JIHĀT-UL-ISLĀM
Vol: 15, Issue: 02, January – Jun 2022

OPEN ACCESS
JIHĀT-UL-ISLĀM
pISSN: 1998-4472
eISSN: 2521-425X
www.jihat-ul-islam.com.pk

Introducing Islam to the Dragon's Empire: A Study of Early Muslim Settlers in China

Dr. Ayesha Qurrat ul Ain *
Assistant Professor, Department of Comparative Religions, International Islamic University Islamabad

Abstract

The largest Chinese Muslim minority group Hui is the progeny of the foreign Muslims who got settled in China more than a millennium ago. This paper is meant to investigate the intercultural relationship between the foreign Muslim minority and Han Chinese state in Tang-Song China. It suggests that Muslims remained isolated predominantly in the beginning, due to the imperial policies and thus the construction of Hui ethnicity was monitored by state. It deals with the following questions. How did Tang and Song empires influence the social integration of the Muslim settlers and how did they respond? How the arrival of Muslims is portrayed in the Hui folklore placing them at the intersection of Chinese and Muslim social spheres? Chinese, Muslim and European historical references are consulted and cross checked to evaluate the information and develop the chronology. This research combines historical and iconographic methodologies.

Keywords: *Origin of Hui ethnicity, Integration, Chinese Muslim minority, Dashi, Islam in China*

Introduction

It is a social reality illustrious to everyone engaged with the history of Muslims in China that each local Muslim community is distinct in its behavior patterns and socio-historical context. No general analysis or description is possible in this regard if the standards of precision are to be met. This piece of research is focused on the Muslim community of Xi'an and thus meant to examine the historical interrelationship of Muslims of Xi'an with the Chinese state and local non-Muslim population called Han henceforth, during Tang (618-907A.D) and Song (960-1279) dynasties.

Xi'an called Chang'an in ancient times had been the capital of many Chinese

CC BY

dynasties including Zhou (1027-771B.C), Qin (221-206 B.C), Han (220 B.C-206 A.D) and Tang (618-907). Being situated at the eastern terminal of the ancient Silk Route[1], it had been embracing the groups of foreigners visiting China as traders or envoys since long. Tang dynasty, in particular, is well known for its relations with other empires of the time and its trade encouraging policies and Tang emperors developed the Silk Route in order to facilitate the trading activities. Due to these factors, Chang'an enjoyed the status of a metropolitan city even in 7th century A.D. The flow of traders and envoys from different parts of the world brought various cultures and religious traditions along with the material goods and trade commodities. Thus Chang'an became home to a multiethnic population with diverse beliefs and practices, sometimes quite converse to Chinese religious patterns. With the exception of Buddhism, all other foreign religions including Judaism, Islam, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity arrived China during the Tang period[2]. Islam in China has been primarily introduced through the Muslim traders, They are portrayed as "carrying jewelry and precious spices in one hand and the Qu'ran in the other; it is through the process of exchanging materials with each other that the Chinese and the Arabs began their cross-cultural and social communications, which eventually led to the introduction of Islam to China."[3]

As our concern resides in the establishment of Muslim community in Chang'an of Tang, we will be exploring the chronology of Muslim embassies to Tang emperors keeping both Arab and Chinese historical sources in view. It will help us in approximating the correct dates of official recognition and introduction of Muslims in Chang'an known as *Dashi* in Tang historical records. The earliest *Dashi,* as later will be expounded, came as both envoys and soldiers and settled in Chang'an laying the foundations of today's Hui community. Their arrival in Chang'an will also be explained through the mythical stories widely circulated among the contemporary Hui community. The analysis of these mythical accounts will illustrate the self-perception of Hui and the way they preserved their Muslim identity and pronounced affiliation and loyalty to Chinese soil concomitantly. The life in the early Muslim community of Chang'an will be studied through the illustration of Tang laws for the foreigners' communities of the time. Muslim sources will also be quoted to see how the Muslim historians of that age portrayed the Muslim community at the capital of Middle Kingdom (China).

The arrival of first Arab embassy to China

The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) proclaimed prophet-hood in Arabia in 610 A.D and the envoys to the neighboring empires (Persian, Egyptian, Roman) were dispatched after the migration of the Prophet to Medina. And there is no historical

record in Chinese or Arabic sources regarding the arrival of Muslim envoys during the life of Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Almost all of the historical sources including Tang annals and Muslim histories unanimously agree that it was the third caliph *Uthmān ibn ʿAffān* who sent an envoy to the Tang Emperor *Gāozōng*(649-683). It was high time for Muslim caliphate to send an embassy to the Chinese empire as the Muslims had recently subdued the Sassanian Empire in the neighborhood of China and the last Sassanian emperor was residing in Chang'an as a fugitive[4]. The Tang emperor was bewildered at the victory of Arabs over as potent an empire as Sassanid. So, he would have received the Muslim embassy in this context with an awe and recognition.[5] It was common for the small states around China, at that time, to send envoys with tributes and gifts to Tang emperor to show reverence towards him and to symbolically accept his superiority. The Muslim envoys were represented of the same kind in Tang annals although the Muslim histories recorded it merely as the dispatching of ambassadors of Islam towards the Chinese empire.

