

China Connections *continued*

CONFERENCES IN CHINA

Shanghai Forum

28-30 May 2016, Shanghai
<http://www.shanghaiforum.fudan.edu.cn/en>

The Shanghai Forum, launched in 2005, is known as one of the most famous international forums held in Shanghai. Co-hosted by Fudan University and Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, and undertaken by Fudan Development Institute (FDDI), the Forum is a non-governmental and non-profit academic organization, which holds an annual symposium each May in Shanghai. This year's theme was "Economic Globalization and Asia's Choice – Interconnectivity, Integration and Innovation: Building Community of Common Destiny in Asia".

Shanghai Forum takes its mission to "Concentrate on Asia, Focus on Hot Issues, Congregate Elites, Promote Interactions, Enhance Cooperation and Seek Consensus" seriously. It endeavors to build an interactive platform for multi-sided communication amongst academic, political, commercial, and press circles through which significant problems both in Asia and the world will be discussed comprehensively and profoundly, so as to seek consensus on Asia's economic, political, social and cultural progress. Shanghai Forum opens application to the world. Many well-known think tanks, universities, enterprises, media and other organizations apply to host roundtables /sub-forums every year.

Over the years, numerous political dignitaries, distinguished scholars, and business leaders have been invited to share their thoughts and wisdom at Shanghai Forum, including Chen Zhili (former Vice Chairman of the NPC of China), Cheng Siwei (former Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC of China), Lee Kuan Yew (former Prime Minister of Singapore), Han Seung-soo (former Prime Minister of Republic of Korea), Shaikat Aziz (former Prime Minister of Pakistan), Robert Alexander Mundell (known as the "father" of the Euro, 1999 Nobel Laureate in Economics), Robert Shiller (2013 Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics), Vladimir Yakunin (President of JSC Russian Railways), and Robert Zoellick (former President of the World Bank Group). Shanghai Forum also receives strong support from the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the Shanghai Municipal Government.

Shanghai Archaeology Forum

13-17 December 2015, Shanghai
<http://shanghai-archaeology-forum.org/>

Founded in 2013, Shanghai Archaeology Forum (SAF) is a global initiative dedicated to promoting the investigation, protection and utilization of the world's archaeological resources and heritage. The 2015 SAF was co-organized by the Shanghai Academy, the Institute of Archaeology at CASS, Shanghai Municipal Administration of Cultural Heritage, and Shanghai University. The forum aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of the field of archaeology and the protection of cultural heritage for our common future.

To celebrate the excellence of archaeological research the SAF Awards were presented to those individuals and organizations that have achieved distinction by making major discoveries and producing innovative, creative, and rigorous works in the past three years. The World Archaeology Keynote Lecture Series presented case studies illustrating key issues such as diverse forms of social and cultural interaction, the formation and transformation of cultural and social identities, the complexities and ambiguities of cultural identities and power relations, the active roles of indigenous agency, practice and ideology in structuring colonial interaction, cultural persistence and the importance of historical contingency and local context.

The Public Archaeology Lecture Series promoted public awareness and knowledge of the ever-increasing wealth of archaeological finds. The Public Archaeology Lecture Series invited three important archaeologists, Charles Higham, Lothar von Falkenhausen, and Colin Renfrew, to share their experiences on archaeology with students, and the general public. After the public lectures, the audience was given the opportunity to engage with these famous archaeologists, discussing archaeological findings, as well as their concerns on the appreciation and protection of cultural diversity and the challenge of vanishing heritage in our globalizing world.

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Shadian's Muslim communities and trans-local connectivities: observations from the field

Hyeju (Janice) JEONG

I REACHED SHADIAN TOWN after a three hour drive from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, China. As I stepped out of the car in the chill of a late November night, the site of Shadian's magnificent Grand Mosque and the call to night prayers reminded me that I was in a zone quite different from Kunming.

