people particularly like tradition, and conservative families do not want their daughters marrying into what they see as a nontraditional, or even heretical, sect. However, when I asked if they ever face problems with other Muslims or Tibetans because of their combination of Tibetan heritage⁶⁹ and Islamic religion, Hasan and his brother were careful to state that Muslims do not discriminate against them in any way and Tibetans are generally just confused at their choice of religion.

Envisioning Salafism as a method rather than a sect allows Hasan and many other Salafis to condemn sectarianism while embracing Salafi orthodoxy. Hasan witnessed Muslims of different sects praying together peaceably in more developed eastern China, and so he and other more educated Muslims see sectarian strife was a symptom of the ignorance and backwardness of relatively undeveloped northwest China. Hasan's partner in the Xinjiang wind farm project is Yihewani, and Hasan does not hide his Salafi affiliation from him. Nevertheless, when Hasan leads prayer with his Yihewani associate present, he does not raise his hands in the Salafi manner. Usually, when friends from different sects pray together in private, they each pray in their own way, but it seemed that Hasan consciously tries to make his Yihewani partner more comfortable. Likewise,

⁶⁹ I use the term "heritage" here to denote Tibetan ancestry, language, and physical appearance because the ancestors of Hasan and other Tibetan-speaking Hui converted in the Qing Dynasty and the CCP legally classifies their ethnicity as Hui, an identity they tend to embrace.

Salafis almost always show this sort of flexibility when praying in non-Salafi mosques. Hasan negotiates multiple strains of ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian identity, but clearly strives to put universal Islamic identity first.

Hasan and other Tibetan-speaking Muslims emphasize their Islamic identity over a Tibetan heritage they see as incidental or even unfortunate. Once, I referred to Hasan as a Tibetan Hui and he said quickly, “I am not a Tibetan Hui, I am a Tibetan-speaking Hui” (我不是藏族回, 我是说藏话的回). Nevertheless, Hui people commonly call Hasan and his brethren “Tibetan Hui” (藏回) in the same way as they refer to Han converts to Islam “Han Hui,” (汉回) but Tibetan-speaking Hui prefer to distance themselves from the Tibetan ethnicity, probably because of its strong association with Buddhism, which is considered blasphemous idolatry and the worship of human beings by most Muslims. Hasan told me that Tibetan Hui in Tibet looked and dressed like Tibetans, but practiced in the same way as all other Muslims. He presented this as evidence of the universality of Islam, but he did not connect this to his own identity in any way. In contrast to these people’s Tibetan dress, Hasan and most of Xining’s other Tibetan-speaking Muslims wore white hats and clothing indistinguishable from other Hui.

Both the Hualong Tibetan Hui and the Muslim Tibetans of Lhasa are legally classified as members of the Hui minority because they or their ancestors were Muslim at the time of the CCP’s classification project. Hasan and several other Tibetan Muslims in Xining usually speak Tibetan language among themselves, but they do not value it or see it as a useful skill. Hasan cannot read or write Tibetan and his Mongolian wife cannot

speak the language at all. He told me that he hopes his children learn Arabic and English in addition to Mandarin, but he has no intention of teaching them the Tibetan language, which he sees as a relic of this backward and parochial culture. He criticizes Tibetans for their lack of ambition as compared to Muslims, reiterating a common Han stereotype, and mentioning how the government pays for many of them to learn Mandarin in Beijing, but they just hang out with fellow students there and then go back and live in their native villages and herd yaks. He acknowledges that Hui also suffer from a traditional lack of education, but they have an international perspective in that they are learning Arabic and English, languages of global spiritual and material importance, in order to travel throughout China and beyond in pursuit of religious knowledge and means of improving their material conditions.

Yusuf: from Sufism to Salafiyya

The Yihewani sect is historically and theologically most closely related to Salafiyya, and the vast majority of Xining's Muslims belong to the Yihewani sect, so it should come as no surprise that most converts to Salafism were once members of the Yihewani. However, I occasionally met a Salafī who once belonged to a Sufi brotherhood. Yusuf is one such convert who works in the Xining government and thus does not wear a beard or a hat. He is a portly, bespectacled, and bookish man in his forties. He kindly drove me home from prayer several times during Ramadan, and on one night he casually mentioned that his family is part of the “Old Teaching,” (老教), specifically the Huasi (花寺) or “Flower Mosque” branch of the Qadarriyya brotherhood.

Like most converts, Yusuf's change in religious outlook began in his young adulthood. After he graduated from college, he began studying Islam on his own and praying at an old imam's house behind Dong Guan Mosque. He eventually decided that Sufism had too much cultural accretion, including the borrowing of Buddhist practices like burning incense and the worship of saints, and he decided that Salafism is the only path that effectively eliminates all such contamination. Many relatives opposed this conversion, but he said that his more educated father accepted his decision, saying that he does not mind to which sect his son belongs as long as he continues to pray and fast as required. Most open-minded Muslims share the opinion that a lack of education is the root cause of intolerance. It is also quite possible that conflicting versions of orthodoxy cause friction between scripturalist sects like Yihewani and Salafiyya, but a comparative lack of such concerns in Sufism sometimes leads to comparatively less opposition to Salafiyya among Sufis, even though Salafis condemn some Sufi practices.

After discovering Salafiyya, Yusuf began informally studying with a small group of six or seven Muslims, of which he was the only Salafi, and they have been meeting once a week for around twenty years to discuss Islam, history, and other religions. He said that imams "can say that Islam is so great, but unless they compare [it to other faiths] how can you know?" (会说伊斯兰多么多么好但是你不比较的话你怎么知道?) Yusuf said that studying Islamic history also helps them understand the present state of the Islamic world and the sources of people's misunderstandings about Islam. I had the opportunity to have dinner with many members of the study group and they offered insightful and objective critique of Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at, rather than the one-

sided praise or condemnation most Muslims produce when asked about these movements. Yusuf said that these people are exceptional because they do not simply accept the faith of their fathers. They realize that one needs to study, especially as a member of a secular society or a minority sect, to explain why one believes and practices the way one does. He even says that others have criticized his group for studying Islam without the guidance of an *ahong*, but they pray and ask Allah to guide them as a group and as individuals, and to forgive any missteps. Such criticism of unguided study represents traditional Chinese respect for hierarchy, but this sort of independent search for greater understanding is a common attribute of Chinese Islamic revivalists.

Guo's Father Converts the Family

Thus far, I have been discussing converts as individuals who defy their families to convert, but sometimes one person is able to transform the sectarian affiliation of an entire family. Like most Salafis in Xining, Guo and his family were originally Yihewani adherents. He explained to me how his father, in spite of illiteracy, was a very curious person and studied with many Yihewani imams, asking them theological questions that they could not answer until he found the answers from Salafis. When he returned to present Salafi ideas to the Yihewani imams with whom he had studied, they could not disprove or contradict them, but none of them gave up their Yihewani affiliation. Guo said that they realized the flaws of Yihewani, but they feared rejection by their community and the mosques that employed them at a time (the 1980s) when there were far fewer Salafiyya and worse discrimination against them.

Guo says that today many well educated Yihewani imams realize that Salafiyya is the correct path, but practical and material concerns prevent them from openly embracing it. Aisa Ahong in Ningxia, whom Guo never mentioned and probably did not know, would be a prime example of this situation in that he personally professed Salafi beliefs but maintained Yihewani appearances. Guo suggested that economics plays a large part in opposition to Salafiyya, because a shift away from Yihewani to the smaller Salafi movement would mean a loss of followers, decreased donations to the mosque, and decreased salary for an imam. Salafis also disapprove of paying an ahong to recite Qur'an on anniversaries of deaths and other occasions, so Salafi imams have less financial opportunities than those of other sects. Salafi ideology also teaches that the Qur'an and Hadith are the only legitimate sources of Islamic orthodoxy, so Salafi congregants tend to weigh whether the ahong's sermon jibes with scripture, while followers of an Yihewani ahong often take an imam's words at face value. Thus, Yihewani and other non-Salafi imams enjoy a greater degree of theological authority.

As mentioned previously, Guo had to keep quiet about his Salafism and tolerate his wife's Yihewani practices to secure her hand in marriage, but he was able to engage in friendly sectarian debate with his Yihewani childhood friend and coworker. Guo told me how his friend had bought a newly translated collection of Hadith, and the two of them agreed that they would study its descriptions of prayer practices to see which sect was correct. The loser would have to attend the winner's mosque. In the end, Guo's friend had to agree that Salafi practices were correct, and he began attending the Salafi mosque for a while before he bowed to familial pressure and returned to the Yihewani fold. Still, Guo

said this experience made his friend unable to oppose Salafi ideas. This friend also was remarkably open to discussing sectarian differences when we went to dinner together, but afterwards, he went to his mosque, and Guo went to his. If Guo's claims are true, social and familial pressures are one of the major forces restraining the growth of Salafiyya, and these pressures are likely to decrease as the movement grows larger and more socially acceptable, potentially increasing the movement's growth rate.

A House Divided between Salafi and Yihewani

One day in the Salafi mosque between the sundown and night prayers, Ishmael, a bespectacled middle-aged man in a Western suit beckoned to me to come and sit and chat with him. He told me that he had been attending Shu Lin Xiang for thirty-five years, beginning when the congregation was meeting in someone's home. His grandfather was an ahong, who "gradually transformed" (慢慢改变) the family to Salafism. However, this transformation was still incomplete because his mother and father's little sister still adhere to the Yihewani sect. Like many, he said that he and his family attended the Yihewani Dong Guan Mosque when religious practice became safe in the beginning of the reform era: "After opening up, we also went to Dong Guan Mosque. We did not understand." (开发以后我们也去东关大寺。我们不懂。) The transition caused much strife between his parents, with them arguing and even refusing to pray together. Even today, thirty years after the introduction of Salafi ideas to his family, his parents still debate about theology, but in a less hostile way.

Even though Ishmael's grandfather was an ahong, he said that today's ahongs are much better. And Salafis generally see Chinese Islam as progressing toward international

norms. He particularly expressed admiration for Shu Lin Xiang's ahong, but specified that no one person "speaks with authority" (说得算) because human words about religion require scriptural support. Thus, each believer needs to "reflect" (思考) for oneself. This need for individual development of faith creates anxiety about transmitting Islam to the next generation. Ishmael's son is studying computer programming at a local university, and he says that he comes to Shu Lin Xiang Mosque to pray whenever he is on vacation. However, when I asked about how he continues to practice while away at school, Ishmael said that he lives in the dorms where there is nowhere to pray. He seemed to think the lack of prayer was a temporary condition, but many Muslims worry about sending their children to atheist-dominated Chinese universities, which is a real obstacle to improving educational levels among Chinese Muslims. Many older people lament the younger generation's lack of orthodoxy and fear that they will become assimilated to Han lifestyle. For most, the struggle to pass on belief and Islamic identity to the next generation dwarfs any sorts of sectarian concerns.

Yihewani Manla Converting to Salafiyya: Harun and Ishaga

Harun: pure oil, pure faith

Many Salafis describe themselves as being ignorant or apathetic about Islam before discovering the movement, but others described how studying Islam under imams of other sectarian traditions led them to Salafiyya ideas. Harun, the middle-aged lay ahong whose ahong grandfather was imprisoned in the anti-rightist campaign in the 1950s and father killed during the Cultural Revolution, is originally from Minhe (a town between Xining and Lanzhou, on the Qinghai side of the Gansu-Qinghai border) and

moved to Xining thirteen years ago. He began making and selling cooking oil six months before I met him because he had heard tales about some Han Chinese who make cooking oil by recovering oil from cremated human bodies, boiling down animal carcasses, and extracting oil from septic tanks. He assumed that Muslims concerned about using halal oil would be his main clientele, but he found that many Muslims would not pay more for clean oil, unlike Han, who are more educated on average. Harun admires the high value that Han place on education, and laments the ignorance of many Hui. He feels that putting little value on education is one reason that only a tiny minority of Muslims have joined the Salafiyya movement. Most Hui continue consuming religion without asking about its source or evaluating it for dangerous additives. Just as he established his shop filled with bags of seeds and beans and an enormous oil press to be assured that his cooking oil was authentic, he joined a movement that contained only authentic scriptures in pursuit of a more pure Islam.

When the party had just liberalized its religious policy in the 1980s, Harun was among many Muslims eager to seek an Islamic education in China's recently reopened mosques, and he recalls how his Yihewani teachers were unprepared for difficult questions about sectarian issues. There were only a few pockets of Salafis in Gansu at the time, but during four years spent studying in Lanzhou and another four in Linxia, he and his fellow students began wondering what was wrong with Salafism. They would ask elderly imams who had had scarcely any access to Islamic texts for the past thirty years, "Why is emphasizing the Qur'an and Hadith not right? (重视古兰经圣训为什么不对)? These old men could not provide satisfactory responses, he told me, so he and many of

his fellow students found answers from Salafi texts and imams. Harun also rediscovered some old notes written by his grandfather, who was an ahong condemned to forced labor in the 1950s. His grandfather had been part of the Yihewani sect, but Harun recognized some Salafiyya ideas in these notes, including a proclivity toward interpreting the Qur'an literally. When Harun told his maternal uncle that his grandfather was actually a Salafi, his uncle called Harun a kafir (unbeliever). To this day, that side of the family generally refuses to talk to him because of their vehement objection to Salafism. Anxiety over disrespecting or wrongly interpreting the faith of one's ancestors is a powerful force binding Chinese people to their ancestral faith, but viewing Salafism as a methodology without firm sectarian boundaries allows Harun to see himself as continuing the faith of his grandfather. However, some view unilaterally attributing what many despise as a heretical sectarian identity to one's ancestors as even more controversial than adopting such an identity for oneself.

Ishaga: Respect the Best Generations, Not the Recent Generations

Ishaga is a Hui man in his early thirties who studied under Jin Biao Ahong at Nan Guan Mosque before growing dissatisfied and discovering Shu Lin Xiang Mosque, where he became a student. One evening, he noticed that an Yihewani acquaintance had accompanied me to prayer at Shu Lin Xiang (his sectarian affiliation was apparent from his prayer style), and he approached us to share his story. This young ahong eagerly chatted with me and my Yihewani companion for the entire hour separating sunset and night prayers. Ishaga told us that he ceased his secular education after less than one year of middle school, but my Yihewani friend was still impressed by how eloquently spoke.

Like many Hui, he traded in caterpillar fungus (冬虫夏草)⁷⁰ and lacked any formal employment; he credited his knowledge of Islam and financial success to Allah.

Ishaga characterized himself as a naturally curious person and said he asked many questions of Jin Biao and the imams at Nan Guan Mosque and found the answers to some of his questions to be inadequate. For example, the Yihewani imams could not explain why adherents of schools of law besides the Hanafi school are considered kafir (unbelievers).⁷¹ Ishaga quoted a commonly cited Hadith on this issue warning that it is dangerous for one Muslim to call another kafir (nonbeliever), because if he is not correct he makes himself a kafir by insulting his brother (Sahih al-Bukhari 6103, 8.73.125). He also complained that each Friday, the imam at Dong Guan Mosque describes heaven and hell or other abstract ideas, but there is little variety or specific focus on aspects of the Qur'an, Hadith, or religious law. Eventually, an old man at Nan Guan Mosque offered to take him to another kind of mosque, and he brought Ishaga to Shu Lin Xiang where he would study under the present imam for a couple more years.