The year 651 A.D is marked as the beginning point of the Arab-Chinese contact at official level in Tang histories. Tang annals use the word *Dashi*[6] for the Muslims and *Dashi* Guó for their abode Arabia and state that the first Muslim embassy reported to the Chinese emperor that they already had three kings and had reigned thirty-four years. Three kings definitely meant Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and first two caliphs and thirty-four years roughly approximated the establishment of first Muslim state in Medina. F. S. Drake quotes from Old Tang histories that the Caliph *Uthmān* R.A known as *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* among Muslims had been recorded as *Han-mi mo-mo-ni*[7]. Mi quotes an eminent Chinese historian *Chen Yuan* who, after an extensive research on Tang Annals and other Chinese historical documents, concluded that "in the second year of *Yonghui* of Emperor *Gāozōng* of Tang, the third caliph of Arabia *Uthmān* dispatched diplomatic envoys to Chang'an, a capital city of Tang, to pay an official call to emperor *Gāozōng*, introducing to him the caliphate, their customs and Islam".[8] This statement sounds to make sense in Islamic context as well because all the envoys sent by the Muslim state to non-Muslim empires were missionary in nature and not to offer any tribute or submission. The Muslim embassies continued to arrive at Chang'an different intervals during Tang rule in the Umayyad Caliphate and later in the age of Abbasside caliphs. In one and a half century since the first embassy in 651 A.D till the 14th year of *Zhenyuan* of Emperor *Dezong* (798 A.D), the recorded number of Arabs envoys to China is 37[9]. Leslie pointed out that Tang histories record a stream of Muslim embassies including ones sent by *Abū Jaʿfar ʿal-Manṣūr*(753-6) and *Hārūn ar-Rashīd*(798).[10] Broomhall mentions that Tang annals recorded transliterated names of Abbasside caliphs and their envoys in Chinese whereas

commonly they were identified as 'black-robed Arabs'[11].

The most famous embassy, recorded in detail in Chinese histories as well as mentioned by Muslim historians[12] is the one sent by *Qutayba Ibn Muslim* (in the reign of Umayyad Caliph *Al Walid(*668-715)) when he touched the borders of China but not intruded. The oft-quoted incident of Muslim envoys' refusal from performing kowtow before the Chinese emperor, as customary in the Chinese court, belongs to this embassy. This envoy came with beautiful horses and other precious gifts for the emperor and Leslie opines that the envoy was sent with the trade purposes as *Qutayba* wanted to renew the business relationships between Chinese empire and the major trade cities he recently conquered on the Silk Route[13]. This opinion seems to be accurate as the dates of this embassy correspond to the conquest of *Farghāna*[14] by *Qutaiba* and also the circumstance at Chang'an of that time favor the arrival of trade-oriented envoys. A Chinese historical source[15] authenticates Leslie's claim reporting the fact that the number of foreign traders in Chang'an in Tang dynasty approximated 4000 and most of them were Arabs and Persians. State not only patronized and encouraged their activities but also administrated the affairs by establishing a trading department. *Al-Ṭabarī*, on the other hand, did not recognize the trading purpose of *Qutayba*'s embassy rather according to him; the Chinese emperor requested an envoy from the Muslim commander after his conquest of *Farghāna* and he mentioned that twelve soldiers were part of envoy[16].

> Chinese histories report that *Qutayba*'s embassy attended the court of Tang Emperor *Xuānzong* in 713 with many presents including an exceptionally beautiful girdle. When the emperor gave them audience, they refused to bow before him saying that in their country they only bow to heaven (God) and never to a prince. It naturally offended the courters and they were furious enough to kill the envoys at their disrespectful behavior but were refrained by one of the high officials arguing that the envoy did not mean to disrespect the Chinese Emperor rather it was just a matter of difference of court etiquettes between Chinese and Arabs[17].

Leslie, however, recorded a disagreement of historical accounts upon performing or not performing kowtow[18].

These Muslim envoys mark the nature and frequency of the official contact between Chinese and Muslim empires and of course can be considered as the few early Muslim settlers in Chang'an. But it is noteworthy that a proper beginning of Muslim community is associated with the influx of Arab soldiers into the capital

after crushing *Ān Lùshān* rebellion when the Chinese emperor restored his capital with the help of Muslim soldiers. It is noteworthy that till *Ān Lùshān* rebellion[19], all the Muslim envoys were named as *Dashi* in Tang records and no categories were devised to denote the Arabs who settled in China though temporarily. They were totally outsiders, representatives of another state and identified with the name of their territory *Dashi Guó* (Arabia).

Second wave of Muslims as soldiers during ān lùshān rebellion

In the reign of Tang emperor *Xuānzong* (756-763 A.D), *Ān Lùshān* rebels captured the capital and the emperor had to seek help from the Muslim caliph *Abū Jaʿfar ʿal-Manṣūr* (754-775) in order to crush the rebellion[20]. There are many versions of this account but all of them agree that the caliph responded by sending troops to support the emperor. Tang annals do not mention the exact number of soldiers but non-official historical records report that they were 4000 soldiers who aided restoring Chang'an in 757 A.D.[21] Even though many historians reported (as discussed earlier) that the soldiers came from the Caliph himself, The Cambridge History of Tang China[22] relates a different story. According to it, the Turks and Uighur extended their help but it was owing to the mutual links between the emperor and Turk Khans, not only that but also Tang emperor gave them huge briberies to convince them for his military support. The reconciliation of these accounts is possible if we take them as different instances during the rebellion as it lasted for seven years and this long period of conflict accommodates the possibility of seeking help more than once. Drake mentions four passages from the Tang histories which record *Ān Lùshān* rebellion and arrival of foreign troops, out of these two exclusively talk about Uyghurs whereas one passage mentions both Uyghurs and Arabs. The last and fourth passage which occurred in The Account of Arabs, records the Arabs envoy dispatched by the Abbasside caliphs exclusively.

Anyhow, all the official and non-official sources as quoted by Broomhall[23] and Mi[24] unanimously maintain that these Muslim soldiers did not return to their homeland and were allowed by the emperor to settle in the capital. They built their houses and other property, wed Chinese women and thus established the first structured community of Muslims in Chang'an; comprising of a people with foreign origins embarking on binding ties with Chinese soil. So, we see that it was the emperor's call for help from the Muslim caliph which drew Muslim soldiers from their homelands and again it was only with the Emperor's permission that they settled in Chang'an. It strengthens our hypothesis that state involvement has been crucial and decisive in the historical pursuit of Muslims in Xi'an. Mi[25] says that since their arrival and settlement in China was not for missionary purpose, they were allowed to stay and intermarry with local women without resistance from the

ruling class. Leslie is of the same view that if the foreigners intended to settle in China, minded their own business and did not appear a threat to the monarchial rule, Tang state was tolerant enough to accommodate them[26]. These Muslims who adopted permanent residence in China were known as *Zhu Tang*[27] and when they had children born through local women, their descendents were known as *Fan Ke*[28].