Shadian has ten mosques, with the Grand Mosque - modeled upon the Al-Masjid al-Nabawi mosque in Medina and completed in 2009 - as its symbol. Almost ninety percent of Shadian's fifteen thousand residents are Muslims, belonging to the contemporary Hui minority of China. However, Shadian is also known for the so-called Shadian Incident of 1975, in which villagers forcefully opened closed-down mosques during the last years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The 'incident' left 1,600 people dead at the hands of the People's Liberation Army. "The old Islamic schools in Shadian used to have valuable library collections, but everything has been burnt," lamented my informant, Mr. Ma. Across the Mosque was the Islamic Culture and Arts Center that exhibits and sells Sino-Islamic artworks. Within a few blocks of the Grand Mosque, one senses a mix of forward-looking aspirations and painful memories, reflecting a continuing history of repression and resilience of Islam in China.

Shadian's trans-local networks in history

Islam in Yunnan expanded during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), when Sayyid Ajjal Shams al-Din from Bukhara (current Uzbekistan) was appointed as the provincial governor, promoting both Islamic and Confucian institutions. According to Mr. Ma, "he also built aqueducts, without him you would not see present-day Yunnan". Following waves of Muslim settlement into the town since the thirteenth century, Shadian became a part of caravan trade routes between Yunnan and Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and India. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, trade became so important that, just before the Chinese communist victory of 1949, around 700 out of Shadian's 980 families, had two to three horses conducting commerce across northern Thailand and Myanmar.¹

In the first half of the 20th century, Shadian also emerged as a significant center for Islamic learning. For example, of the thirty-three students from China who studied in Cairo's al-Azhar University in the 1930s and 1940s, five came

from Shadian alone. They were heavily sponsored by Bai Liangcheng (白亮诚, 1893-1965). A scholar and an official, Bai Liangcheng founded the Yufeng Elementary School in 1914, one Islamic Girls School, and several Islamic periodicals. The old Yufeng Elementary School now displays an exhibition on Bai Liangcheng and Shadian's notable Muslims. Here I learned that Bai also initiated industrialized tea commerce based in Yunnan's southernmost Xishuangbanna. With imported technology and machineries from Japan and India, he constructed a large-scale tea factory, creating trade networks domestically and across the borderlands of Thailand and Myanmar. These connections would later provide permanent homes for Shadian diaspora, who migrated to Thailand and Myanmar in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and formed Sino-Islamic enclaves. In November 1948, Bai Liangcheng and fifty others left Shadian, most likely to flee Communist rule. The following year, fourteen of them undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. "It's embarrassing to say you're escaping," said Mr. Ma. "So you say you're going on the pilgrimage."

Return to Kunming

Back in Kunming, I told my Chinese host family about my experiences in Shadian, but was met with somewhat perplexed and worried expressions flashing across their faces. Later in the evening, my host forwarded me an article on Zhihu Ribao, a Chinese online platform where articles are posted anonymously. The article drew parallels between the Shadian Incident and the contemporary Islamic State in the Middle East - "both groups being violent, self-unifying and terrorist in essence" - echoing the dominant and official narrative in China. The rich histories that I observed in Shadian, rooted in southern Yunnan with its critical ties outwards that have shaped the province's many landscapes, are apparently not making their inroads into the audience who needs them the most.

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- 1 Ma Weiliang, Yunnan Huizu Lishi yu Wenhua Yanjiu (Kunming, Yunnan Daxue Chubanshe, 1999), 241.

Islam in contemporary China: an overview

Jianping WANG

CHINA IS HOME to a large Muslim population. According to the Islamic Association of China, the country has over 25 million Muslims, 40,000 mosques and more than 50,000 Akhond, a Persian title for the Islamic clerics who serve the scattered communities all over the country. Every year, more than 10,000 Muslims make their pilgrimage to Mecca, while - over the past thirty years - nearly 12,000 Muslim students have completed their Islamic studies abroad, and another 100,000 have studied Islam in the *madrasa* (religious school) in China. All these figures show that Islam is not an insignificant issue for contemporary China's political and social landscape.