Ishaga said that Chinese people greatly respect the three generations preceding themselves (their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents), but Salafis respect the best generations instead (the prophet's generations and the two subsequent generations of

⁷⁰ This fungus used in Chinese medicine grows in the mountainous areas around Qinghai each summer and hordes of Tibetans and Hui flock to the countryside to pick it. A single caterpillar with the fungus growing out of its rear end sells for around 30 RMB (\$5) depending on weight. Numerous storefronts in Xining advertise this product, which is said to have miraculous curative powers, as their primary business, and fortunes have been made trading in it. It is usually cooked into tea but can also be eaten raw. I can say from firsthand experience that it tastes like dirt.

⁷¹ When I spoke with Jin Biao (see chapter four), he declined to condemn any sect. It is unclear whether Jin Biao expresses less tolerance when addressing his students in confidence or if Ishaga was actually referring to other imams or just generalizing about the Yihewani tendency to condemn other sects.

Muslims). Thus, most Chinese Muslims refuse to reevaluate their parents' faith as Ishaga has done. His uncles are educated members of the Yihewani sect, and they try to convince him of its veracity and accuse him of disrespecting his Yihewani ancestors, but he claims that that they rely on these arguments because they cannot refute his Salafi assertions. He stresses that he does not call his uncles or ancestors unbelievers, he merely suggests that there is room for improvement on their beliefs and practices.

Founding Salafi Mosques

Thus far, I have exclusively described individual conversions and individuals leading their families to convert, but it is important to remember that Islam, like many faiths, places a great deal of emphasis on the religious community. And so, we must also consider how Salafi mosques are formed, that is, how a group of like-minded believers comes together to pray in a style that is despised by many of their fellow Muslims. Informants told me that Xining's Salafiyya movement existed as early as the 1960s, and began openly meeting in someone's house in 1984. The mosque moved to the vicinity of Shu Lin Xiang's current location in the late 1980s and to another location in the early 1990s before building the large prayer hall I frequented in 1998 and adding a larger classroom and dormitory building in 2006. These buildings have now been demolished in anticipation of a grand new mosque on the same block. Each new location was within a block or two of the last, to allow most members of the congregation to continue walking from their homes to the mosque. This constant expansion and reconstruction is typical of mosques of China's northwest regardless of sect, but in Muslim communities with no tradition of Salafism, Salafi congregations emerge out of the preexisting sectarian

structure. The Salafi mosque in Tongxin, Ningxia was scarcely a decade old, and so congregants there were able to share some insight on the mosque's early development.

In Tongxin, Aisa Ahong's younger brother and father as well as other newcomers to Salafism worked together to found a fledgling Salafi mosque. Seven to ten years ago, Muslims from several mosques of different denominations (although mostly Yihewani) united out of dissatisfaction with their present imams and traditional practices. They pooled money to construct a simple, two-story, white-tiled building. It contained one small prayer hall on the second floor and another one on the first. Each one consisted of only a couple hundred square feet of sparsely decorated, carpeted prayer space. Only about twenty people attended each of the three prayers I performed there, but it bore the optimistic name, "Masses Mosque" (大众清真寺). Nevertheless, this small congregation possessed a very strong sense of community. During the ninety minutes between evening and night prayers, the ahong and ten other Muslims sat in a circle to practice reciting Qur'an. Each person would recite about a page of text in Arabic (luckily, they acquiesced to my request to skip me), then the imam would recite it one verse at a time with everyone repeating each verse after him in unison. Then, he would read the Chinese translation verse by verse while explaining each verse's meaning. At Aisa's school in Wuzhong, I studied in this same fashion with an ahong and some old men, but only in Tongxin did I witness everyone in a mosque studying together in this way.

The imam of Masses Mosque was the only Salafi in a Qadariyya Sufi family, and he said that independently studying Qur'an and Hadith led him to the conclusion that Salafiyya was the right path. After this realization, he traveled to a central Ningxia town

called Hongsibao (红寺堡), which contains six or seven Salafi mosques, one of the largest concentrations in Ningxia, where he pursued an Islamic education under Salafi imams. After he graduated, the Salafi congregation invited him to come to Tongxin to serve as its ahong. He realized that it was a very small and new mosque, but he claimed that he went where he was needed, without concern for material rewards. And it is likely that the fledgling congregation in Tongxin was glad to have any ahong willing to lead an average of ten to fifteen people in prayers. He claimed that many other imams are drawn to or remain within the Yihewani sect because it controls many of the bigger and richer mosques. Employment at many Yihewani mosques includes more material comforts than small Salafiyya ones, and often Yihewani imams enjoy sumptuous meals during funerals and death anniversaries.

When I mentioned Xining to this imam, he said that he admired the brotherly spirit among Xining's Muslims who all gathered at one mosque each Friday, and he said sectarian tensions were much greater in Tongxin. He did not mention that the masses of Muslims he admired in Xining belonged to a rival sect. When Aisa Ahong's father and brother took me to visit the Ming Dynasty mosque in Tongxin where Mao Zedong first recognized the Hui minority, they insisted on waiting until prayer was over before entering the mosque grounds because they did not want to run into any of the Yihewani who prayed there. Nevertheless, Xining Salafis also claimed that anti-Salafiyya sentiment was the worst in Xining. In fact one has the impression that a great many Salafi communities optimistically believe that they suffer the worst persecution, and that their movement is more accepted elsewhere. In Tongxin, all of the Salafis I met had recently

left other sects to join a movement that was small and persecuted locally, but they imagined it to be popular among the most learned Chinese Muslims and the majority of devout Muslims internationally. Essentially, they rejected most of the large community of Muslims in Tongxin in order to form a tight-knit local community that they perceived as a microcosm of the universal brotherhood of Salafiyya.

Conversion as Rational Self-Discovery

In each of the aforementioned cases, individual investigations of the Islamic faith are described as having led to reexamination of traditional beliefs and practices. In both types of conversion, namely of non-Muslims converting to Islam and of Muslims joining the Salafiyya movement, change in belief and identity is normally a gradual process, and many people cannot state exactly what realization or specific element of doctrine inspired them to abandon or reinterpret the faith of their ancestors. It seems that gradually understanding the physiological benefits associated with practices like ritual washing and not drinking alcohol, scientific principles that seem to have been miraculously recorded in the Qur'an, and a sense of belonging in the Muslim community slowly tips the scales in favor of some becoming Muslims or specific types of Muslims. A steady accumulation of scriptural knowledge, the realization of many small contradictions between traditional practice and the text of the Qur'an, and a desire for a more modern and universal form of Islam draws many Chinese Muslims from other sects into the Salafiyya fold. Converts express membership in a global ummah of Muslims or a more authentic community of Salafis. They experience local communities primarily as manifestations of a universal community that tacitly makes them cosmopolitan and modern. In a sense, they are

transcending the local and accentuating the individual by inhabiting a transnational identity.

For most new Muslims, converting to Islam is such a challenging transformation that establishing allegiance to just one sect seems unnecessarily daunting and divisive, but for old Muslims, selecting Salafism is an agentive move to embrace faith on an individual level and adopt the identity of an especially devout minority within a minority. Joining a faith or movement is a gateway along the road to self-discovery, a deepening of the process of study, memorization, recitation, and fine tuning of behavior one has already begun. The Islamic practices of most converts and Salafis are not as regimented as those of Tablighi Jama'at, but all of them enact a constant process of becoming more devout, more authentic, more aligned with the imagined global ummah. Converts and revivalists participate in forming a counter-discourse to the party's Marxist evolutionary narrative that treats minorities and religions as static remnants of a bygone era. The current political context in China does not allow much room for dissent, but participating in transnational spiritual movements that supersede the materialist nation-state implicitly critiques and challenges the latter without risking direct confrontation. Choosing spiritual identities opposed to the expectations of an atheist or traditionalist social context empowers the self through transcending local regimes of power and discourse to imagine and take refuge in a universal Islamic community.

Chapter 7 - Secular Nation/ Imaginary Ummah: Chinese Muslims in the National

Public Sphere and Transnational Imaginary

That is a nation [Jews or Christians] that has passed away. They shall receive the reward they earned, and you will receive what you earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do. (Qur'an 2:141)

When discussing reports from televised news broadcasts or online social media that reflect poorly on the Chinese people by showing young people misbehaving, teachers brutalizing students, self-important bureaucrats defrauding the public, or shameless acts of public debauchery, Chinese people often shake their heads and say to foreigners, “Chinese people are not okay” (中国人不行). Chinese teachers at Qinghai Nationalities University often resorted to such statements when discussing current events with foreign students. Such assessments commonly emerge when Chinese people engage Americans in conversations comparing their two countries. Asked for elaboration on how exactly Chinese are “not okay” (怎么不行?), typical explanations describe Chinese people as “uncivil” (不文明), “backward” (落后), “uneducated/uncultured” (没有文化), or sometimes “too numerous” (太多了). Most Chinese associate these problems with a lack of “development” (发达), especially when making comparisons to the U.S. Chinese Communist Party rhetoric places so much emphasis on development that many Chinese people seem to assume that urbanization and economic development will raise the “cultural level” (文化水平) or simply “quality” (素质) of the population and gradually eliminate the nation’s social ills. Of course, such rhetoric is based on unilineal Marxist theory of social evolution, and the party claims to be leading lagard minorities and others still deluded by religion toward a higher cultural level.

Muslims agree that development is necessary to help people to become educated, but they criticize the Chinese state and people's myopic obsession with material aspects of development, which they implicate in encouraging rampant selfishness and immorality. They often critique societal immorality as primarily a Han Chinese problem, saying, "They [Han Chinese] have no belief/religion and will dare to do anything" (没有信仰, 什么都敢). Muslims will even acknowledge that Buddhism and Daoism are preferable to no faith, but they feel that these religions are so lackadaisically practiced that they have become mere superstitious trivialities for the vast majority of professed adherents. There are numerous Tibetan Buddhists in Xining, but Muslims see them as parochial, uneducated, culturally retrogressive, and likely destined to be assimilated into the Han nation. Chinese Muslims are also highly critical of themselves as a group, saying they are backward, uneducated, unorthodox, or "not okay," and that they have little to no understanding of their own religion. Although they see quite various paths to correcting this, a very large proportion see the economic development of the Chinese nation as a prerequisite to rectifying the deleterious state of Islamic knowledge and practice in China. For Chinese Communists, economic development will lead to science-based materialism; for many or most Chinese Muslims, it will lead to improved knowledge and practice of Islam.

Even though many Chinese often complain about social problems, most of them are reluctant to assess blame in candid or critical discussions about politics, especially when speaking with an outsider. However, when Chinese people do assess causes of society's ills, they tend to blame corrupt minor officials' subversion of what they

characterize as well-intentioned policies established by leaders in Beijing. They also tend to mention a more pervasive and recalcitrant culprit: the teeming, ungovernable Chinese masses, whose sheer numbers make it difficult for many to get a good job or education, and the “low quality” of which they claim makes Chinese society immoral and democracy impossible. Universal Islamic identity inspires Chinese Muslims to look abroad to both Islamic and Western nations for counterexamples to Chinese society. They select elements from societies around the globe to shape their individual identity and influence other Chinese Muslims, but they generally accept the atheism of the Chinese state and Han majority as inevitable. Many influential Chinese Muslims, including the party cadres, international businessmen, and exchange students to be discussed below, decry the party’s atheism and unaccountability, but still claim single party rule is essential to maintain stability and achieve greater development.

A tendency among the Chinese “common people” (老百姓) towards self-deprecation, powerlessness, and dependency on a government that most acknowledge to be corrupt and at least somewhat oppressive amounts to what I have come to think of as a sort of collective “battered person syndrome.” I do not mean to make light of domestic abuse or the sometimes violent oppression of the CCP, but I intend to underline the serious psychological trauma and difficulties in escaping both. Constant propaganda campaigns urging Chinese people to act more civilized, to comply with the one child policy and reproduce less, and to behave more morally, together with reminders of China’s “century of humiliation” and a tendency of the government to deflect blame for societal ills from the central to local governments and ultimately to the common citizenry

have contributed to a collective sense of low self-esteem among the Chinese populace. Thus, when the government cracks down on rebellious or unruly segments of the population, foreign instigators or the rebels themselves receive blame rather than the government. Even those who sympathize with protesters' grievances still decry their allegedly violent or uncivilized methods. The blind obedience and dogmatism of the Maoist era are over, and virtually no one fools his or herself into believing that the Communist Party is driven by communist or socialist motivation, but the Chinese people still rely on the party to protect them from each other. Chinese people tend to fear that too much dissent, if permitted, will pull the country apart and allow them to be victimized by foreigners, whom the state media depict as perpetually conspiring to victimize the Chinese nation. Few Chinese people have any illusions about being free under the present system, but mostly they feel they cannot do any better. And it is entirely possible that the Chinese people are correct in assuming that overthrowing CCP rule would cause chaos and economic collapse.

I make this assessment, at the risk of sounding emasculating, condescending, and orientalist, in order to illustrate how the party manages to retain control over a Chinese populace that is aware of the party's shortcomings and manipulation of the media. In devolving blame for social ills to the people and using propaganda to encourage citizens to better themselves, the current Chinese state arguably shares with its Confucian and Maoist incarnations a discursive emphasis on self-cultivation. However, the transparency of the party's ideological basis in "Mao Zedong thought" or "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and popular awareness of the state's manipulation of the media

encourages citizens, especially non-atheists, to participate in the globalizing trend in looking abroad for inspiration and alternatives. I aim to illustrate how the type of transnational identity and universalist morality Islam offers can provide individuals with the agency and self-confidence to imagine possibilities beyond continued dependence on a single ruling party or culturally particular ideology. However, the “battered person syndrome” I have described here helps to explain why such changes in perspective have taken place principally within individuals who still mistrust each other, fear instability within China, and are wary of the motives at play in the murky realm of international politics, and thus still feel more secure under the party’s control.

In this context, then, Chinese Muslims make compromises to live successfully among a Chinese population that is schooled in Marxism’s condescending stance toward their religious faith. Even if they must sometimes hide their religiosity in public, their Islamic identity gives them a sense of superiority to the atheist Han and a feeling of attachment to global events that they often feel supersede mundane national concerns. The Chinese government’s attempts to control media reports, especially those that have potential to cause unrest or dissent among Muslims, surround such events in a fog of official mystery that creates room for a variety of individual interpretations, manifestations of Islamic identity, and articulations with the global ummah. A continuing increase in the scale and number of transnational connections among Muslims since the 1980s has strengthened global revival movements to the detriment of traditional Chinese Islamic sects. The Tablighi Jama’at movement provides participants with a framework within which they can embody a religious identity and methodology that is shared with

Muslims all over the world, but they ultimately must step outside this purely religious existence in order to make a living. Such a bifurcated identity is not new internationally or unique to Chinese Islam, but ordinary Muslims adopting secondary identities as traveling preachers carrying South Asian notions of orthodoxy makes some within the Chinese state uneasy. Likewise, increasing numbers of Salafiyya could threaten to upset the balance of power between Islamic sects. Both movements espouse techniques and goals of self-cultivation that differ from what is advanced in state propaganda, subtly undermining the official discourse. Embodying a foreign habitus of individual ethical comportment asserts transnational identity and in doing so provokes critical comparison among Chinese, Western, and Islamic models of individual morality, citizenship, and statehood.