The establishing of first Muslim community in Chang'an

Leslie is hesitant though sympathetic about the claims of establishment of first Muslim community in Chang'an as early as 8th century as all the above mentioned details are derived from Muslim inscriptions or non-official Chinese sources[29]. His opinion appears to be convincing when we find Victor Xiong[30] stating that Islam may also have spread to Chang'an as the Arabs had frequent official contacts with the Tang court starting in *Yonghui* 2 (651), but there is no credible record of Islamic religious establishments in the city. The most prominent indication of a Muslim community is the existence of mosque, a vital and inevitable part of a Muslim neighborhood so the dates of the construction of the earliest mosque would be the biggest clue to the foundation of a Muslim community indeed. The inscription on the stone stele of the Great Eastern Mosque Xi'an bears testimony to its construction in 742 A.D but it is claimed to be a forgery as proved through detailed research based upon other statements found in the inscription. The inscription states that Islam was introduced to China in the reign of Emperor *Kāihuáng*(581-601) of Sui dynasty i.e. in 6th century whereas Muhammad (P.B.U.H) proclaimed prophet-hood only in 610 A.D so this faulty statement makes the status of inscription dubious. Moreover the language employed in the inscription for Muslim religious terminology does not belong to Tang age as analyzed by Chinese philologists and historians[31]. But Drake[32] argued against this approach and proved that this chronological mishandling of dates of introduction of Islam to China occurred in Ming reign due to the difference in the Chinese and Islamic calendars. In fact when this inscription was rewritten at the occasion of repair and expansion of the mosque, the inscriber counted back the years from 1384 A.D according to Chinese lunar year. Since Muslim year is shorter than Chinese year by eleven days it corresponded to 599 A.D of Sui dynasty mistakenly instead of 622 A.D of Tang dynasty. Thus the inscription is not a forgery rather the misunderstanding arose due to the mistaken calculation when the inscription was re-erected. Another undated inscription is discovered by Pickens in the Great Western Mosque of Xi'an which refers to a permit of 705 A.D to build a mosque. A local Shaanxi Muslim author[33],(quoting from a document of 1958 reports that these foreigners built the first mosque in 762 A.D in Chang'an. Upon consulting the contemporary Arab sources, Muslim historians and geographers like *Abu Zaid* and *Ibn Khurdãdhbih*

are found mentioning the Muslim communities in various cities of China. The certain official dates referring to the presence of a Muslim community in Chang'an belong to twelfth century i.e. 1127 A.D which correspond to the Song dynasty.

So, although the presence of Muslim community in Chang'an is not unanimously supported by all the historical evidences yet it is not a sufficient reason to terminate all such claims. The loopholes in the form of undated inscriptions of building mosque in the beginning of eighth century and the supportive statements from non-official Chinese histories and Muslim writings substantiate the existence of a Muslim community in Tang days Chang'an though smaller in number and influence and thus not mentioned in the official records. Today's Hui community of Muslim Quarter Xi'an dates their presence to Tang dynasty although the city officials refer to its establishment in Song. There could be some justification that why Muslim community or the mosques are not mentioned in Tang records, if they are affirmed to be established by Tang age according to other sources. It would be enlightening to know that Tang histories mention those religious communities which were established in Chang'an by either refugees or the missionaries. Professor E. H. Parker[34] indicated that there is a clear record of Persian and Babylonian religions in Tang annals. Persians came to China as refugees when the Sassanid kingdom was defeated by Muslims, the last Sassanian emperor took refuge in Chinese capital and asked permission to build a temple there, being recruited himself in the imperial security. Buddhism tried to proselytize people and so was Christianity and in this way, both of these tried to intervene the imperial control and authority going against state religion. So, these two were mentioned in official histories. Islam and Judaism both neither tried to proselytize nor came as refugees so the empire had no official concerns with their establishment and thus they were not mentioned in Tang annals despite their presence in China as recorded by other sources.[35]

Inception of Islam in China as interpreted in Hui folk literature

In order to take the insiders' perception into account, it would be useful to have an over-view of the folk literature of Chinese Muslims locating the origin and meaning of their existence in China. *HuiHui Yuanlai* (origins of the Huihui) and *Xi-lai Zongbu* are such books, widely in circulation among Xi'an Hui as well; and deal with the themes of origin of Hui in China and the purpose of their arrival and stay. The writing of *Huihui Yuanlai* is ascribed to *Liu Sanjie* a Muslim scholar of Nanjing in 17th century, father of *Liu Zhi* (1660-1730 A.D) the famous *Han Kitab*[36] author. So, this authorship raises the status of the text among the Hui. This book and other texts of this kind locate the origin of Islam in China in the reign of Tang Emperor *Tàizōng*(627-649)[37] with imperial court obviously seated in Chang'an. Reportedly,

Tàizōng saw a dream which instigated him to send an embassy to the Arab state in order to fetch some Muslims to China to guard his empire. Here is an abridged form of the whole incident as recorded in the book of local Hui literature[38].

The emperor had a dream of bad omens[39], according to one version a bad spirit which was chased out by a turbaned man and according to the other version, the roof of his palace fell down to smash his head but was interrupted by a turbaned man. This man was in green robes and white turban, standing at the right side of the emperor's bed with a water kettle in his hand.[40] His outlook resembles the inhabitants of West and was unlike Chinese in his features. Upon awakening, the emperor consulted his ministers and one[41] amongst them interpreted his dream saying that turbaned man refers to the great sage with good omens who has appeared in the West and the Emperor should send an envoy to him in order to fetch a sage from his companions who could combat with the threatening evil (the bad spirit or falling roof indicated threat) and keep the empire safe and peaceful. The emperor dispatched his envoys following the suggestion and the Arabian sage Muhammad (P.B.U.H) responded to his request sending some of his companions to China. The number of these Muslims varies in different accounts of the story but majority of them coincide in stating that the Muslim envoy was led by the maternal uncle of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) *Sa`d ibn Abī Waqqās*(*Wen Kesi*). Leslie's edition of the story states that there were three people in the Muslim envoy[42]. Two of them died on the way and only *Gexin* (probably *Qāsim*) arrived at the court to have an audience with the Emperor. This envoy brought the holy teachings of Islam to Chang'an, the capital of China and Ben-Dor's[43]account proceeds to say that these Muslims had a conversation about the nature of sages and sage-hood at the court which obviously revolved around the two great sages i.e. Confucius, the Sage of China, and Muhammad (P.B.U.H), the Sage of West. This scholarly discussion and exchange of ideas enabled the emperor to grasp that Islam and Confucianism are attuned in their approaches. And thus these companions of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), who became the ancestors of Hui people, were brought to China at the Emperor's demand and they stayed in China with his consent and will. They were settled there by providing homes and Chinese wives so they might not grow home-sick. *Huihui Yuanlai* ends with the following poem,

Formerly, Islam was found only beyond the western border.

Who could know that Muslims would dwell in China forever?

It was only through the Tang emperor's dream in the night

that three thousand men were brought to establish [the Muslim presence].

By imperial order, the seal of the Board of Astronomy was given to one

of them. They dwelt peacefully in China, conciliating the state. All praise to the grace of the emperor of the Tang for his fine ritual treatment; even today, we [Muslims] protect the state, not moving again.[44]

Both the story and the poem carry a collection of implied meanings which articulate the response to fundamental questions faced by Hui in Han China. They explored their origin linking their ancestry to the companions of the Prophet of Islam and proved their presence to be indispensable in China and also shown evidence of the compatibility of their tradition with Confucian teachings. The situation where the author of the account placed the story temporally is very crucial to both the chronologies i.e. China and Islam and thus well-chosen. According to this account, the origin of Hui in China owes itself to the call of the Great Tang Emperor *Tàizōng* and the response of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H). *Tàizōng* was though not the founder of Tang but very rightly known as the consolidator of the newly established dynasty. He is entitled as political paragon in Chinese history and shone to the extent that his fame and chivalry faded the original founder of Tang, his father *Gaozu*. So, to place the introduction of Islam in his reign definitely meant to grant Tang's approval to its dawn in Chinese land. Emperor *Gāozōng,* in whose reign, there is an official record of first Muslim embassy, was not a powerful ruler and his throne was usurped by Empress Wu later so it would not be definitely a high time for the advent of Islam in China as the author might have perceived. On the other hand, the representatives in the envoy were said to be dispatched at the immediate orders of The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself which not only relates the arrival of Islam in China to his personal desire but also consecrates the presence of Hui in China, being the direct descendents of the companions of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). Such an account also shifts the intention of arrival of early Muslims to China from the mundane and to some extent detested purpose of trade to the sacred cause of spreading the message of Islam on one hand and protecting the Chinese empire on the other. First purpose makes the Hui presence meaningful in Muslim context whereas the second one justifies their existence in China in Han milieu. The poem affirms loyalty and affiliation of Hui for the Chinese state considering the protection and conciliation of the country to be their obligation rather purpose of their stay in China. Hence, it is a reflection of how Muslims saw themselves tied to both the cultural paradigms of Islamic and Chinese civilizations and how they located themselves as vital and inseparable connecting links between the two since Tang times.

If cross-matched historically, these accounts seem to be mythical and fabricated. But myths are not created in the air; they underlie some cultural truths and try to

explain what is incomprehensible for the human reason otherwise. Moreover, we see that most of these stories were organized into coherent form in early Qing when Manchu were shaping their identity through identical mythologies. Crossley has beautifully analyzed the function of myth though in Manchu context but very appropriate here as well. "Myth is not necessarily falsehood or fantasy. It is a way of folding interpretations inside one another to create a coherent and if possible persuasive narrative of the origins of cultural authority or political power."[45] These stories might be a compilation of the oral transmission of the incident of *Ān Lùshān* when the emperor really sought help from Muslims and they came as redeemers of the empire restoring Chang'an for Tang. Personal motifs of the Hui folks and the circumstances during the oral transmission of lore could have possibly manipulated the historical facts and thus these stories could have been evolved. For example, to place the arrival of Islam in the reign of *Tàizōng* instead of *Gāozōng* or *Xuānzong* is certainly a meaningful maneuver on the part of Hui authors.

Apart from these local Muslim histories, we find an anthology of Hui folklore related to this theme. Another Hui story also mentions the arrival of Muslims from the West in order to help the tang emperor save his kingdom from a disaster after he saw a dream[46]. And the story of giving them Han wives in order to make them settled in China is repeated with reference to the lantern festival. So this story serves the purpose of locating Hui identity by seeking authenticity from the centers of both Muslim and Chinese civilizations. They become the saviors and protectors of Tang dynasty and their journey to China is affirmed and planned by the Muslim ruler at Makah. They are settled in Chang'an by the very orders of the emperor himself. One version of the story mentions Hui taking Han wives by force through imperial orders whereas another version makes the marriages legitimate by saying that Hui just chose their wives on the lantern festival and the emperor gave gold and silver to the parents of those girls and in return they brought their daughters to the Hui places of living to be their brides. There was a magnificent wedding ceremony witnessed by the imperial court and Tang officials. And when on third day of marriage, the couples went to see the bride's parents, the emperor said two guards with each couple as official security protocol. The girls liked their husbands and appreciated their nature and food but complained about the difficulty of language. As these Muslims did not have any Chinese surnames, their children were given surnames after their mothers. And with this combination of foreign Muslims and Han a new nationality emerged in China.