In spite of the party's devotion to atheism and ban on members displaying outward signs of religiosity, many Muslims, including some who are quite devout in practice, join the party and work in various branches of the government. Hui who work in government jobs do not wear white hats, beards, or traditional Arab clothing; their wives do not wear headscarves; and, if they fast during Ramadan, they do so discretely. As such, Hui cadres outwardly perform the party's ideal of Hui who are assimilated to secular society, but the party also encourages them to participate in the culture of their ethnic minority communities to make them effective liaisons between the state and their ethnic minority brethren (Mackerras 2002:117). Hui cadres also are aware that there is a limit as to how high they can rise in their government departments and that the person in the highest position of Communist Party secretary will always be Han. Hui in public

service generally take pride in holding government jobs, which in historic and modern times are the most desired occupations in China, and which offer superior job security, but they chafe at the dominance of Marxist rhetoric and feel that their insider position is tenuous. Despite candidly discussing the flaws of the party's minority policy and the shortcomings of the atheist Han who dominate the party, none of the Hui cadres I met acknowledged any alternative to continued domination of the CCP or any hope of reforming the party from the inside. Essentially, they participate in the party for material benefit for themselves and the Chinese people, and they seek spiritual fulfillment in Islam, keeping the two modes of existence completely separate.

In this chapter, I will introduce two Salafis who are government officials, one retired and one at the beginning of his career, both of whom must forge compromise between their faith and occupation in public and private. Then we will explore the relationship between Chinese Muslims and the Chinese state, including their predominant acceptance of the need for one party rule as well as their sense of cultural distance from Uygurs and associated lack of sympathy for political separatism. Examining Chinese Muslim perceptions of both Western nations and those of the Islamic world illustrates how the emphasis that Muslim revivalists place on transnational identity (combined with knowledge of how media discourse surrounding these realms is subject to manipulation) makes speculating about the global situation of Muslims a popular and deeply meaningful pastime. Contrary to the party's intentions, attempts to control information have actually exacerbated the situation by producing a widespread sense of cynicism and highly varied conceptions of reality.

Finally, I will introduce two more examples of influential elements in Chinese Islam that may pose challenges to the party's control: an international businessman who advocates democracy and Islam-inspired human rights and a young man who has acquired an Islamic education and sympathy for al Qaeda in the Arabian peninsula. Bureaucrats, businessmen, and foreign-trained students are leaders of the Chinese community who forge articulations with the larger Chinese public sphere and the world outside China, and they do so in a way that is highly contingent and variable, creating room for slippage, experimentation, and instability.

Mr. Han:⁷² A Retired Cadre Devoted to Study of Islam

I met a Salar man named Han in Shu Lin Xiang Mosque. He always wears Western-style suits, is clean-shaven, and greases his hair back in a manner typical of Han men, but I never connected these traits with government service until he told me that he was a party member who had retired from government service. He mentioned this rather casually over lunch and went on to say that many Muslims had criticized him for this occupation, especially when he first joined the party in the 1980s and memories of Maoist oppression were still fresh. Now, he feels free to say that he joined the party to feed his family and has never bought into the communist ideology. While most retired party members still have to attend occasional banquets and official events, Mr. Han claims that his diabetes limits his mobility and forces (or allows) him to avoid all such obligations. Mr. Han freely criticizes the party's minority policy, saying that the party's

⁷² Han 韩 (second tone) is a common surname among Salar people. It descends from the word, "khan," as in Genghis Khan, and also means "king" in their central Asian Turkic language. Despite the identical Romanization, it is in no way related to the name of the Han 汉 (fourth tone) ethnic group.

professed respect for minorities is a sham and that the country is obviously run by the Han. When his daughter married a person from Xinjiang who is half-Hui and half-Kazakh, he planned to give a toast about how Muslim minorities should harmoniously unite to study Islam and cooperatively develop their faith. The proposed speech he described to me could have been taken directly from the party's policy on minority religions, but when he told his daughter's new father in law what he wanted to say, he pled with him not to. He told Mr. Han that he was afraid the police would come visit him the next day and he would lose his job just because of this mere mention of Islam. Being familiar with how the party works, Mr. Han understood his in-law's fear, but the party's hypocrisy still troubles him.

The biggest problem with the party in Han's eyes is a lack of democracy (民主, literally "people's sovereignty"), which leads to corruption and fakery perpetrated by those who have no beliefs and therefore are not accountable in this life or the next. This belief is not only common to most Chinese Muslims, it reflects a traditional Chinese notion that people will only behave in this life if they are terrified of horrific posthumous consequences, which Buddhists and Taoists often depict in gruesome images of sinners being tortured in the Courts of Hell. Han does not specifically advocate universal suffrage or a multiparty system as a remedy for China's corrupt government, but he more broadly complains that the Chinese people hold no power in the "people's republic." Mr. Han is not a believer in Marxism, but the inauthenticity of the party seems to bother him even more than its purported ideology, as the latter at least claimed to have a noble intent. He told me a joke about someone receiving a box labeled "Made in China" and

“Communism.” The recipient opens it up and says, “This is fake!” The party still teaches Marxism, but Han claims that everyone knows that China is now a capitalist nation, only those in the party cannot say so.

Inauthenticity in religion bothered Mr. Han as well, and he saw Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at as contributing in different ways toward making Chinese Islam more “authentic,” which, to a Salafi, generally means “Arabian.” He started attending Shu Lin Xiang Mosque in 2009, eventually bringing his whole family into the Salafiyya fold and even serving on the mosque committee, but he criticizes those who condemn believers of any sect. Han and many Salafis subscribe to the widely shared view that judgement is Allah’s exclusive prerogative, and he mocked pompous, judgmental imams by puffing out his ample belly, describing how their congregation regularly feasts them, then sticking his nose up in the air, and jabbing his finger in the air while sneering, “Kafir! Kafir!” He also mocked those who believe men must wear hats to pray in a mosque, saying that hats were once mandatory to gain admittance to Dong Guan Great Mosque. He laughs about how he once asked one such person if his belief is in a hat. He likes to remind people that the Qur’an requires men to cover the area from their waist to their knees, but makes no requirement for hats. For Mr. Han, emphasis on such outward symbols and the prevalence of unorthodox (i.e. non-Salafi) practices are symptoms of the lack of education among Chinese Muslims.

Like many other Muslims, Mr. Han laments a lack of Islamic knowledge among Chinese Muslims and associates it with the Maoist repression of religion. But he concedes that government restriction is not the only thing that prevented his generation of

Muslims from learning, Han also blames rationing of materials and sheer poverty. He recalls how an imam wrote him Arabic phrases transliterated into Chinese on scraps of wood that he would study in secret. Tears welled up in his eyes as he related how he and many others raised pigs during the Cultural Revolution, but he is even more troubled that many Muslims in rural areas still raise pigs because they did not know any better. Han and numerous Muslims other Muslims described mosques in such villages as empty except for mice, with grass in their courtyards growing waist high. Just as this imagery began to remind me of how Tablighi Jama'at participants describe the need for their missions, he mentioned how it is good that some people do da'wah and teach ethnic Muslims about their faith, starting with how to recite the basic declaration of faith in Arabic. He later confirmed that Tablighi Jama'at was the da'wah movement of which he spoke. In spite of many Salafis' and most party members' opposition to the movement, Han feels that Tablighi Jama'at fulfills a vital role in helping to make up for the deleterious state of Islamic knowledge and practice among Chinese Muslims, and that Muslims who oppose this movement are mostly just old and set in their ways.

Mr. Han is a graduate of Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining and believes that both secular and religious education are important. He feels that imams are too poorly educated, and regrets that even those with good Arabic and a strong Islamic education have little knowledge of Chinese language or secular subjects. He observed the same thing in his travels in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Malaysia, so he sees lack of education as a problem across the Islamic world. He complains that such undeveloped countries put all of their resources into religious education, so they are left fighting

American warplanes with warriors mounted on horseback. Not only does Han denounce how devout Muslims do not study secular subjects, he also complains that other Chinese Muslims who have the opportunity to study abroad spend their time practicing Arabic and developing business contacts without dedicating any time to study Islam. When they return, they can negotiate a contract in Arabic, but have forgotten how to recite all but the most basic surahs of the Qur'an. Han complains that this gives foreigners the impression that Chinese Muslims are materialistic and areligious in addition to impeding the development of Chinese Islam. Of course, it also reveals the actual motivation of many Muslims who travel abroad to study.

Mr. Han and many Muslim revivalists often speak of the need to “develop” (发展) Islam in China, which may seem like a curious expression to use for those who advocate a return to the original Islam and oppose any new ideas or practices. For Salafis and many other revivalists, developing Chinese Islam means the identification and purgation of impure practices, cultural accretions, and temptations of the secular world. Mr. Han wielded power as a party bureaucrat and then later held power within the Salafi community by sitting on the mosque committee, but he felt liberated and more able to dedicate himself exclusively to Islamic studies only after he renounced both of these positions. He complained that a few self-important, wealthy individuals were trying to assert control over the mosque, spawning a conflict that drove Ahmed away, and inspiring fierce debate over whether to relocate the mosque. While many party members parlay government connections to amass business empires and leave fortunes for their offspring, Han said that he plans to leave his children the copious notes he kept of

everything he realizes (体会) as he reads Qur'an and Hadith. With a daughter studying in Malaysia and having made numerous trips abroad, I am sure that there will be a material inheritance as well, but he considered his spiritual legacy to be more important. This member of China's political elite found spirituality only after retreating from the public, but others denounced making such a division in one's life.

Guo: An up-and-coming Salafi bureaucrat

In contrast to Mr. Han, Guo represents a younger generation of upwardly mobile government officials. I have already related how his father brought his family into the Salafi movement while Guo was a boy. He is now in his early thirties and works as a bureau chief in charge of a major infrastructure project for the Xining government. Even though Guo tends to separate his religious life from his occupation, he also denounces such a compartmentalized lifestyle. Like many Salafis, Guo argues that one cannot just accept religion and habitually practice it, one must work to integrate scriptural guidelines and religious motives into every aspect of one's life. Guo rails against secularism, which he defines as seeking reward in this world as opposed to the next. Religion might have governed Guo's conduct, but as a government employee, it was not outwardly visible. Not only was Guo perpetually clean-shaven and bare-headed, I also never saw his wife wear a hijab either at home or the several times she accompanied us when we went out to dinner, but I did see his elderly mother-in-law in a typical Qinghai-style black velvet hijab on one such occasion.

During Ramadan, Guo told me that his "work unit" (单位) went to a lunch meeting in the southern district of the city and he had to make an excuse to avoid going.

His office often planned such things for Friday afternoons when Muslim men are obligated to pray in the mosque. I asked why a government agency would do this in a place with so many Hui, and he said that most Hui were not observant, so no one saw this as an issue. And no Hui, including Guo, were willing to inform their superiors that their religion conflicted with their job. The city also held a Halal Food and Culture Festival during Ramadan to promote Hui culture and the halal products available from local businesses. The festivities mostly consisted of some singers onstage and various cooked food stalls. I asked another Salafi government employee if no one realized the folly of holding such an event during a month of fasting. He could only shake his head and said the government does not care about Ramadan, most Hui in government are not practicing Muslims, and those who are (like himself) are too concerned about face to raise the issue.

Even when feeling weak from hunger and sleep-deprivation during Ramadan, Guo does his best to maintain normal working hours and to go about business as usual. He expressed the vulnerability he felt as a devout Hui by saying, “You are already a minority, but you are a minority within a minority because you want to maintain your faith. You have to place special importance on your individual impression.” (你一经是少数民族，但是你是少数中的少数，因为你要坚持你的信仰，你需要特别重视你个人的印象). As a devout Muslim in an atheist government, Guo is aware that his position is very precarious. Minority status already makes Hui somewhat suspect in the eyes of the Han majority, and most Han consider their refusal to drink or smoke socially awkward, but wasting valuable time praying five times a day and refusing to eat anything all day every day for an entire month seems crazy enough to make someone seem unemployable

to many Han. During the halal festival, I saw several white-hatted Hui men exchanging salaams while eating and drinking in blatant disregard for the Ramadan fast, illustrating that some Muslims who publicly display their Islamic identity do not practice it, at least in this respect, while others are devout in practice without any sort of outward display.

Essentially, Guo supported any movement that deepened engagement with scripture on an individual level, and he was wary of those he suspected of perverting Islamic orthodoxy, but he refused to adopt the judgmental stance he associated with uneducated Chinese Muslims. Guo laments that very few Muslims, especially those of the Sufi or Gedimu persuasion, follow Islamic law or study their faith at all. He also criticizes the way the Tablighi Jama'at movement emphasizes a sudden emotional experience of Islam rather than a gradual build up of knowledge. He did not acknowledge it, but this also parallels the distinction between early Chinese Buddhist subitist and gradualist schools of thought. He has read some Tablighi Jama'at materials, but has little firsthand experience of the movement, so he refuses to condemn them outright. He even expresses cautious optimism that they have the potential to successfully revive Islamic practices in some cases. He also acknowledges that Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya have an inordinately large impact for movements that include just a tiny percentage of China's Muslims. Guo also perceives a general revival in Islamic practice among all sects in China, noticing more attendees in mosques in China's interior, but instead of tying this to a specific sect, he attributed it to China's overall development and increased economic prosperity. Guo sees poorly educated imams as the main obstacle to revival, especially those in rural villages who tend to resist any sort of outside influence, leading them to

condemn participation in movements like Tablighi Jama'at and Salafiyya, sometimes even forbidding their congregants to pray behind imams who don't share their intolerant beliefs. This judgmental attitude is common enough among the "hard sect" Yihewani imams of Qinghai and Gansu, and Guo has developed a special contempt for their beliefs, partially because his wife and her family stubbornly follow them.

Guo's Yihewani "Hard Sect" Wife

Just as Guo has learned to conceal his devotion while working for the government, he also must tolerate the hardline Yihewani dogma of his wife and her family. In short, the constraints of society have prevented him from embodying his faith in public or discussing finer points of theology with his wife, so Guo's faith is centered on the individual. Even though Guo claims that his wife's female cousins had married a Han and a Tibetan without conflict, her family still opposed her marriage to a Salafi. Guo recounted how he sat down with his wife's mother (who, he said, was the real decision maker in the family), and he explained that the distinguishing feature of Salafiyya is a sole emphasis on the Qur'an and the Hadith, which are two sources no Muslim will contradict. His future mother-in-law and her husband are illiterate in Chinese, so they are unable to study theological debates for themselves. The local imams were the root of the men's opposition to the marriage. The simple rural couple did not necessarily fully understand why Salafiyya was so objectionable, but they felt bound by ties to the sectarian identity of their village and the traditional authority of the imams to reject a Salafi suitor for their daughter.

In light of the issues of face and tradition at stake, Guo agreed to not preach Salafi ideas to their daughter or criticize her religious practices, and he said he would refrain from criticizing their sect as long as they did the same for his. This apparently has allowed the marriage and keeps the peace. During Ramadan, Guo's wife began her fast a day earlier than Guo because the Yihewani calculate the appearance of the crescent moon instead of waiting for it to be sighted like the Salafiyya. Nevertheless, in our private conversations, Guo mocked the way she just called her father and asked when the fast started and ended, having no idea how these dates were determined. He said that once he tried to read some Hadith to one of her Yihewani aunts who has been on hajj twice, but she just ignored him and intently watched television. Of course, all Islamic sects recognize Hadith as a venerable source of religious knowledge, but the Salafi place a special emphasis on independently studying these texts.