An interesting reason behind the name Hui is told in the folk story which talks about the Arab Muslims coming to China at the will of The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself in order to spread Islam. It simply talks about Tang age not specifying any

emperor or reign. The emperor has been said to allow the propagation of Islam in China. And the Muslim fellow after feeling homesick repeatedly sought the emperor's permission to go back, whereas the emperor loved him due to his diligence and wisdom. Because of the Muslim man's insistence on return to his country, the emperor called him Hui "the returner" and after that this name became popular and well-known. It has nothing to do with reality as the title of Huihui was totally unfamiliar in Tang and never used in the official documents passed on to us from Tang age. Moreover the emperor's permission to spread Islam is also a Hui motif inculcated to authenticate the existence of Islam in China by associating it to the imperial wish and order. In reality, the Muslim Arabs or Persians never tried to proselytize or convert people and this is considered to be the main reason that Islam in China never underwent the persecution of the emperors and rivalry of the local Confucian tradition unlike Buddhism at least until Qing.

The seclusion of Muslims in 8th century Chang'an and the Tang empire

Whatsoever the manner and purpose may be, it is proved historically that *Dashi* arrived in Chang'an during Tang reign. A glimpse of the eighth century Chang'an (787 A.D) can be seen in the Tang records where we find four thousand families of foreigners residing in the capital possessing properties and families thus tied to Chinese soil. They had come at different times, some as travelers, some in the suites of princes, and some as deputies. They received a monthly allowance at Court, which sum aggregated 500,000 ounces of silver per year[47]. These foreigners were not exclusively Muslims definitely rather they were constituents of a mixed ethnic group including Persian refugees, Mongols and Turks possibly. As a part of these foreign people, Muslims gradually settled establishing *Fān fáng*, the ghettoes[48] of *Fān Ke*. This seclusion and segregation of Muslims in their enclaves was neither voluntary nor optional rather obligatory and enforced by Chinese authorities but on the other hand, it is also important to know that the inhabitants of *Fān fáng* accepted this segregation whole-heartedly. The oldest Muslim neighborhoods are described as independent small communities clustered around a central mosque, a vital institution of Muslim communal life. There could be many reasons, why these settling Muslims accepted these ghettos, including the liberty to offer prayers and to get their food prepared according to Islamic dietary standards. Not only in Chang'an, but throughout China wherever *Fān Ke* existed, they were bound to live in the areas specifically assigned to them and not to intermix with local Chinese generally. Although their presence was a normal and common phenomenon, they were treated as extraterritorial. It was the time, when the categories like *Fān Han* were developed and their status was officially changed from *Dashi* to the people

somehow belonging to China though as foreigners[49].

The Muslims were totally foreigners then and their religion was only for foreigners with no attempts of converting local Chinese or propagating their teachings among them. *Akẖbār al-Ṣīn wa 'l-Hind*[50], an important Arabic source regarding the Medieval China, gives an explicit indication of this fact when the narrator says that he knew no one among Chinese who is Muslim or can speak Arabic. It marks the extent of segregation between *Fān Ke* and Han Chinese. They were 'familiar strangers' as Lipman[51] characterizes them, allowed to enjoy religious freedom to some extent in their legal and religious matters but confined to their prescribed boundaries spatially. Their civil and legislative problems were solved according to the Islamic laws and the state had appointed an administrative department for this purpose in Guangzhou, headed by Muslim reputed scholar of the time. There are evidences that if somebody among Muslim *Fān Ke* committed any crime or showed misconduct, he was sent to Guangzhou for legal proceedings[52]. According to Tang laws (618-907), the legal disputes between the adherents of same religious or ethnic group were to be resolved in the light of the laws of that group. But if the clash occurred between different minorities they would be dealt following Chinese laws[53]**.**

The Tang state was tolerant towards multiculturalism and liberal enough to allow the religious diversity but was not compromising towards the assimilation or integration of ethnic minorities into the Han society. *Akẖbār*[54] makes us aware of the prevalent Tang dictate saying that it is compulsory for every one living in China including Arabs and Persians to trace back their origin to something for recognition of their decent. It marks Tang's concern about the distinction between barbarians[55] and local Chinese despite the metropolitan environment of their state. Thus the Muslims maintained their original Arabic and Persian names marking their identity, tracing their origins back to their homelands and native clans[56]. Talking about the development of familial relationships and domestic socialization between *Fān Ke* and Han, we must pay heed to the Tang edict, from 628 on, pointing to the fact that intermarriages were started by then even if not in vogue usually. The foreign envoys or merchants could marry a Chinese woman but not take her away to his native land[57].

So, the Muslims reportedly married Han women on these conditions and thus a progeny of mixed ethnicity and hybrid culture was produced. Undoubtedly, these Han women embraced Islam but their upbringing and personalities were tinted with Confucian cultural values as anticipated. So, their children were the unintentional pioneers of the historic process of cultural integration though diminutive enough to

be noticed at this early moment of interaction. The historicity of this early cross matching and interethnic socialization is still commemorated by Xi'an Hui when they proclaim that they are descended from *Huimin Baba* and *Hanmin nana*.[58] This placement of genitors in the ancestral line strengthens their distinct identity equally embedded in Chinese and Muslim lineages and also makes them feel at home proving that their ancestors have been around since long having pleasant relations (existence of intermarriages being an indicator) with locals.

Chang'an Muslim community from Tang to Song

By the end of Tang, Chinese kingdom was threatened by severe fiscal problems causing rural unrest and popular rebellions and these circumstances made the sate vulnerable to external threats and finally resulted into the usurpation of the throne. In this period, Northern and Southern parts of China were ruled apart and saw a succession of many interim dynasties until Southern and Northern Song took over but they also retained the partition and ruled autonomously in both parts as their names imply. North and Northwestern China remained subjected to conflict and unrest even in Northern Song as different minority regimes like Western Liao, Jin and Western Xia appeared there to challenge the authority and control of Northern Song. Shaanxi, with its provincial capital at Xi'an, was situated in the Northern part but it never became the capital of the state again after Tang. North China was ruled by five dynasties from 907-60 A.D including Later Liang (907-923 A.D), Later Tang 923-936 A.D, Later Qin 936-947 A.D, Later Han 947-950 A.D and finally Later Zhou 951-959 A.D and most of these dynasties chose Kaifeng as their capital. This period was characterized with disunion, hasty dynastical changes and continuous warfare so we may not find any clue of Muslim settlers in Xi'an during this period. Since, this is a short phase of no more than a century, we may construe that Tang age conditions prevailed in Xi'an Muslim community and they were dealt according to Tang laws as Five Dynasties could not spare time to pay heed to legislative issues and minority affairs. Even in Northern Song, since the capital was moved from Xi'an, no more envoys were expected at the city and thus no official historical records could be found mentioning Muslim activities in the city except if something unusual happened entailing imperial intervention through an edict (for instance granting admission to build a mosque etc) or a new policy were to be introduced for Muslims which implicitly included Xi'an Muslim community. These are two possible ways to peep through the life of Xi'an Muslims during Northern Song if official historical records are to be consulted.