I inadvertently confirmed that Guo does not preach Salafism to his wife when he was unexpectedly called to Beijing and I ate pre-fast breakfast with his wife, a male cousin, and a female friend of theirs. Usually, she would be cooking in the kitchen most of the time and eat her breakfast at a small kitchen table visible from where we ate in the living room, but distinctly separate. However, when Guo was out of town, we all ate together, and she and her female friend peppered me with questions about my research and the U.S. I described the Islamic revival movements that interested me, and she sat wide-eyed and told me that I knew more about these sectarian issues than she did. She also said that she and ten to twelve colleagues in the hospital in which she worked realized their lack of knowledge and organized a group to study Qur'an and basic

information about other religions. She even invited me to give a lecture to this group, but nothing ever came of the idea and it is likely that Guo quashed it when he came home. The invitation came as a surprise because such religious study groups are common and tolerated, but any meeting to discuss religion outside of an officially recognized institution is technically illegal, and involving foreigners in unsanctioned Islamic education would be highly illegal. Since Guo's wife appeared to be ignorant of basic sectarian differences it would not be surprising if she were also unaware of these restrictions.

Guo criticizes the hard sect, including his wife's family, because in spite of their lack of education, they arrogantly believe that they know better than the vast majority of Muslims all over the world. He related a (probably apocryphal) conversation between a Chinese hard sect along and a Middle Eastern Islamic scholar. The latter is surprised to hear that the Chinese Muslim refuses to pray in the Prophet's Mosque in Mecca because he believes that it is haram to pray behind a Salafi imam. The Middle Easterner assumes that a proponent of such an unusual opinion must have done extensive research, so he asks the Chinese imam where he got his doctorate, only to hear he has none. Then he asks in turn about his master's degree, and his bachelor's degree, and when he became hafiz (memorized the Qur'an), only to learn that the Chinese imam has none of these qualifications. At this, the Middle Eastern Muslim walks away in disbelief. In Guo's eyes, lack of education and material development is the essential problem with Chinese Islam, and he maintains that this is the same root cause of terrorists' misinterpretation of Islam in Xinjiang and abroad.

Like nearly every Muslim in Xining, Guo condemns the violent incidents⁷³ that occurred in Xinjiang during my time in China and accuses Uyghurs of giving Muslims a bad name, which causes the Chinese government to mistreat all Chinese Muslims. The first time I brought up Xinjiang, he shook his head and said that the Uyghurs “destroy our religion” (破坏我们的教门). He claims that they have gotten erroneous and harmful ideas from abroad, an assertion which echoes the CCP strategy of attributing all separatist movements to foreigners bent on weakening China. When asked, he acknowledges that restrictions on religious practice in Xinjiang have worsened the situation, but he expresses little sympathy for Xinjiang’s Muslims, emphasizing that Islam does not justify their violent methods. Guo openly and often criticizes Han people, Chinese Muslims, and Chinese society in general, but he rarely discusses politics and generally seems to support the government point of view when he does. I would not say that Guo supports the party; he is certainly critical of its atheist stance, but like most Chinese I met, he accepts the inevitability of the party’s monopoly on power.

Muslim Revival and the CCP Gospel of Development

Most Chinese Muslims are simultaneously critical of the atheist Han and patriotic toward the Chinese state. Mr. Ma, the ethnic Muslim I discussed previously, says that people are basically good as long as they believe in something, but atheists cannot be trusted. One might expect that a blanket condemnation of atheism would at least make one critical of the Communist Party, but Ma and most Chinese tend to reserve their

⁷³ March 7, 2013, rioting in Korla left four dead. On April 23, 2013, a search of a Uyghur house in Bucha County, Kashgar County escalated into a violent confrontation in which 21 people died, and 35 people died in a June 26 riot in Turpan. When I traveled through these places, there were numerous checkpoints and a visible military presence in the streets.

criticism for local officials. Despite telling me not to trust atheists, he refuses to condemn Mao's persecution of religion or the modern party's atheist ideology. He claims that after the prevalent chaos of the 1930s and '40s in China, state atheism has served a means to build unity by including various minorities and preventing a fight over whose religion would be dominant. He argues that most religious leaders of the time were just cheating people out of money anyway, which is historically has been part of the CCP, Nationalist, and imperial rationale for combatting religious institutions. Ma does not possess a strong religious or secular education, but he has internalized a good deal of the party's religious and political discourse.

In spite of his lack of education, Ma has much personal experience dealing with local officials. When I met him, his house was one of the few remaining in his neighborhood that lay in the path of a new high-speed rail line, and the city government had already forced him to move once to make way for a new train station. He claims the government was offering too little in compensation, and he held out for five more months until they raised their offer price sufficiently. Ma's small neighborhood includes three mosques even though it can be circumnavigated on foot in less than thirty minutes; however, Ma regards the area's ethnic and religious characteristics as coincidental and refuses to characterize ethnicity as a factor in the choice of districts to demolish or the price offered in compensation. Instead, he claims the problem is that the "common people" (老百姓) are powerless against moneyed interests acting in collusion with the local government. It is simply a poor neighborhood on the margins of the city with no wealthy or connected residents capable of saving it. As the months wore on and

bulldozers drew near, Ma began flying a Chinese flag from his second story window, and he even had me take a picture of him beneath it, proudly brandishing his membership in the Chinese nation as a protective talisman against the encroachment of venal developers. After he held out and lived amidst rubble for several months, the government finally agreed to pay his rent in a new apartment complex in the distant reaches of the city. Ma is not enthusiastic about trading his three-story house for a much smaller and less conveniently located new apartment, but he remains optimistic about Xining's development in general, telling me that it will be a great city in another five years.

Most Chinese Muslims share enthusiasm for development with the rest of the population, but they tend to criticize the way Han seem to be single-mindedly devoted to material progress, and denounce the way many devout Muslims (in China and abroad) know nothing beyond religion. Hasan, the Tibetan-speaking Hui, invited me over to his house one day to chat with him and Ismael, a learned Hui friend of his who has attended lectures by many prominent Chinese Muslim intellectuals. They complain that too many Chinese imams can recite Arabic beautifully but cannot explain the words' meaning. Moreover, they claim that it is not enough to master Islamic knowledge, because Chinese Muslims need more college diplomas, masters degrees, and doctorates in secular as well as Islamic knowledge. Many imams urge Chinese Muslims to study science and work toward developing their knowledge and position in society in order to elevate and modernize the position of Chinese Muslims in Chinese and global society. Hasan and many other Chinese Muslims assert that division between religious and secular education is a big problem, and he is amazed that the U.S. has schools that combine these types of

subjects. Ishmael and Hasan agree that the latent influence of Christian culture in the United States is much more beneficial than the atheism and materialism pervasive in China. This materialism, he argues, far predates modernity to Confucius who refused to speak of gods or the afterlife. However, he acknowledges that Confucianism, unlike Marxism, contains virtues such as loyalty and filial piety that are also found in Islam. He notes that in China, students must take a class in politics starting in middle school, which teaches them to value only material things and economic progress. Like most Chinese Muslims, Hasan pursues material goals, but feels that Allah will allow him to accomplish them only if he makes spiritual progress.

While Chinese Muslims are quick to criticize the atheist Han and the Han-dominated party, they are even quicker to disparage the current quality of Islam in China. Whereas Gedimu and Sufi Muslims tend to emphasize the long history of Islam in China and the Sufi saints born and/or buried there, revival movements tend to be especially critical of Chinese Muslims. One Muslim who has participated in Tablighi Jama'at in Pakistan recalled in a circle of Tablighis how he and other Chinese participants could not handle the ascetic lifestyle of Pakistani jama'atis. He said, "Chinese just know eating" (中国人就知道吃) in recounting how he and other Chinese made a Pakistani jama'ati cry because they were dissatisfied with simple South Asian fare and had purchased and prepared food for themselves (a clear breach of the movement's communal ethos). He also described how Tablighis from Pakistan and elsewhere go on "walking jama'ats" in which they eschew all forms of transportation except for their feet, but he said that Chinese people are still new to da'wah work so this method is not yet practiced

in China. During a session of Tablighi Jama'at "general visits," one of the movement's stalwarts who is also trained as an *ahong* began a speech by saying, "We Chinese people's brains are not good" (我们中国人脑子不好). He contrasted this with Americans, Europeans, and Japanese, saying that Chinese have to depend on their faith in light of their lack of intelligence. This formulation is unusually blunt, but the sentiment itself is not unusual. Ahmed, the Salafi *ahong*, also asserts that Chinese people's inability to distinguish between Hui ethnicity and Islamic religion represents the "low quality" of the Chinese people relative to developed nations, like the United States and Japan, which he claims are "high quality, but China is low quality" (素质高, 但是中国底). It may seem unusual to cite two predominantly non-Muslim nations in a conversation about Islamic faith, but Chinese Muslims often cite growth in the numbers of American and Japanese Muslims as evidence of Islam's truth, modernity, universality, and scientific nature.

The Chinese media portray the United States and Japan as China's biggest competitors⁷⁴ economically, politically, and militarily, but Chinese Muslims also tend to focus more on these nations' similarity to China as secular, non-Muslim nations with growing Muslim minorities. Chinese Muslims worry that materialism, close-mindedness, and even a comparative lack of intelligence may be innate characteristics of Chinese people, but the discursive strategy of associating themselves with Muslims in other more developed nations allows Chinese Muslims to transcend ethnic and national differences

74 The conflict over the Diaoyutai (钓鱼台) or Senkaku Islands was constantly in the news during 2012-2013, so Chinese people were constantly discussing the threat of war with Japan, which they often described as a puppet of the American government.

to lay claim to a greater degree of modernity than non-Muslim Chinese. Given the positive association of the United States and Japan with global modernity, Chinese Muslims find it gratifying to believe that Islam is on the rise in both of those nations. Rather than citing statistics of the unimpressive number of Japanese Muslims⁷⁵ or the increase in the American Muslim population (which is mostly because of immigration and fertility (Grim and Mehtab 2011)), Chinese Muslims tend to cite anecdotal accounts posted on-line of Japanese and American doctors and scientists converting. Muslims often matter-of-factly state by way of comparison with unsatisfactory Chinese people, “Americans’ brains are good” (美国人脑子好) or “Jews are the smartest ethnicity” (犹太人最聪明的民族). Such stereotypes are facile ways of explaining China’s relative lack of development, and they persist partially because China has been so recently isolated from outsiders and experiences little immigration. State control over media also attaches a degree of mystique to people and events abroad. Muslim revivalists, like other Chinese, tend to perceive ethnic and national categories as determining certain immutable characteristics even as Islam has the potential to bridge such ethnic divisions. Perceived “natural” disadvantages among Chinese Muslims encourage them to claim unity in faith with Muslims in other nations whom they perceive to be more devout and modern.

Chinese Muslims admire economic development and the growth of Islam abroad, but they worry that a prevailing lack of respect for religion and corruption in the government threatens development in both of these sectors at home. Guo shares in most

⁷⁵ Japan had an estimated 185,000 Muslims in 2010 and is projected to have 171,000 in 2030, remaining stable at .1% of the population. In contrast, the U.S. had an estimated 2,595,000 Muslims in 2010, a number which is projected to increase to 6,216,000 in 2030, increasing from .8% to 1.7% of the population. (Grim and Mehtab 2011).

Chinese people's immense curiosity about and admiration of the United States, and he claims that most Chinese think everything about the United States is good, so he assumes that Americans think every aspect of China is lacking (差). He was surprised when I told him that many Americans admire and even envy China's rapidly growing economy, but he laughed knowingly when I said that Americans generally dislike China's lack of freedom (不自由) and fear the Communist Party. Even though Guo sympathizes with Americans' critique of China's political system, he still adheres to the same party line most Chinese tend to accept: that China would fall apart under a multiparty system, so it needs the CCP to keep it intact and strong. Even though Hui, and virtually all non-Uyghur Chinese Muslims, have no separatist ambitions, they see the stability of the Chinese nation as perilously fragile due to unlearned and self-interested Han Chinese and restive Tibetan and Uyghur minorities. It seems that the party has successfully persuaded most Chinese Muslims that it is the only power able to keep China's poorly educated and sometimes restless patchwork of minorities together, but Chinese Muslims only begrudgingly accept the atheist party's role in regulating religious practices.

Although most of China's Muslims are generally supportive of the Chinese state in addition to being devoted to Islam, they tend to be suspicious of interactions between the two. When Xining's Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with Eid al Fitr, the city shuts down the main street of Eastern Xining and over one hundred thousand men form a praying throng half a mile long. This is such a major event, that the government requires all the city's mosques to hold services at the same time on the same day. This conflicts with the Salafi practice of waiting to end Ramadan until the crescent moon is sighted in

Saudi Arabia instead of relying on a locally calculated calendar like the Yihewani and others. Thus, on what was scheduled to be the last night of Ramadan, Shu Lin Xiang's Ma Ahong gave an interesting talk about how we did not know if we would celebrate the end of the fast the next day, but we had to gather and pray regardless, because the CCP had declared the next day to be Eid al Fitr (开斋节). If no one were to show up for the holiday prayer (which was not held at a usual time for obligatory prayer), he feared the government might accuse Salafis of being disobedient.

Ma reasoned to the congregation that there would be no harm in getting together to pray and study and noted that it was a sensitive time for Muslims in China. He cited the recent violent incidents in Xinjiang and added that the Ningxia government recently released a policy saying that those younger than sixth grade cannot study religion inside or outside mosques. Preaching from a pulpit in the mosque's overcrowded temporary facility, the ahong pointed out that it was a particularly fragile time for Shu Lin Xiang, the "root" (根) Salafiyya mosque in town that had just begun construction on a new mosque. He went on to say that if the crescent moon did not appear that night, we would simply combine prayers for the holiday with the Friday prayer that would be held the following day. This would mean the holiday prayer would take place later in the day than usual, but he cited Hadith that established that this is acceptable. Ma Ahong kept saying that the congregation had to put the needs of the mosque first and have patience with the current situation. His rationale was reminiscent of how Aisa Ahong in Ningxia maintained prayer styles he regarded as unorthodox with an eye toward future success. As I rode home with Guo and Yusuf, both government employees, after this lecture, they

expressed resigned exasperation at what they characterized as a typical CCP attempt to assert its authority.

Ilyas: an International Businessman in Support of Democracy and Human Rights

Ilyas is one of the few Chinese I met who wholeheartedly support democracy, contrasting with most Hui (and Han) who are skeptical of whether such a system can succeed in China. He is 43 years-old and has two sons, of eight and twelve years-old. He owns an international trading business based in Guangzhou, which requires him to make frequent trips to Bangladesh and South Asia. Ilyas has a college education and speaks excellent English as well as Arabic. He spent five years working in the Xining city government, and he still does not wear a beard or a white hat. He eventually left public service because he felt that his advancement was limited by his adherence to Islam and its conflict with Marxism. Like many of Xining's Hui businessmen, he lives in Guangzhou for most of the year and spends the hot summer months, the Chinese New Year holiday,⁷⁶ and Ramadan in Xining, where his family lives year round because of its more Muslim-friendly environment. He is enthusiastic about studying Islam and is thinking of setting up a Guangzhou Islamic Society with several like-minded Guangzhou businessmen. I met many of these men at a wedding banquet in Xining, and they spent most of the meal debating how to provide their children with quality education in both Islamic and secular subjects for their children, as they feel both types of education are substandard in China. I asked Ilyas what was most important for me to write about Islam in China, and after a

⁷⁶ Like every other Salafi I met, Ilyas does not celebrate the Chinese New Year, but he does not work during this time because there is little business to be done while most of China is on vacation.

thoughtful pause, he began by saying that China is a great civilization with 5,000 years of glorious history, but now it is “going down.” He asserts that Chinese people today have no manners, no respect for culture, no human rights, and no spirit; all they know is money. He blames this on the government’s general derision of religion and the complete absence of any moral basis to the educational system. In his eyes (and those of most Chinese Muslims) the socialist and patriotic lessons taught in schools and promoted in propaganda are empty rhetoric (since the party itself no longer practices socialism) and do not count as morality. Indeed, such complaints are commonplace among Chinese Muslims, but Ilyas goes further than most in his political critique of the party.