Hybridization of foreign ethnicities in ghettos during Song

Muslim population of Xi'an was not monolithic or unilingual rather it was a

composite of Persian, Arab and Central Asian Muslims and Islam was the most obvious binding as well as discriminative aspect of their lives. They were connected through Islamic principle of Muslim brotherhood and this religio-cultural camaraderie brought them closer and further the uniform state policies towards *Fān Ke* fused them together in quarters separate from Han and thus a unique community came into being whose hallmark was Islam. This community when hybridized with Han Chinese through marriages, gave rise to Hui of today who had been rejoicing Islam as their identity mark unlike other ethnic minorities of China (until CCP government manipulated the criteria of *minzu*)[59]. These Muslims were geographically connected to their homelands through Silk Road as Xi'an was its eastern terminal. This connection was an immense source of Muslim culture, religious knowledge and moral support for the Muslim settlers in China. This is why we see that the establishment of *Karakitai* Empire in Northwestern frontiers of China strengthened Xi'an Muslims psychologically and enhanced the chances of their survival in a non-Muslim majority by unconsciously supporting them to retain their religious identity and culture. *Karakitai* turned into a Muslim empire in 960 A.D when its ruler Musa declared Islam to be the state religion and it resulted into conversion of almost 200,000 Turks to Islam reportedly[60]. It would have definitely accelerated the contacts between Shaanxi Muslims and the newly established Muslim state. It was a brief political milieu of post-Tang and pre-Song age.

Song empire and the integration of Chang'an Muslims into Han society

Now, shifting our attention to the internal state of affairs of Muslim community of Xi'an, we find the emergence of acculturating trends. Song policies with regards to the prevention of integration of *Fān Ke* with local Han were not much different from those of Tang. So, the process of acculturation was slow and at a small scale. To be precise, there were few not many Muslims who tried to participate in different walks of social life so there is a room for historians to differ whether the Muslims started integrating in Chinese societies or not as the evidences could be found for both sides. Leslie[61] noted that their status in Song was changed from aliens to Chinese citizens. This statement implies that they participated in Chinese social life although in a limited way and they started to accept China as their habitat, departing from the former status of temporary settlers or potential travelers. This shift in their intentions is well inferred from the definite dates of establishments of mosque in Xi'an in Song. Lipman insists that despite their families settled in Xi'an and their business established in the city, Muslims "considered themselves, and were

considered by Chinese; to be temporary residents rather than permanent settlers."[62] It seems to be an over emphatic statement by him, in order to support his contention of Muslim being 'familiar strangers' in China and he also affirms later that Muslims developed a sense of belonging to China in late Song.

It is beyond doubt that state prohibited any attempts of integration as buying lands or intermarriages were legally not permissible. But despite this, these practices prevailed and Muslim traders being wealthy easily afforded to wed Han women from noble families and sometimes from Chinese elite[63]. These intermarriages increased Muslim population on one hand as the women had to convert to Islam upon marriages and on the other; these mixed families paved the road to integration of Muslims in Chinese society. Their children bore Chinese surnames following their mothers' lineages and the coming generations became increasingly integrated. Again, we need to keep in mind that these intermarriages and subsequent intermixing was not a prevailing phenomenon rather was just commencing. Anyhow, in the 4th year of *Zhenghe* of Song, which happened to be early twelfth century, there appeared the 5th generation of local-born foreigners officially recognized as *Tusheng fānke* or *Wushi fānke*. We find its evidence in the Official Song heritage laws issued to deal specifically with the heritage matters of *Wushi fānke*. The Song history[64] tells of foreigners who lived in Chang'an for forty years, married local women, and did not want to return to their homelands. But we cannot state with full conviction that these foreigners were exclusively Muslims and on the other hand, it is also contrary to factual evidences to exclude the Muslims altogether from this group.

Apart from the descendents of Tang time envoys and soldiers who constituted *Fān Ke* of Chang'an, there was another influx of Muslims from Central Asia by the mid of Song reign. The Song emperor Xuānzong (1067-1085) was very enthusiastic to ensure his sovereign authority over his empire and thus was particularly troubled by the Liao dynasty in Northern China[65]. Seeking lessons from his predecessors, whose Chinese armies were brutally crushed by the minority regime of Liao in many wars, he planned to seek help from Muslims of Central Asia. He thus invited a group of Muslim soldiers lead by *Amīr Sayyid So-fei-er* of Bukhara (a direct descendent of Prophet P.B.U.H). After the war, these soldiers were settled in Northeastern China, creating a buffer zone between the song capital and Liao Empire. Muslim sources claim arrival of some more 10,000 soldiers to aid *Amīr*, in 1080, and while settling in North China many of them inhabited Shaanxi[66].

The arrival and settlement of these soldiers not only enhanced the Muslim population but also accelerated the process of interethnic interactions through actively participating in different walks of social life. They expressed their presence

as a part of society by establishing the mosques, the hallmark and focal centers of Muslim communities, in all the big cities of China including Chang'an. The earliest certain date for the building of mosque in Chang'an is 1127 A.D[67]. Thus resuming their religious lives in China with full zeal, they gradually started perceiving themselves a part of Chinese public and paid heed towards Chinese cultural education of their children. There were special schools *Fan Xue* for *Tusheng Fānke* to learn Chinese classics and get prepared for the imperial examinations to take part in the official state activities. These schools were run by Muslim elite themselves after obtaining the certificates from the courts[68]. The state had a yearly quota for these *TushengFānke* , although there is no evidence of such a school in Chang'an yet there are reasons to believe that the children from the city had travelled elsewhere to study and be a part of Chinese administration. By running schools, getting Chinese standard education, participating in running the empire and marrying local women, the Muslims were definitely becoming more and more like the local Chinese people.