Many Chinese admire the freedoms Americans enjoy, but Ilyas is one of the most vocal and thoughtful proponents of democracy among my informants, and he is hopeful that such a system will govern China in his or his son’s lifetime. Many young people adamantly support democracy, but it seems that a majority of people over forty years old are doubtful that it can work in China. Few are nostalgic for the tumultuous days of the Nationalist Party, but Ilyas flatly stated that the Guomindang (国民党) that was defeated in 1949 would be preferable to the current regime because of its “more democratic character.” He also is the only person who talked to me of “human rights,” and he cited his Arabic teacher as saying that Islam is the ideal source of human rights because of its egalitarianism, universalism, and goal of protecting the dignity of mankind. Of course, his idea of human rights varies drastically from liberal Western discourse; he includes gambling, pornography, and insults to Islam as violations of human rights. Even if Ilyas’ theoretical source and definition for rights varies from predominant international norms,

the concept of a universally applicable set of rights still contrasts with the type of Chinese exceptionalism on which the current system of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (中国特色社会主义) is built. Such universal principles also contradict the party’s uneven distribution of rights and restrictions to minority groups. Many Muslims and other Chinese people claim that China is too big in geographic size and population, so democracy would cause it to fall apart. They also cite China’s recent economic progress as evidence that single party rule is simply more efficient (especially in comparison to combative and perpetually deadlocked American-style democracy). Still, some Chinese Muslims who oppose democracy in the present hope that it will prevail in China one day. Others idly hope that enough Han will eventually convert to Islam to allow the implementation of Islamic law one day, but no one sees this as a possibility in the foreseeable future or as long as non-Muslims remain the majority.

Many Chinese Muslims feel that the Communist Party undermines Islam and perceive a clear ideological conflict between Islam and Marxism, but no one in my experience seemed to perceive any contradiction between Islam and democracy. When Shu Lin Xiang Mosque planned to vote on the mosque’s relocation, no one opposed the idea of balloting, and it seemed to be a mutually agreeable solution that would end the frequent shouting matches that took place in the mosque courtyard during the time of deliberation. Everyone I asked agreed that it was the logical way to reach a decision. However, no one seemed surprised when the local government intervened and effectively preempted the vote, but most people seemed quite annoyed about this loss of agency. After a couple days of griping while reading the notices of the government’s decision

posted on the door of the mosque, mosque life went back to normal, and almost exactly one month later, a large picture of the planned mosque appeared on the doors of the prayer hall which seemed to allay any lingering bad feelings. Discontent is extremely common among Chinese Muslims, but frustration with the government and solidarity among Muslims almost always falls far short of any form of activism, nor do they create sympathy for separatists in Xinjiang.

Xinjiang: Chinese Muslims' Internal Other

Ilyas and most Chinese Muslims believe that terrorists give Islam a bad name by using religion to justify violence in pursuit of political goals, and he traces conflicts among Middle Eastern countries and non-state actors to power struggles brought on by ego or individual desires (for which he uses the Arabic term, *nafs*, denoting a selfish form of human nature which must be overcome). Like most Salafis, he regrets that too many Chinese associate Salafiyya with this violent minority of Muslims abroad, which impedes the growth of the movement. Thus, he and most other Hui have little sympathy for Uyghur Muslims, whom they view as less educated and more prone to violence than other Chinese Muslims. Most Qinghai Muslims seem to agree that Uyghur separatism is inspired by economic and cultural motives, so they remain detached. They are aware that the practice and study of Islam in most of Xinjiang is more tightly controlled by the state, but rather than interpret this as a threat to Islam, they tend to place blame on the violent separatists whose actions have inspired and may actually justify such restrictions. Incidents in Xinjiang generally spark head-shaking among the Hui and a fear that the government might crack down on Muslims everywhere. Although most Muslims are

annoyed that a few Uygurs give their faith a bad name, they often refrain from judging specific Uygurs who are accused, arrested, or executed because they know state media never provide the whole story. When the pictures of fifteen alleged Uygur “terrorists” killed in violence in Kashgar covered the front page of the Xining paper, a congregant at Shu Lin Xiang held it up and said, “They did not obey the Communist Party” (他们不听共产党的话), implying that it was clear they ran afoul of the party, but whether or not they were actually guilty of any crime was unknown, and essentially unknowable.

Writing about Xinjiang goes against the advice of a graduate student and an imam who expressed fear that doing so might impede my ability to return to China. Interestingly, they also saw this as perfectly reasonable because the situation in Xinjiang is completely different from that of Muslims elsewhere in China. Indeed, they were well versed in the local situation, but told me they knew nothing of the situation in Xinjiang aside from rumors and unreliable news reports. Except for a few jama’ats made up of Xinjiang people (almost always Hui and not Uygurs), there is little interaction between Muslims in Xinjiang and those outside the territory. Each of the larger mosques in Xining has a few students from Xinjiang, and a few Uygurs travel to Xining to work or sell their wares, but most, if not all, of them do not have official permission to travel to or reside in Xining, and so their position in town is tenuous. Few of Xining’s Muslims have ever been to Xinjiang, so they generally share an abstract sense of solidarity mixed with pity and condescension, similar to how they view uneducated Muslims in impoverished and war-torn countries. However, Qinghai Muslims generally agree with the government in assessing separatism as a result of lack of development, so they generally support the

party's goals of developing Xinjiang's infrastructure, economy, and education system as a means to achieving peace and paving the way for eventual spiritual development of Xinjiang's Muslims. Hasan, the Tibetan-speaking Muslim I discussed earlier, is ambivalent about the side-effects and motivations behind China's development but is eager to participate in and profit from it. He is curious about when and how the U.S. "opened up" its western regions, and he clearly sees the wind energy project he plans to build in Xinjiang as part of fulfilling China's manifest destiny. At the same time, he sympathizes with Uyghurs and Tibetans who feel that they are outnumbered by Han and that their culture is threatened. However, he sees the homogenization of cultures into national and transnational religious identities to be a natural and benevolent, if sometimes painful, evolution.

One Uyghur student at Shu Lin Xiang Mosque named Hasan spoke Mandarin fluently and trusted me well enough to speak candidly about the situation back in Xinjiang. In contrast, another Uyghur student only smiled at me and said in broken Mandarin, "America has Rebiya [Kadeer]. Do you know of Rebiya?" (美国 Rebiya 有. 你知道 Rebiya 马?), referring to the exiled dissident living in the U.S. who is head of the World Uyghur Congress. Hasan, the oldest of the mosque's manla at twenty-two, told me that when he returns to visit his family in Turpan, the local police invariably pay him a visit the next day to ask what he has been doing in the "interior" (内地).⁷⁷ Hasan lies and says he has been "working" (打工), which he says is what all the Uyghurs studying in

⁷⁷ Qinghai Muslims use the term "interior" 内地 to refer to the provinces to the East, but this usage implies that those in Xinjiang use the term to refer to the rest of China, including Qinghai.

Xining say when they go home. He also shaves off his short beard before he goes to Xinjiang in order to avoid arousing suspicion. The Xining authorities occasionally visit Shu Lin Xiang and other mosques to “investigate” (调查), and Hasan quickly exits the mosque when they do. He is lucky that his features can pass for Han Chinese. At one time during 2012, there were four Uygur manla at Shu Lin Xiang, but every one of them had to move out one week after the June 26 riot in Turpan. Government control over Uygurs both inside and outside of Xinjiang increases in response to such incidents. Police rounded up several Uygurs outside Shu Lin Xiang Mosque after the first Friday noontime prayer of Ramadan, and the owner of one of the many halal hotels in town told me that the local police require him to report all Uygur guests.

Hasan is frustrated both with his fellow Uygurs and with the Chinese government, and he said the latter could end the conflict by simply loosening the restrictions on Islamic study and practice and elevating the Uygurs’ standard of living. He complains that violence and restrictions on religious activity have created a self-perpetuating cycle, and revenue from Xinjiang’s oil, natural gas, and other resources “is put into the government’s pockets” (放在政府的口袋里). He draws parallels between Tibet and Xinjiang, saying these two minorities are the only ones locked in struggle against the government because they face the most restrictions, have the lowest level of education, and suffer from the highest level of poverty. He also expresses extreme skepticism as to the veracity of reports coming out of Xinjiang, saying that the state media are eager to put the “terrorist hat” (恐怖份子帽子) on anyone who opposes its will, so it is impossible to know what really happens. Hasan often shakes his head resignedly while discussing these

issues and repeatedly says that such “pressure is just a test” (压力就是一个考验), a hardship from Allah to be endured, not combatted.

Mujahed: Foreign Exchange Student and al Qaeda Sympathizer

The CCP accuses Uyghur separatists of being inspired by foreigners, but most students who have studied abroad have no aspirations to commit acts of violence or any sympathy for those who do. However, one student who studied in the Arabian peninsula, fittingly named Mujahed, admires Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda in spite of his fascination with American popular culture. Mujahed is a 24-year-old student who studied Islam and Arabic at an Islamic university in the Middle East for the past ten years before briefly returning to Xining and then going to work as a translator in Dubai. His English is excellent and Arabic probably even better. I first met Mujahed when he called out to me as I walked past his father’s noodle restaurant. He had seen me in Shu Lin Xiang Mosque and insisted that I come to the restaurant for dinner that night. He had seen me around the neighborhood and thought I was Jewish until he had seen me in the mosque. According to Mujahed, there used to be white men with long beards like mine who hung around Dongguan Mosque. He assumed that these men were Muslims until some foreigners from the Middle East told him they were Jews. He didn’t believe them at first, but at their urging, he invited them to pray with him in the mosque, and as his foreign friends predicted, they refused to go. I heard similar stories of Christian missionaries masquerading as Muslims, and I never encountered any of them, although I was often mistaken for one.

Mujahed loved to talk about global politics, even though he cautioned me not to discuss such issues with others or say bad things about China lest I be mistaken for an American spy sent to start trouble and weaken China, a group he claimed makes up 10% of Americans in China. Like most Chinese Muslims, he supported the Chinese government's efforts against perceived Japanese and American aggression, but was also critical of the atheist Communist Party and expressed a strong affinity with Muslim nations in general. Mujahed glowingly described Muslim countries in contrast to the U.S. (where he has never been), saying that they have virtually no crime, women are cherished and given preferential treatment, and the negative image of the Islamic world is entirely due to biased coverage of the Western media. He refused to believe that Muslims would kill each other, and he asserted that incidents of terrorist attacks on Muslim civilians are actually perpetrated by American agents in disguise.

In contrast to all of my other informants, Mujahed wholly supported the ideology of violent jihad, even reciting a speech by Osama bin Laden and saying he wished he could join al Qaeda. He expressed this desire as an offhand remark and it was clear that responsibilities to his parents, wife, and young son made this an impossibility. Such sentiments are very uncommon, and besides Mujahed, I heard them only from a couple of particularly surly cab drivers. Neither they nor Mujahed oppose the Chinese government; however, because they claim that it does not interfere in other nations' affairs. Mujahed even expresses hope that China one day will help Islamic nations acquire nuclear weapons. When several U.S. Marines died in a training accident, he showed me how he posted the story on a social media account and every one of the commenters responded

positively, praising Allah for punishing the Americans. This represents the most common response among Chinese Muslims to perceived American aggression: wait for Allah to resolve the situation. Mujahed said that his greatest dream is that one day the Muslim nations of the world will unite, and he (and many other Chinese Muslims) also described this as the United States' greatest fear.

Most Chinese Muslims view Afghans as being engaged in a justified struggle against American occupiers, but they also cite the Qur'an to condemn the killing of noncombatants in terrorist acts such as the Boston Marathon bombing and riots in Xinjiang. I cited such verses when talking with Mujahed, but he just smiled and asked me who between us had studied the Qur'an more. Mujahed also cited bin Laden's justification for violence against civilians by classifying all citizens of any democratic state as inherently complicit in their elected government's aggression against Muslim nations. When I mentioned that Muslims, foreigners, and children also died in the September 11 attacks, he suggested that the U.S. government actually perpetrated them anyway. He expressed admiration for the Islamic government in Iran, and quoted bin Laden in saying that the American culture is "rubbish culture." When I asked him about the hip-hop and pop music to which he loved listening, he claimed that these originated in Europe, and changed the subject when I tried to explain to him the origins of these in the jazz and blues of the American south. Mujahed was unusual in freely criticizing me and my Chinese language abilities and making frequent provocative or incendiary remarks, but he repeatedly refused to engage in actual debate, avoiding conflict in a manner common in Chinese culture. When I confronted him with the fact that he would change

the subject every time I challenged his logic or asked him a hard question, he would simply say that he simply did not want to make me angry. Like most Chinese, he is extremely skeptical about anything he hears from popular or online media, and so he bases his beliefs on a combination of hearsay, stereotypes, and unprovable assumptions.

Islam and the Transnational Imaginary

Some jihadists and scholars perceive Islamic revivalists and fundamentalists as conflicting with all secular or non-Muslim societies, but this is clearly not true of most Chinese Muslims. Rather than perceiving the divided world of Huntington's (1996) "clash of civilizations," Chinese Muslims are rife with internal divisions and inhabit a multi-polar world in which they do not wholly identify with or support any of the actors. In *Landscapes of the Jihad*, Faisal Devji (2005) describes how acts of terrorism potentially serve to unite Muslims all over the world and force everyone to bear witness and choose sides in a purported clash between religiously defined civilizations. Chinese Muslim revivalists do resemble Devji's description of extremists that use global events to construct individual ethical behavior, rather than acting to produce a specific political goal (Devji 2005:101). Chinese Muslims perceive a much more complicated world and have complex relationships to the multidimensional actors therein.

Chinese Muslims and most non-Muslim Chinese admire many trappings of Western-style modernity and critique the comparative lack of scientific education, technological backwardness and material poverty of Islamic nations, which they claim provoke misreadings of Islam that permit terrorism. They oppose the actions of the American government toward Islamic nations, but they admire Western governments'

recognition of religious values in contrast to the staunch atheism of the party. However, Chinese Muslims generally see their government's noninterventionist foreign policy as a benevolent counterexample to the United States. Even those Chinese Muslims who sympathize with some Islamic governments or political organizations tend to perceive Uyghur separatism as a distinctly local struggle, detached from that of Muslims elsewhere. Thus, Chinese Muslims do not see themselves as wholly in conflict with Western or Chinese civilizations, nor do they completely emulate Islamic nations, some of which they believe to be heretical and many of which they consider to be just as backward as China in material development. Depending on an individual's sectarian persuasion, he or she may idealize Saudi Arabia, India, or Egypt, or accuse governments and individuals in these nations of heresy or of collaboration with Israel or Western imperialists. Individuals shape their own identity in relationship to national and stateless actors on the global plane through constant interaction with local participants of religious movements, forging their own perception of the global ummah that implicitly subverts, or at least ignores, the nation and empowers the individual.

The Chinese government's imperfect control and filtration of media distances Chinese Muslims from the discourses of the Islamic world, Western media, and domestic Chinese news outlets. Censorship does not wholly prevent the spread of information, and popular awareness of the government's attempts to control media and promote thinly veiled agendas casts a shadow of doubt over both domestic and foreign media outlets. Rather than inhibit debate about sensitive subjects, censorship promotes rampant speculation because the public is aware of the widespread ignorance and misinformation

created by censorship, and this awareness inspires and perpetuates wild conspiracy theories, simplistic grand narratives, and prejudiced stereotypes in the popular imagination. Chinese Muslims are more likely to believe unsubstantiated rumors from trusted fellow Muslims than corroborated reports from Chinese or Western media that are believed to be tainted by bias. Despite this skepticism of all secondhand knowledge, most Chinese Muslims are voracious consumers of news media because they believe that dissecting media reports can reveal kernels of true events, machinations of national and transnational powers, and, perhaps, even the hidden will of Allah.

Chinese Muslims admire the perceived devotion among citizens of Islamic nations which most of them have never visited, but they struggle to understand why Allah allows these nations to be impoverished and disempowered. Hasan and his friend, Ishmael, agree with many Chinese Muslims in complaining that Muslim nations are now the most “backward” (落后) in the world because they fail to correctly apply Islamic principles in order to develop their nations to benefit their people. In contrast, Ishmael and many others cite the history of powerful Islamic empires of the past to argue that modern Islamic nations are being punished for turning away from true Islamic government, which is tolerant of non-Muslims and dedicated to serving its people. Tibetan-speaking Hasan and Ishmael wonder why Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and other “Muslim” leaders were able to be killed by the United States. Taking Iraq as an example, Ishmael friend argues that this and other oil-rich Arab nations have plenty of wealth and power, but they squander it through corruption. He also denounces their lack of scientific achievement and development. Such nations have a surplus of so-called

religious leaders, but they never send students abroad to learn about Western science to help develop their nations and elevate their people's material well-being. Ishmael argues that Obama, Bush, and other Western leaders are able to defeat Islamic leaders because Allah is using them as tools to punish bad Muslims. Ishmael describes these transnational struggles as interpersonal conflicts between world leaders rather than clashes between governments or nations, intertwining the personal and the global. Chinese Muslims perceive individual actions as globally significant, and they shape their own individual identities to prominently feature membership in transnational religious movements and the global ummah, asserting international belonging in the face of their marginalization within an atheist Han nation.

The significance of individual Muslims in the transnational imaginary of Chinese Muslims extends beyond political figures to attach inordinate significance to individual American converts. Young Chinese Muslims who have studied English in school enthusiastically watch English language videos of American Muslim converts. Multiple Chinese Muslims showed me videos of the American Muslims, Abdur Raheem Green, Yusuf Estes, and Abu Muhammad Khalid Yasin. As Americans, these figures carry a certain amount of prestige associated with modernity, and being raised as Christians legitimizes their critique of Christianity and assertion of Islam's veracity. There are also numerous videos of popular Chinese imams online, but no one seems very excited about these. Despite the fact that virtually all devout Chinese Muslims study Arabic, they do not watch Arabic-language sermons, and it is unclear whether they would understand them. Some Muslims also pointed out that videos of Middle Eastern imams are far less likely to

elude censorship than those posted by Americans. Chinese Muslims enthusiastically claim Michael Jackson, Mike Tyson, and Neil Armstrong as converts. (Even though this has been denied by Jackson and Armstrong.) Some will also assert that rumors of Jackson's sexual deviance and evidence that resulted in Tyson's conviction for violence against women were fabricated in order to besmirch Islam. Of course, this does not make sense since Tyson converted in prison, and the unsubstantiated claims of Jackson's conversion do not claim it happened until long after pedophilia rumors began. However, the veracity of such claims is unimportant as Muslims simply cite these conversions to illustrate the growth of Islam and the incipient threat posed by some who attack the faith.

Most Chinese Muslims refuse to believe that Muslims actually kill each other, and some even claim that intra-Muslim violence is often perpetrated by Israeli or American agents in disguise. Indeed, there is a certain degree of paranoia about outsiders attempting to mislead and divide Muslims. Both Yihewani and Salafiyya trace each other's movements to British colonial projects in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, respectively. The modern alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States leads many Yihewani to claim that Salafism, al Qaeda, and other groups associated with terrorism are actually sponsored by American or Israeli intelligence agencies to divide Muslims and justify attacks on Islamic nations. Since manipulation of the media is an accepted fact, evidence for such theories is considered unnecessary and evidence disproving them is easily disregarded. Chinese Muslims preface discussion of the conflict in Syria by saying they do not know if what they heard is real or not, and they often discuss outside forces like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United States as the principle actors in the war. A shadowy

and sinister other is always lurking in the background. Similar to how the party frequently claims foreigners are conspiring to undermine China, Chinese Muslims perceive underhanded foreign forces constantly working to divide and weaken individual Muslims and Islamic nations. Chinese Muslims often perceive Jews in this role, and Shu Lin Xiang's Ma Ahong goes so far as to claim that Karl Marx created communism as part of a Jewish plot to gain world domination.

Like many, perhaps most, Chinese Muslims, Ilyas is unapologetically antisemitic. Not only Muslims, but many Chinese people take it for granted that Jews are the most intelligent of all races. Indeed, an Israeli traveler recounted to me how multiple Chinese people told her on separate occasions that she had a genetic disease that makes her extremely smart. However, Ilyas and other Muslims specify that this intelligence is also a curse, because it leads them to arrogantly believe that they are better than others and even smarter than Allah. The Qur'an states that Allah "gave the Children of Israel the Scripture and the wisdom and the Prophethood, and provided them with good things and favored them above all peoples," but it does not specifically say the wisdom given to them was greater than all other peoples (Qur'an 45:16). Jews as well as Christians often appear as a cautionary example of a people who turned away from God. As a Salafi, Ilyas asserts that Muslims should just believe the Qur'an and Hadith because other people just make things up "like the Jahud." Ilyas implicates Jews in causing the 2007 financial crisis, and like most Chinese Muslims, he assumes that they are the wealthiest people in the U.S. and that they control American media and the outcome of elections. Even Ilyas and other highly educated Muslims often make such claims matter-of-factly and reject any attempt

at denial or explanation. To a certain extent, Chinese Muslims perceive themselves as being allied with all Muslims in competition with Jews and Christians, even though very few of them see this as justifying violence.

Chinese Muslims in general and revivalists in particular look outside China to justify their faith and practices, but Qinghai Muslims complain that the party tries to prevent them from traveling internationally for fear that they might adopt democratic ideas like Ilyas or jihadist ideology like Mujahed. While these ideas themselves certainly have potential to destabilize the single-party Chinese state, neither one of these men actually has any plans or aspirations of personally promoting or implementing their ideas. Islam for them is not the way of their ancestors, or of any Chinese, but the way of more developed and enlightened foreigners. While a certain amount of Chinese nationalism influences most Muslims, they still envision the faith and practices of foreigners as being far superior to their own. As such, Chinese Muslim revivalists are prone to receive foreign influence, but they are aware of the danger of participating in Chinese politics, so any ideas of how Islam should influence the public sphere are merely academic. Transnational religious movements shape individual identities, but they are markedly absent from the largely secular discourses surrounding local and national politics.

Chinese Muslims, especially government officials and prestigious businessmen, participate in the Han-dominated secular world, and so they must maintain separate secular and religious identities to some degree. Thus, secular behavior tends to dominate local and national realms, but religious identity still defines Chinese Muslim revivalists' inward subjectivity, and perceptions of global events reinforce and magnify such forms of

identification. Transnational identity helps give Chinese Muslims the confidence to act as individuals at the risk of censure by the local community. In this transnational imaginary, too vast and complex to be wholly knowable, religious forces are thought to determine global interactions. Thus, reformist Chinese Muslims attach little importance to economic behavior and other actions in the secular realm of the nation. Instead, they focus on cultivating inward spirituality in relation to perceptions of the global ummah. Similar to how Anderson (2006) asserts that print capitalism helped create the national “imagined community,” Qinghai Muslims’ careful attention to debatable reports of global events helps to constitute them as part of an imagined global ummah. This transnational community is a powerful component of individual identity not because of its reality, but because of the way its imaginary nature allows individuals to shape divergent, disparate but individually satisfying interpretations of and articulations with it. There is much room for slippage and experimentation in this discourse of overlapping cultural systems rife with hidden motives and twisted, conflicting assertions about reality.

Chapter 8 - An Ummah of Individuals

Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever goes astray does so to his own detriment. And no one laden with burdens can bear the burden of another. And We never would punish until We have sent a messenger. (Qur'an 17:15)

A situation comes to mind, one Friday I was eating as a guest at a relative's house, there were three males among us, me, a younger cousin, and his younger cousin. When it was time for the congregational prayers, our aunts told the three of us to go to pray together, and I jokingly said that we would still go alone. In any case, after going downstairs, we parted, one to the great mosque [Dong Guan, the Yihewani Mosque], one went to Shu Lin Xiang [the Salafi mosque], I wanted to go to Yang Jia Zhuang (the Gedimu mosque). Ha ha. Here in this story is very much, very much. (Anonymous posting from an online forum of Xining Muslims)

(想起一件事情，有一天主麻在亲戚家里做客吃饭，男的就有我、表弟、表表弟，到主麻时间了姨娘们说你们三个一起去吧，我开玩笑说还是自己去吧，反正下了楼也要分开，一个大寺，一个去树林巷，我要去杨家巷，哈哈，这里面的故事很多很多。)

In my conversations with Mujahed, the al-Qaeda sympathizer mentioned in the previous chapter, I often helped him expand his English vocabulary while discussing politics and religion. Once, I tried to define the English term, *extremism*, and I could not explain to him why the term had a negative connotation, especially when applied to Islam. To Mujahed and other Muslim revivalists, one cannot be too extreme in Islamic practice. There is a Hadith in which Muhammad angrily rebukes Muslims who tell him their plans to never marry, never sleep, and stop eating meat. The prophet says that he does all of these things, so they should not exceed the bounds of his practice (Sahih Muslim 3236). Muslims cite this as a cautionary tale against *bid'a* (innovation), which means deviation from orthodox Islam rather than a what outsiders tend to think of as extremism, or being “too Muslim.” The debate is not what is the proper level of Muslim-

ness; it is a question of what is real and what is fake when it comes to Islamic law, practice, and theology.

The media in America, China, and many other non-Muslim nations tend to classify Muslims into moderate or liberal categories that are valorized versus orthodox or fundamentalist Muslims who are associated with oppressing women, imposing shariah law on non-Muslims, terrorism, and the danger of “radicalization.”⁷⁸ Hopefully, I have made it clear that this oversimplifies the internal complexities of Islam. But more importantly, the value associated with each of these categories is reversed in the Islamic world, with moderate Muslims being seen as degenerate libertines and orthodox Muslims as pious exemplars. Western support of liberal Islamic movements only makes them look like pawns of the West and condemning terrorists as orthodox Muslim extremists or Islamic fundamentalists actually lends an air of legitimacy to their heterodox views. In order to begin to defuse this discourse of cultural confrontation, Muslims and non-Muslims alike need to recognize forms of benevolent extremism like Tablighi Jama’at and apolitical Salafiyya that offer an inwardly focused means of returning to the fundamentals of Islam without recourse to divisive politics or destructive violence.

My research indicates that not all, or even most, means of increasing Islamic piety are properly associated with mindless dogmatism, oppressive politics, violent extremism,

⁷⁸ Ayoob showed me a video of Abu Muhammad Khalid Yasin lecturing about how non-Muslim experts divide Muslims into fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists. I have further simplified this because most non-Muslims do not distinguish between fundamentalists like the Salafiyya and traditionalists like orthodox Yihewani and Gedimu, or the modernist and secularist reformers who contrast with them. He (and Ayoob) condemn the latter two, but condemn the non-Muslims who allegedly strive to keep Muslims divided and weak even more so. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of Yasin’s claims, but his criticism of Muslim reformers and Western motives towards Muslims reflects what I heard from Chinese Muslims.

or other affronts to the values of Western liberalism. Rather than trying to support a wholesale secularization of society or more moderate forms of Islam, it is possible to encourage an Islam that is both more devout and less political. Public display of Islamic piety is certainly an integral part of many conservative Muslims' practice, but no one I met would make such displays mandatory for all Muslims or all people. Chinese Salafis' support for individual education and Tablighi Jama'at's emphasis on self-cultivation are both qualities that appeal to modern Chinese and Western liberal sensibilities. Islam is heterogenous and dynamic, and even scripturalist or fundamentalist movements like Salafiyya, that seem to be most rigid, are also open to interpretation, to a certain extent.

The revival movements I have described bear many similarities to Devji's (2005) description of Al-Qaeda as a decentralized movement, devoid of a political goal, diverging from traditional Islamic authorities, and focused on ethical behaviors. Thus, it is possible that these apolitical and inwardly focused revival movements could appeal to the same Muslims who are drawn to violence when left disillusioned and isolated by a globalizing world. The multifarious motives that draw people to terrorism are far beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that promoting moderate Islam, socialism, or liberalization as ideas that contrast with Islamic law can only strengthen the hand of extremists. Empowering individuals to read and interpret the unfiltered Qur'an as in the Salafiyya movement or to inhabit the role of imam and travel among diverse Islamic communities with the Tablighi Jama'at can create discursive space in which to develop new modes of being Muslim in a secular society, rather than perpetuating a false dichotomy between Islam and the objectives of a secular government.

I have presented a loosely woven tapestry of individuals, held together by variously defined revitalizations of Islam. These revivalists share a belief that since each individual is ultimately responsible for his or her own salvation, each person should thoughtfully choose a path and understand the beliefs and practices it entails. Such people have seized upon Islam as a transnational wave of the future, which provides goals and guidance, a comprehensive system of daily comportment, and a global community of people sharing in all of this. Perhaps most surprisingly, many have found a sense of agency in following a universal moral code that they feel improves on the ways of their ancestors and the law of their nation. Participants in Tablighi Jama'at, adherents to the Salafi method, converts and reaffirmed Muslims who have recently discovered a passion for Islamic study and practice all share the common goal of uncoupling themselves from mere ethnic tradition to achieve a greater degree of authenticity and universality. The nature and source of this allegedly universal authenticity varies, but revivalists agree that it cannot be found without transcending China's borders. As such, China's Islamic revival includes manifestations of several transnational movements, which deny national boundaries and ethnic differences to empower individuals with a direct spiritual connection to what they imagine to be the authentic Islamic ummah.

In Search of Authenticity

Authenticity is a slippery concept, and anthropology teaches us that it is ultimately impossible to uncover any isolated, unadulterated, and entirely "authentic" religion or culture. In today's globalized world, cross-cultural influence is inescapable. Western (and specifically American) culture is so popular throughout modern China that

it would be foolhardy to search for any remote village completely untouched by foreign influence. Scholars and aficionados of Chinese culture may be familiar with the countless innovations in arts, culture and technology to come out of China, but most people today, in China and abroad, are more likely to associate the Middle Kingdom with reproduction goods of low to middling quality. However, most outside of China do not realize that this situation has contributed to a pervasive anxiety within China about authenticity in goods, information, and ideas. Thus, in addition to being part of a historical trend of global Islamic revival, Chinese Muslims' quest for unadulterated, authentic Islam is also part of a larger Chinese discourse about authenticity and the lack thereof.