Although Muslims were increasingly getting involved in the social set up of Chinese society, we find most of these efforts to be unidirectional and even hindered or at least restricted by the law sometimes. Buying lands and interethnic marriages were not positive activities legally for Muslims but such laws were not enforced strictly. Muslim community was dealt with in a distinct way and they were allowed to practice their own laws in their personal lives but with the supervision of Chinese authorities. Chinese empires had generally controlled the ethnic minorities by appointing an official out of them in order to facilitate the governance and avoid the conflicts. In the vein of Tang, Song retained Muslims in their *Fān fáng* but started monitoring them by appointing an official among the foreigners themselves known as *fān-chang* who had to wear official uniform like other Chinese officials and was directly chosen by Chinese emperor. He administrated the internal affairs of Muslim community and assisted the empire being a mediator between the emperor and the people of his *Fān fáng*[69].

Keeping the legislative matters aside, what surprises one the most is that Confucian literati of Tang and Song showed no interest in Muslim culture or religion? Islam was a religion new to the Chinese and its teachings quite unusual but there was no attempt from Chinese intellectual class towards its understanding or getting acquaintance with it. Song Chang'an though accommodating a good number of Muslims, did not produce any historical written record for today's historian to understand that how local Chinese saw these *Fānke* and their religion. This totally neglecting attitude can partly owe itself to the official seclusion of Muslims in their closed neighborhoods and isolated communities even within a metropolitan city

like Chang'an. The unfamiliarity with the religion was also due to the absence of any missionary activities by Muslims, an unlikely facet of Medieval Islam otherwise and perhaps exhibited in China only. But the main rationale lies within the psyche of Chinese intellectual class itself, they were accustomed to take non-Chinese as barbarians and their civilizations as inferior, so for them it was useless to indulge in such an activity of low profile i.e. learning about a barbaric religion. For Confucian elite, their way was the supreme way and their master, the greatest sage so Islam had no appeal to them. Muslims might be looked down upon in Confucian social hierarchy because of their occupational trends i.e. trade. China, being an agricultural country since ancient times with Confucian scholars being the landlords, had always relegated merchants and traders to an inferior status associating the negative qualities of treachery and cunningness with them.[70] So, Muslims might not be an appreciated class of people and thus were perceived by Confucian literati not to possess any high moral teachings worthy of their attention. These reasons collectively can justify the absence of any scholarly work concerning Islam and Muslims in Tang-Song China and Muslims themselves were not able to write in Chinese language at that time so the cluster of information we get is mainly derived from the travelogues or official historical records which talk about foreign community as a whole under *fān ke*.

Conclusion

The ancestors of today's Xi'an Hui community were the Arab and Persian Muslim settlers who came as traders and soldiers in Tang and Song dynasties in many currents. They were not missionaries in intention therefore no enmity or adversity was incurred upon them by the empires. The Chinese empires dealt with them quite like other foreigners and placed them in the *Fān fáng* prohibiting them from integration into the Han society but manifested multicultural approach and granted these Muslims complete religious freedom. Han society, in the vein of their cultural narcissism, did not pay much heed to the new religion or culture of Muslims and thus they stayed marginalized during Tang and Song primarily. This marginalization and internal hybridization of these early Muslims laid the foundations of the construction of a new ethnic minority in the centuries to come, known as Hui. Relegated as originated from foreign roots in Chinese histories, these sojourners are placed at the overlapping space between Chinese and Muslim societies in Hui folk literature. They serve as the connecting link between Chinese and Islamic cultural spheres for today's Hui thus retaining their ethnic integrity as well as affirming their status as rightful denizens of Chinese land.

References

[1]The road starting from Southwest Asia via Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Tianshan Mountains and the Hexi Corridor reached Chang'an making it the eastern terminal of the route and linking China to the West through road.

[2] Louie, Kam. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[3] Huaizhong Yang , Yu Zhengui, ed. *Islam and Chinese Culture* (Ningxia People Publishing House, 1995).,p.3

[4] During the period A. D. 670-3 Firuz himself came to China. The Emperor gave him a command in the army and he was allowed to build a Persian monastery the capital, Chang'an in 677 A.D. F. S. Drake, "Mohammedanism in the T'ang Dynasty," *Monumenta Serica* 8, no. ArticleType: research-article / Full publication date: 1943 / Copyright © 1943 Monumenta Serica Institute (1943).

[5] This occurred to author when she saw the depiction of Tang court with a Muslim envoy in the Tang Palace in modern Xi'an on October 16th, 2013. Why to choose a Muslim envoy? It indicated that Muslim embassies were seen to be distinct in one way or another.

[6]A transcription of the Persian for Arab, Tazi.

[7] Drake, (1943)

[8] Shoujiang, You Jia Mi. *Islam in China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004).,p.3

[9] Ibid.

[10] Leslie, Donald. *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800* (Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986).

[11] Broomhall, Marshall. *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem* (London; Philadelphia [etc.]: Morgan & Scott, ltd. ; China inland mission, 1910).

[12] Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far. Tārīkh Al-Rusul Wa Al-Muluk, *Cairo: Dar al-Ma'aref* (1963); Ibn Kathir and Ismail ibnUmar, *Al-Bidayah Wa Al-Nihayah*, (Cairo: al-Matba'ah aI-Salafiyah, 1932); S Maqbul Ahmad, *Tārīkh Al-Jughrāfiyā Al-'arabīyah Al-Islāmīyah Min Al-Qarn 9-16 M* (Al al-Bayt University, 1995).

[13] Leslie, Donald. *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*, vol. 59 (Australian National University, 1998).