Many Americans associate the phrase, "Made in China," with items of dubious quality, but few realize that the same words, pronounced in English, are often a punchline in China. When pointing out food that doesn't taste quite right or an item that breaks soon after purchase, many Chinese will laugh, shake their heads, and say in English, "Made in China." Highly publicized recent scandals have involved unscrupulous companies selling used cooking oil as new, watering down infant formula with the chemical melamine, using substandard building materials to construct houses and schools, and just recently, knowingly selling expired meat to fast food chains. These controversies, just to name a few, have produced anger and frustration among the Chinese public. Chinese citizens express awareness that many such schemes continue unnoticed as they cynically mock news broadcasts produced in China, saying that the first third claims that the Chinese people are happy, the second third emphasizes the suffering in other nations, and the third portion assures them that the leaders in Beijing are busily working on their behalf.

Beneath these mundane examples, decades of Maoist attacks on traditional religions followed by a modern government that preaches atheist socialism, but no longer practices its egalitarian economic and social principles, have contributed to a deeper longing for spiritual authenticity in Chinese society. This is officially expressed in crackdowns against allegedly inauthentic religious movements like Falun Gong or the Christianity-based “Almighty God” (全能神) millenarian movement.⁷⁹ Rather than opposing such campaigns on the grounds of religious freedom, Chinese Muslims and other believers join the state and atheists in condemning such heterodoxy. During Friday sermons before and after the predicted end of the world in December 2012, Shu Lin Xiang Mosque’s Ma Ahong mercilessly mocked those who claimed to know when the end of the world would come, including those who recently had been arrested. He also warned that not only Han fell prey to such delusion, some Hui in Ningxia had been drawn into Falun Gong, and he pointed out to the surprised congregation, “Hui is an ethnicity, not necessarily Muslim.” (回族是一个民族，不一定是穆斯林). Unlike ethnicity, authentic faith is not inherited.

Both revivalists and traditionalist sects like Yihewani and Gedimu feel that to achieve authentic Islam, one needs to follow the ways of the prophet Muhammad, but they disagree about the means of doing so. Salafis advocate careful study of the literal meanings of Qur’an and Hadith, whereas participants in Tablighi Jama’at attempt to recreate the experience described therein. In contrast, Gedimu, Sufis, and more traditional

⁷⁹ This millennial sect believes that Jesus Christ has returned as a Chinese woman. A crackdown against this movement just before the predicted end of the world in December 2012 resulted in hundreds being arrested in Xining for printing and distributing illegal religious materials.

sects argue that the only way to access this pure faith is through a long line of imams, scholars, and/or Sufi patriarchs who form a chain through history to link past to present. Revivalists criticize what they see as an excessive emphasis on following such figures, because they ultimately feel that one must embark on an individual quest—through intensive textual study like Salafis or actual wandering while tirelessly reciting select Hadith in Tablighi Jama'at study circles—to discover a direct and authentic understanding of Allah. Furthermore, revivalists strive to perfect their faith through learning and teaching both the rational and scriptural justifications behind each and every practice. Partially because Chinese Muslims are living in a secular society, revivalists feel that mastery of and faith in the Qur'an is not enough, they also must learn to justify their faith and practices with reason and modern science to defend Islam and share it with nonbelievers.

In contrast to the party's conception of religious instruction as transference of inherited dogma, revivalists pursue authenticity in religion by encouraging individual study of scripture so each person can autonomously apply its lessons to his or her life in the modern world. As a result, even the Salafi school of thought known for its political activism elsewhere, has achieved a different incarnation in China as a puritan, but peaceful and strictly apolitical, sect. China's Muslims criticize those in other nations who use Islam to justify appalling acts in pursuit of political and economic goals. They assert that authentic Islam is perfect, but Muslims, like all humans, are flawed. Revivalists struggle to recapture the authentic faith of Muhammad, but they increasingly realize that it this goal is increasingly elusive in the mundane world. Thus, just as Salafiyya and

Tabligh Jama'at are more accurately described as methods of becoming more pious than static sects, it is more appropriate to speak of a process of "authentication" than the unattainable "authenticity." Salafis strive to understand and maintain the authentic meaning of texts and required actions. Tablighis attempt to carry out what they imagine to be the authentic behaviors of the sahaba in order to recreate their authentic subjectivity. Participants in each movement constantly authenticate their motives, mindsets, and actions through scripture, but they deny the possibility of actually producing idealized humans like the saints and great imams admired by other sects or recreating a stable polity in imitation of Muhammad's original Medinan community.

In addition to authenticity, Chinese Muslims are in endless pursuit of modernity as they strive to dissociate their religious identity from the retrogressive stigma Marxist dogma attaches to it. The leading Islamic scholars in China today, as well as most of the best and brightest secular students, are continuing a historical tradition of going abroad in search of knowledge to help modernize China. Graduates from the famed Al-Azhar University in Egypt or Mecca or Medina Universities in Saudi Arabia lead the biggest mosques in Xining. While these imams each have students of their own in China, it is the goal of every student to study in Islamic nations of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, or others. While young people aspire to go abroad, even elderly men with no formal education struggle to perfect their Arabic while sitting in mosques between prayers, helping each other while clustered in small groups or sitting alone with a Qur'an and quietly reciting. It may seem like common sense that Muslims, for whom the study of Arabic is of paramount importance, would seek education in the Islamic world, but one

can also see this as part of a larger cultural trend of Chinese people looking abroad for a more cosmopolitan and authentic education. Many of the same Muslims who assiduously study Arabic also diligently practice English, seeing them both as global languages that can help assure both spiritual and material success. While Muslims can readily name all the best Islamic universities, they (and every other Chinese student) also know the names of Harvard, Yale, MIT and other prestigious American universities. Fluent English and/or Arabic are authentic hallmarks of an overseas education and skills that domestic diploma mills or local mosques simply cannot fake. Just as Chinese Muslims see Chinese, English, and Arabic languages as key assets in an increasingly globalized world, their vision of modernity does not require a choice between Western, Islamic, and Chinese culture, but it enables creative fusions of them.

Religious and Secular Morality in Chinese Society

Many Chinese people contend that the Chinese state and its citizens have gone too far in rejecting both traditional ethical teachings and twentieth century socialist ideology in the process of embracing neoliberal capitalism and the material fruits of modernity. Likewise, China's educated urban Muslims decry the way most of their co-religionists either follow wholly in the footsteps of the materialist Han, or focus exclusively on Islamic education without any schooling in secular subjects, Chinese language, or even spoken Arabic, the sorts of skills needed for success in the modern world. In short, Chinese Muslims complain that their brethren are too mired in traditional forms of ethnic religiosity or so enthralled with the future that they leave their ethnicity and religion behind. There is no question that revivalists place religious learning first, but they also

contend that mundane knowledge is necessary to support the community of Muslims, glorify Islam, and defend and promote the faith among nonbelievers. Numerous informants told me that there is only one truth and it comes from Allah, so a major goal of Islamic revival is to overcome the false dichotomy between secular and religious knowledge and mobilize both of them in pursuit of an Islam that is both authentic and modern. Revivalists want to leave particularistic ethnic religiosity behind them and rediscover a more forward-looking, independent, and universal religious subjectivity that embraces all types of knowledge that can fit within the framework of timeless Islamic scriptures.

While paying lip-service to religious tolerance, the party and its public schools take the traditional Marxist view of religion as feudal superstition. When I toured a Hui public middle school in Ningxia, the principal proudly gave a tour of the halal cafeteria and described the school's elective Arabic classes, but when I asked if there was anywhere for students to pray, he curtly said, "That's not okay" (那不行). Headscarves and white hats also are forbidden, and a local along accompanying me on the campus tour shook his head and said, the students "don't even dare to say, 'salaam'" (连色兰他们不赶说). The government no longer legally mandates assimilation as it did during the Cultural Revolution, but minority identity is "cunningly recognized" to paraphrase Povinelli (2002) and allowed to continue as an unfortunate inheritance of history. Aspects that have potential to drive development or spur tourism like Arabic language, quaint dances, minority cuisine, and even ornate mosques are encouraged, but transnational religious movements and embodied piety are discouraged. While most

minorities traditionally practice indigenous religions, the transnational nature of Islam and its status as an alternate source of virtue, makes revival among Chinese Muslims a subtle challenge to PRC legitimacy.

In governing Hui, Uygur, and other Muslim minorities, CCP policy has come to reflect the belief that Islam itself is not politically dangerous unless it is combined with a volatile mix of economic grievances and radical ideology among a people with culturally and linguistically constituted solidarity within a cohesive territory. Most Chinese Muslims characterize militant movements among Muslims abroad as misappropriating religious rhetoric to combat political or economic grievances. Such grievances have combined with a clear ethnic identity that includes a common language, territory, and history to make Uyghurs a significant threat to the unity of the Chinese state. The party blames this problem on foreign meddling and attempts to isolate the Hui from foreign influences by restricting their ability to travel overseas, but such restrictions do not apply to converts, whom the party seems to believe are too rare to bother regulating. In order to safeguard CCP power and maintain the preeminence of its materialist ethics, party religious policy attempts to keep the religious sphere relatively static so as not to distract from its focus on economic development.

In many cases, Muslim revivalists advance the state's developmental goals by spreading education and alleviating poverty, but religious groups meddling in areas that are traditionally government responsibility can cause discomfort among more conservative elements in the party. Thus, Mr. Ming and his ilk face numerous obstacles when they try to serve their rural Muslim brethren because their activities bely the

government's perception of religion as a retrogressive force and inspire government fears that their activities could serve as an avenue for the spread of subversive ideas. The government prefers to separate religious activities and Islamic education from public schools and secular development projects, but the religious beliefs of some revivalists inspire them to spread religious revival, and sometimes material support, to spur economic and spiritual development among their old-fashioned rural brethren. In addition to conducting religious activities outside the bounds of state-approved religious institutions, urban Muslims spreading orthodox Islamic culture to the countryside are usurping the traditional role of the Han state as the civilizing center spreading culture to the non-Han periphery.

It would be far too simplistic to equate the Communist Party with previous Chinese dynasties, but the CCP uses a familiar discursive strategy to portray those in the government as morally superior to the uncouth masses. This helps the post-socialist (or postcolonial) regime to maintain an exclusive political system in spite of economic liberalization. Instead of inciting political change, economic liberalization has allowed the CCP to hold up the possibility of individual economic rewards to enlist its subjects in the national project of exemplifying modernity and loyalty for their less advanced, rural, uneducated, and/or ethnic minority countrymen. Discursively emphasizing this dichotomy between economic subject and ideologically virtuous cadres allows the party to skillfully employ and expand on traditional tactics of Confucian moralism by recasting them in the flexible discursive frame of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." However, Chinese Muslims adhere to a moral system beyond the party's control, and they

envision an alternative conception of modernity that is pious instead of materialistic, which they promote in rural areas through forms of da'wah like traveling jama'ats and Mr. Ming's philanthropic junkets. Such da'wah projects share some goals with the state, such as encouraging education, hygiene, and peaceful coexistence, but they implicitly challenge the state's historical role as sole guarantor and depository of culture, nationalism, and public virtue.

The party's divergence from traditional Marxist theory and socialist morality complicates its claim to legitimacy as purveyor of socialist ethics and creates room for the elaboration of Islamic and other religious moral systems. The current generation of CCP leaders did not participate in the Long March, War of Resistance Against Japan, or civil war, and scarcely remember the mass mobilizations of Maoism, so it is quite possible Xi Jinping's campaigns against corruption and against ostentatious spending by bureaucrats are partially designed to make up for the fact that today's princelings and technocrats have no obvious claim to socialist or nationalist virtue. Indeed, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is far from coherent as an economic or moral system. Although Ci Jiwei's (1994) assertion that "hedonism" has become the predominant ethos of Chinese governance may be an overstatement, this perception underlines why the party maintains a dialectical, but immensely problematic, relationship between a sovereignty justified with communal socialist moral ideals and market-oriented consumer-subjects motivated by material rewards.

The potentially embarrassing fact that economic success has come through rolling back state control over the economy and renouncing the Maoist isolation long

championed by the party has created the need to adapt dated socialist rhetoric to the realities of the consumer economy. In spite of the party's claim to diverge from the nation's "feudal" past, the party has fallen back on a traditional notion of sovereignty in which the Chinese state asserts its role as ethical guardian by claiming to protect its subjects from real and perceived excesses, failures, and shortcomings of the global capitalist system. Even though the party now accepts the practice of religions it deems legitimate, it still exercises the prerogative to protect its citizens from various sorts of heterodoxy that it deems "feudal superstitions." Muslim revivalists perceive Qur'anic admonishments against innovation as sufficient to ward off heterodoxy and Islamic morality as more than adequate to counteract the hedonistic allure of globalized capitalism. Thus, they tend to emphasize membership in the moral community of the transnational ummah more than their citizenship in the Chinese state. It is important to note that transnational Islamic identity is not necessarily formed in opposition to the Chinese state; Muslims often pragmatically support the party and its goals, but their vision of morality does not always coincide with that on which the party bases its claims to power.

In response to state claims of scientific management based on godless Marxism, Chinese Muslims cite scientific principles that appear in the Qur'an and practical benefits of Islamic practice. The party has positioned itself as the moral guide necessary to lead the people through an era where ever-suspect private and foreign interests are necessarily omnipresent; however, it has learned to tolerate other voices as long as they do not directly contradict or challenge the party's supremacy. The state discursively co-opts

Islamic and other religious communities to display its tolerance and multivalent virtue as guarantor and moderator of harmonious religious expression. Religious policy outwardly displays a velvet glove, but still wields an iron fist in confronting religious communities that step too far outside the established institutional framework. The party dominates China's religious public sphere with a system of regulation and management geared toward sectarian institutions that cannot fully monitor or control the development of individualized modes of religiosity and non-institutional trans-sectarian movements like the Tablighi Jama'at. Indeed, these modes of democratized Islam are not presently subversive, but their existence outside the state's apparatus for religious management is probably more troubling to the party than their transnational character.

The case of Chinese Islamic revival helps explain the resurgence of religion in late twentieth and early twenty-first century politics as those disillusioned with the amorality, uncertainty and international homogenization of the global economy increasingly attempt to imagine themselves as part of a universal moral community that is both cosmopolitan in scope and traditional in morality. While such transnational identities threaten to erode the authority of secular nation-states, other governments reassert their sovereignty by claiming to act as guardian and representative of traditional moral systems, even if recast in a more 'modern' or 'scientific' incarnation. The Chinese state is clumsily attempting to reject religion in the name of modernity, while simultaneously claiming to protect legitimate world faiths, controlling their practices and co-opting their virtue at the same time. Just as Chinese Muslims memorize scripture to recite it with an authentic, yet slightly original, nuance, they also adopt transnational Islamic movements

to authenticate their Islamic practice, but deploy such movements in a nuanced way that helps to shape their own more individual identity and contest the secular hegemony of the Chinese state.