[14] Both Arab and Chinese sources agree that Qutayba arrived borders of China during 713-717 A.D

[15] Guang, Sima. *Zīzhì Tōngjiàn*, Second ed., 4 vols. (Zhonghua Book Company January 2009).

[16] Al-Tabarī, (1963).

[17] Hajji Yusuf Chang, "The Hui (Muslim) Minority in China: An Historical Overview," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 8, no. 1 (1987).

[18] Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*.

[19] In the winter of 755 A.D, the governor Ān Lùshān who was in charge of Fanyang (Beijing) and many other provinces, rebelled against Tang with the help of his ally General Shi Shiming and the rebellion lasted for seven years. Rebels even captured Chang'an and Tang state had to seek help from Muslims. for a detailed account see Denis C. Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979). vol.3 pp. 561-86

[20] Jianbiao, Li. "Changes in Islam's Status in Modern Shaanxi Province," in *Muslims and a Harmonious Society*

Selected Papers from a Three-Conference Series on Muslim Minorities in Northwest China

Gansu Province, 2008 | Shaanxi Province, 2009 | Xinjiang Autonomous Region, 2009, ed. Jared Daugherty (The Religion and Security Research Project, Center on Faith & International Affairs, Institute for Global Engagement, 2011).

[21] Mi, *Islam in China*; Yung-Ho Chang, "The Development of Chinese Islam : During the T'ang and Song Dynasties (618-1276 A.D.)" (1999).

[22] Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*.

[23] Broomhall, *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem*.

[24] Mi, *Islam in China*.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*.

[27] Literally means foreigners living in China

[28] Literally meaning foreigner and colloquially referring to foreign Muslims born locally.

[29] Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*.

[30] Xiong, Victor Cunrui ."Sui-Tang Chang'an," *Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies* (2000).

[31] Jianyou Lu, Ayesha Qurrat ul ain "Historical Narratives Embedded in Stone: Analysing the Inscription on Xi'an Ancient Mosque Steles " *Mankind Quarterly* 55, no. 1,2 (2014).

[32] Drake, "Mohammedanism in the T'ang Dynasty."

[33] Jianbiao., "Changes in Islam's Status in Modern Shaanxi Province."

[34] Broomhall, *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem*.

[35]Imperial histories tended to mention either the unusual events or the factors which caused problems for the empire. Islam was none of these two so we find it not mentioned in Tang annals.

[36] Han Kitab is the magnum opus created by Chinese Muslim scholars in 17th century. For details of Liu Zhi's contribution see James D Frankel, "Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law," *Oceanic Linguistics* 52, no. 2 (2013)..

[37] Tai Zong was the father of Gāozōng (who received first Muslim embassy according to all authentic sources) and ruled China immediately before him.

[38] Broomhall, *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem*; Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*; Zvi Ben-Dor, "'Even Unto China': Displacement and Chinese Muslim Myths of Origin," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 4 (2002).

[39] Not only Hui of China but also Dungans of Russia who migrated from China share the belief in this anecdote of dream. Please see S.R.K. Dyer, *T'ang T'ai-Tsung's Dream, a Soviet Dungan Version of a Legend of the Origin of the Chinese Muslims* (1983)., pp.545-570

[40] Turban and water kettle are the well-known Hui symbols in China.

[41] His name is said to be Xiao Xiji in Leslie and Lipman's narratives whereas Zvi names him Xu Mao.

[42] Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*.

[43] Ben-Dor, "'Even Unto China': Displacement and Chinese Muslim Myths of Origin."

[44] This translation is taken from Broomhall, *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem*.

[45] Crossley, Pamela Kyle .*The Manchus* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997).,p.33

[46] Li, Shujiang and Karl W. Luckert, *Mythology and Folklore of the Hui, a Muslim Chinese People* (SUNY Press, 1994).

[47] Broomhall, *Islam in China : A Neglected Problem*.

[48] Ghettoes are not essentially associated to persecution as it has been commonly understood after the practice of Jewish ghettoes in Eastern Europe. The expression simply refers to an ethnic enclave.

[49] Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*.
[50] Sulayman al-Tajir and Abu Zayd al-Sīrafī, "Akhbar Al-Sin Wa'l-Hind (237/851), Ed. And Trans. J. Sauvaget," *Relation de la China et l'Inde*.
[51] Jonathan Lipman, "Familiar Strangers: A Muslim History in China," (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
[52] Chang, "The Hui (Muslim) Minority in China: An Historical Overview."
[53] Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*.
[54] al-Tajir and al-Sīrafī, "Akhbar Al-Sin Wa'l-Hind (237/851), Ed. And Trans. J. Sauvaget."
[55] Confucian thought demarcated between the non-Chinese and Chinese people very well, considering former as barbarians, as Confucius once said, "The Yi and Di barbarians, even with their ruler, are still inferior to the Chinese states without their rulers." Edward Slingerland, "Confucius Analects," *Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing* (2003). p.18
[56] Raphael Israeli, *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics* (Lexington Books, 2002).
[57] Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*.
[58] Baba in Persian means grandfather and nana means maternal grandparents. This statement has been repeatedly pronounced by many Hui inhabitants of Xi'an during personal discussions with author A during the year 2013.
[59] Ma, Rong. "Reflections on the Debate on China's Ethnic Policy: My Reform Proposals and Their Critics," *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 2 (2014).
[60] Biran, Michal .*The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[61] Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*.
[62] Lipman, "Familiar Strangers: A Muslim History in China.",p.27
[63] Mi, *Islam in China*.
[64] Guang, *Zīzhì Tōngjiàn*.
[65] Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*.
[66] Israeli, *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics*.
[67] Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*.
[68] Mi, *Islam in China*.
[69] Chang, "The Development of Chinese Islam : During the T'ang and Song Dynasties (618-1276 A.D.)".
[70] In the Chinese social set-up, Confucian scholars had been landlords and the lay Chinese society had always been involved in the agricultural activities hence the Chinese philosophy esteems the farmers and idealizes their nature as simple and close to nature. On the other hand, merchants had been represented as cunning and petty thus not trustworthy and of low morals.