Islam and the Discourse of National Development

Muslim revivalists see themselves as contributing religious influence and a greater sense of morality to Chinese society, even though the Chinese state still promotes the Marxist view that religion will eventually disappear in the process of scientific socialist development. Since the late Qing Dynasty and through the era of the early Republic of China, Chinese Muslims explored and promoted their religious identity as part of the Chinese nation-building process. Despite the varying degrees of religious restriction during the Maoist era and the subsequent tendency to emulate of foreign Islam seen as more authentic, the Hui still see themselves as undeniably Chinese. However, their vision of the future of the Chinese state and the role of Islam within it is highly variable and uncertain. With its numerous autonomous regions full of partially integrated minority groups, and largely unaccountable, Han-dominated central government, one could argue that China resembles an empire more than it does a modern nation-state. Thus, Chinese nation-building is very much an ongoing project, and Chinese Muslims' transnational identity as well as the unique situation of the Hui in occupying a middle ground between Han and minorities put Chinese Muslims in position to play a key role in this process. Imperial, nationalist, and communist regimes have used the Hui to liaise with Muslim nations and Islamic minorities, but the increasing importance of transnational Islamic identity, especially among revivalists, has increased the modern

state's doubts about Hui loyalties. Chinese Muslims do not perceive an innate conflict between belonging to the transnational ummah and Chinese nation, and the Hui still have no sympathy for separatists. However, Chinese Muslims profess a more holistic idea of development that reveals contradictions within the party's moral and economic claims to sovereignty and challenges conventional notions of Chinese statehood.

Religious revival poses a challenge to the Chinese state's traditional role as moral exemplar, and the foreign origin of Islam makes it doubly threatening, but state recognition attempts to co-opt the faith into helping support the party's legitimacy. Confucian meritocracy, the Nationalism of the early Republic, and Maoism each concentrate power in the hands of an elite few who are tasked with exemplifying, extolling, and enforcing the governing virtues used to ensure the material and moral well-being of the nation. Confucian scholars proved their virtue through examination, and the elders of Maoism showed their mettle through struggling against capitalist exploitation and forging an alliance with commoners in the Long March. One could even argue that the lack of a comprehensive moral system and perceived lack of governmental virtue among the people contributed to the Guomindang's (国民党) ultimate loss in the Chinese Civil War. Some founders of the Republic could boast of the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (清朝), but the messy and imperfect application of Sun Yat-Sen's nationalism never really achieved the unity and modernization it promised and hoped to achieve. Muslims received recognition as one of the five nationalities represented on the five-striped flag of the republic, and were the first minority recognized by the CCP, but their relationship to the latter has been tumultuous. Muslims worked together with the Chinese

masses through several mass Maoist campaigns, inspired by socialist ethics to pursue a material socialist utopia, and while many have been drawn into the modern-day hedonism Ci Jiwei (1994) describes in an attempt to experience this utopia, Muslim revivalists embody a divergent form of virtue with disparate goals.

The party positions itself as impartial arbiter and guarantor of China's religious communities in order to ensure continued inter-ethnic harmony and unity and economic stability. Its efforts to this end are not subtle; they include billboards admonishing the population with slogans like the "four inseparables" (三个离不开): "Han are inseparable from minorities, minorities are inseparable from the Han, and minorities are inseparable from each other" (汉族离不开少数民族, 少数民族离不开汉族, 少数民族互相离不开). Such a heavy-handed approach illustrates that this is not assumed or acknowledged by many Chinese citizens. Likewise, the religious policy of the Communist Party of Xining requires mosques to hang chalkboards and large red banners in their courtyards to promote national religious policies. It seems that the party is co-opting mosques to spread its message to minority groups, but congregants seem to scrupulously ignore these slogans until an outsider like me asks about them. In reality, draping mosques in patriotic slogans aims to persuade non-Muslims of Muslims' patriotism and the acceptable position of Islam within the Chinese nation. On the other hand, such requirements have the potential to convey to Muslims that their agentive participation in the Chinese state is unwanted and impossible, which could lead Muslims to channel their agency into regulating their individual behaviors and interpersonal relations in accord with the norms of a transnational community.

Chinese Muslims and the atheist party agree that the Chinese nation they share is a work in progress, but they disagree on what it should become and how it will get there. Tablighi Jama'at, Salafiyya, and even the Yihewani movement each began in the late-colonial context and have continued to thrive through the process of decolonization and in present-day postcolonial states. In reality, modern China is closer to fitting the post-socialist framework than the postcolonial one, but the party's emphasis on China's past victimization by colonial powers makes the postcolonial discourse relevant as well. Islamic revival movements provide channels for Chinese Muslims' angst and disillusionment with the materialism and unequal distribution of wealth that has resulted from China's transition from socialism to neoliberalism. Likewise, cultivating transnational Islamic identity gives Chinese Muslims a sense of solidarity with the former colonies of the Islamic world in opposition to Western hegemony. However, Chinese Muslims also see a cautionary example in the poor state of many predominantly Muslim nations' lagging economic development.

The Communist Party and Chinese Muslims share desire for economic development and moral critique of the West, but both of these are expressed in very different terms. China's post-socialist participation in the neoliberal economy encourages Chinese to emulate Western capitalists individually striving toward material goals, so the party reinforces collective memories of near-colonization and preaches Chinese exceptionalism to help sow suspicion about wholesale adoption of Western culture and liberal political ideas. The party utilizes a postcolonial discourse to remind citizens of suspect foreign motives, bolster patriotism and loyalty to the party, question foreign

religions, and warn of the dangers of the hedonist excesses of capitalism. However, emphasizing such postcolonial themes does not eliminate popular disillusionment with growing economic equality and prevalent hedonism associated with the lapse of socialist idealism. Muslims see foreigners' piety as something to be admired and perceive ulterior motives and materialism as characteristics shared by Westerners and the Chinese state. Chinese Muslim revivalists have replaced Maoism's mass campaigns, common sense of purpose, and ethical clarity with transnational Islamic movements that serve similar subjective and social purposes without the internal contradictions of the party's market socialism.

The overbearing Chinese state leaves little room for agency or creativity in imagining the national community, so Chinese Muslims focus on imagining themselves as part of a global ummah instead. Benedict Anderson (2006) described the genesis of the nation as the creation of an "imagined community," but now its power is all too real and its citizens are scrupulously categorized, regulated, and surveilled. Thus, many subjects of today's nations are searching for a new, more ideal, and more imaginary community in which to construct their own identity. The ummah as an imagined community is a powerful idea because it is ethereal, constantly in the process of becoming, of being enacted through daily prayer, hajj, revival movements, and Devji's (2005) "landscapes of the jihad." It is a goal toward which one can strive and of which one can catch a glimpse, but it cannot be achieved as a final destination. The common goal of returning to pure, authentic Islam nominally unites revivalists worldwide, who have never met each other, but share similar subjective experiences. Devji (2005) describes how acts of terrorism

exploit the power of the global media to draw Muslims and Westerners into a polarized world in which Islam and Islamic nations play a distinctive role. However, Chinese Muslims express various viewpoints and interpretations of such events, often sympathizing with the goals of Muslims abroad, but denouncing violent methods as well. A world in which information is controlled and perpetually in doubt creates a huge space for each person to imagine the ummah in different ways, with different boundaries, but always with the same, universal foundations. The national community has become stifling, so individuals have begun imagining a transnational community in the image of their local Muslim communities, discursively reshaping the sometimes disappointing national community through imagining a new one both within and beyond it. Non-Muslim and non-religious Chinese are also looking abroad for inspiration, but Islam (as well as Christianity, which is rapidly growing in China) have well-elaborated moral systems and conceptions of transnational communities that may be particularly appealing for Chinese people who are disillusioned with their native faiths (including socialism).

Identity and Community: Ethnic, Religious, Transnational, and Universal

Islamic revivalists dining on the floor with South Asian jama'atis, curious English students singing hymns with Christian missionaries over coffee, and Tibetan monks teaching Western backpackers how to meditate each debunk the party's classifying religions as obsolete relics of old-fashioned ethnic groups by displaying how they have become key components in shaping transnational identities and communities. As the Chinese state and its citizens continue to distance themselves from Maoism and expand connections with the outside world, religion continues to play a growing role.

Spawned from ancient communities of immigrants, Chinese Muslims have traditionally occupied a subaltern identity as a partially barbarian group on the fringes of the Han nation. As latter-day Qing emperors struggled to maintain control over their domain, Hui warlords used various modes of Islam to justify power and build unity within their domains. Then and now, sectarian movements served to unite Muslims of various ethnicities and sometimes sow intra-ethnic divisions, particularly among the Hui. The development of various Islamic movements coincided with the development of semi-autonomous Hui polities like that ruled by Ma Bufang, which inspired the Nationalists to include them as one of the five nationalities of the republic. The party's Marxist-Leninist-inspired classification system led Muslims to be divided into ten different ethnic groups, ostensibly to aid the party in ushering them into modernity. After assimilationist policies culminated in complete prohibitions of religious practice and other ethnic customs during the Cultural Revolution, the party has turned to a strategy of recognition, monitoring, and maintenance over the past three decades, gradually accepting that religious identity will be around for some time. However, it remains to be seen whether a system of administration that originally perceived religion as an outgrowth of ethnic identity and was designed to encourage assimilation can accommodate growth and expansion of global religious movements and consequent transnational identities.

Today's party sees transnational connections as crucial to sustaining economic growth and tries to project soft power abroad through Confucius Institutes and cultural exchanges, but its domestic propaganda still laments China's "century of humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers, criticizes American attempts to contain its rise, and bristles

at any perceived slight to its core interest of territorial integrity ranging from rocks in the South China Sea to border spats with India. The party is caught in a contradiction between its traditional xenophobia and growing global aspirations. One of the greatest threats to China's stability is the growing unrest among Muslims in Xinjiang, and Muslim nations represent some of the key suppliers of energy to fuel China's growth as well as growing markets for exports. Thus, the state is wary that using too heavy a hand domestically might upset foreign powers or that too much leniency could allow militant ideas to spread. However, non-Uygur informants perceive Xinjiang's violence as an outgrowth of local conditions and not a pan-Islamic concern, and they suggest that the party is aware of this. Indeed, the need to control foreign religion is not exclusive to Islam, so it seems that the party's mistrust of religion and supervision of bishops, lamas, and imams relates more to a generalized fear of moral systems and transnational identities beyond its control.

Even though the Chinese state traditionally tends to portray religious believers as the unwitting dupes of unscrupulous charlatans, it continues to rely on religious professionals to monitor and control communities of believers. Thus, grassroots movements like Tablighi Jama'at or those who encourage autonomy among believers like Salafiyya appear to jeopardize the party's traditional means of controlling religious communities. Furthermore, the demands and assumptions of a growing body of autonomous believers acting according to their own interpretations of a universal moral code could eventually spawn unregulated movements that could undermine the religious status quo or even the single party system. The party has nothing to fear from believers

who docilely obey the pronouncements of state-approved imams, reincarnations of lamas identified by bureaucrats, or bishops appointed by the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, but it perceives a clear threat to stability in loose cannons who freely create their own interpretations of scripture. Of course, adherents to Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at certainly do not characterize their movements as encouraging new scriptural interpretations, but party bureaucrats worry that Tablighis encouraging untrained individuals to preach and Salafis allowing laymen to study and interpret the Qur'an deemphasizes the power of imams and opens the door to uncontrolled and unorthodox developments. In contrast, Salafi informants claim that the government prefers the Yihewani movement because it advocates patriotism, modern education, and has evolved into a sect that is unique to China and dominated by learned Chinese imams who occupy positions within the Chinese Islamic Association.

Many of my informants compared the Salafiyya movement to the Protestant Reformation because of the way they both encourage each person to read and understand scripture for him or herself. The party also fears that the growth of Salafiyya, and possibly Tablighi Jama'at, has the potential to destabilize China's Islamic community in the same way the Reformation threw early modern Europe into political chaos. Tablighi Jama'at might appear to be less destabilizing because of its nonsectarian and adamantly apolitical nature, but critics of the movement readily point out that amateur preachers have unpredictable ideas about Islam. Of course, modern religious movements, especially in atheist China, do not contain the same political implications as Protestantism did for Europe, but Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at still contain implicit challenges to traditional

modes of Islamic authority. While Protestant sects dissolved the unity of Christendom, transnational religious movements like Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at have unifying aspirations. Islamic revival and Protestant Reformation both devolve religious authority to individuals, but whereas Protestant movements denounced an international institution that had gone awry and led to its splintering into multifarious sects, Islamic revival denigrates the variegated Islamic landscape and advocates uniformity as a solution. Protestants quickly became enmeshed in politics when they found eager sponsors in local leaders seeking autonomy from Rome, but the transnational Tablighi Jama'at movement and the Chinese manifestation of Salafiyya have both recognized politics as a divisive influence. Rather than stepping into the dangerous realm of politics or engage in endless theological debates, they attempt to focus on universally agreeable core principles of Islam in order to consolidate the global ummah.

The global community of Muslims is divided into multiple sectarian groups, which still view Mecca as center of the Islamic world, but also revere secondary centers where adherents gather or make pilgrimages to shrines. It is difficult to perceive a united ummah amidst this polycentric landscape rife with internal divisions, and this is precisely why revival movements like Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at decry blindly following learned imams, sectarian institutions, Sufi holy men, and other sources besides the Qur'an and Hadith. Revivalists believe that these sacred texts once established unity among Muhammad and his followers, so they are all that is necessary to do so again. The original community, they believe, was united both politically and spiritually, but today's ummah primarily exists as a subjectively experienced spiritual connection among

Muslims. Of course, some Muslims speak of a time in the distant future when the Muslims of the world will be reunited under a new caliphate, but no one sees this as a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. The vast majority of Muslims in China and many other places denounce those who would use force to establish a new caliphate, so such attempted ummahs are far from universal. Likewise, most Muslims agree that all Muslims are brothers and prefer not to speak about divisive theological issues, at least to foreign ethnographers, because to mention them is to expose the sharp fissures within the ummah. Thus, the ummah today exists primarily as an imagined community in the minds of believers, even if they feel that many other self-professed Muslims are kafir, they still imagine themselves sharing a connection with a global community with common beliefs.

Perhaps the only objective manifestation of the universal Muslim community exists in the mass of humanity endlessly circling the ka'aba. While staying at a small family hotel in Xi'an's Muslim district, the owner told me conspiratorially that he had an illegal satellite dish. He did not use it to watch uncensored foreign news or preachers from the Middle East, but he primarily used it to watch Muslims circling the ka'aba in Mecca. He excitedly invited me into the office one night to watch afternoon prayer. We sat together, eating figs and melon seeds, witnessing the gathered masses going through the familiar motions and recitations of the Asr prayer, having different thoughts, but picturing ourselves as part of the same community. In spite of varying beliefs about who should and should not be included in the Islamic community, imagining oneself as part of a global ummah is a practice which all Muslims share. Institutionalizing Islamic law, issuing fatwas, and arguing about the location of Allah all create divisions within the

Islamic community and, one could argue, ultimately weaken the faith. The only path to a unified ummah is an inward one, whether it be through individualized study, communal living and preaching on jama'at, or even various forms of Sufi practice, pursuing individual knowledge of Allah creates a shared subjective experience of the global ummah. Religion, sometimes considered a legacy of one's ancestors and link to a local community, is increasingly becoming an individual choice of what one hopes to become, a spiritual link between local and transnational communities, a critique of the modern nation-state, and a subjective experience of universal community.

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