After being banned during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Islam in China has undergone a revival since the reform and opening-up policy of the late 1970s. In just thirty years' time, it has transformed from an underground religion into an Arabian-style religion that is officially recognized as one of the five religions in China (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism). Whether wearing their long robes, turbans, or hajibs, Muslims can be found all over China; from the big cities of Beijing and Shanghai to the island of Hainan, from Inner Mongolia in the north to Yunnan in the south, from the western border of Tibet to the eastern coastal region. However, more than half of the Muslim population lives in Northwest China, particularly in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, the vast region where 23,000 mosques serve various ethnic communities, including Uygur, Kazak, Kirghiz, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Salar, Hui, Dongxiang, and Bao'an. Islam is also flourishing in the academic world: there are more than sixty Islamic periodicals, Muslim professors and scholars teach and research Islam in various universities or research institutions, and many conferences, workshops and forums on Islam are being held all over China, often sponsored and organized by Muslim elites.

The three pillars of the Islamic network in China

However, although China has more Muslims than any Arabian country, they are in fact still a vulnerable minority in Han-dominated China. While Muslims profit from governmental policies giving preferential treatment to ethnic minorities ('affirmative action') and officially enjoy freedom of religious practice, they are supervised carefully and restrictions remain in place over the activities of *madrasas*, religious ceremonies, religious organizations, etc. In order to maintain their Islamic tradition and to uphold their monotheistic identity, it is important for the widely dispersed Muslim enclaves to build a strong network in and outside of China. Three Islamic institutions form the backbone of this network.

Firstly, the mosque plays a central role in the Chinese Muslim community. Besides its religious function as a place for ritual praying, mosques in China also have social, economic, and cultural functions, such as administrative management, festival celebration, social mobilization, economic enterprises, cultural education, or even daily life affairs. Hence, the mosque is a stronghold that binds its local community, while stretching out its external relations with communities in other areas, in order to establish the *umma* (Muslim nation) in the context of an unreceptive environment.

Secondly, the *maktab* (grammar school, or primary level) and *madrasa* (Islamic college or high level) provides the Chinese Muslim community with education in Islamic knowledge, faith reinforcement, and passes Islamic tradition to the next generation. Most *maktabs* and *madrasas* in China are attached to the mosques, however, there are also quite a few *madrasas* set up independently and open to all Muslims in society. They are not only responsible for the maintenance of Islam and to cultivate young Muslims, but also to strengthen and revive Islamic consciousness of Muslims of all ages. *Maktabs* and *madrasas* often regenerate the vitality of the community

Snapshots of Sino-Muslim students living in Egypt

Shuang WEN

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA resumed sending Chinese Muslim students to al-Azhar University in Egypt in 1982. A small number of the students are sent by the Islamic Association of China, headquartered in Beijing, and approved by the Chinese Embassy in Cairo. These students can enjoy the benefits of an education exchange agreement between the PRC and Egypt, i.e., they can live in the international student dorms at al-Azhar University and receive a modest monthly stipend. Most, however, travel on their own initiative; they are unable to enjoy the benefits of the education exchange agreement and have to fend for themselves. So when the Arab Spring broke out in January 2011, their lives in Egypt suddenly became uncertain. Below are two snapshots of these self-funded Chinese-speaking Sino-Muslim students.¹

Nabil

Nabil comes from a pious Muslim family in Henan. He went to Egypt in 2008 to study Islamic law at al-Azhar University, aspiring to become an *Ahong* (a Chinese term for *imam*) upon graduation. Because he did not have much prior knowledge of Islamic studies or the Arabic language, he did not receive a fellowship from the Islamic Association in China. However, he was very driven and passionate about his studies. When the uprising in Egypt erupted, his family members wanted him to return. However, just like many of his fellow Muslim students from around the world, he was excited about the revolution. He saw that people who held prior grudges for personal reasons became supportive of each other, as if they were united by a moment of uncertainty. Feeling inspired, he made a conscientious choice to stay in order to witness the unfolding of a historical event in the Islamic world. He believed that this experience would strengthen his faith and enrich his personal growth in life.

Khalid

Khalid is originally from Henan as well, but his family is not particularly strict with religious practice. Not being able to pass the college entrance exam in China, he went to Al-Azhar University simply out of curiosity for the outside world. Although the tuition and living expenses in Egypt are not beyond the affordability of his family, they are still a financial burden. After a few years of trying, Khalid still could not pass the Arabic language exam, let alone enter a degree program. Feeling ashamed and not wanting to return home empty handed, he decided to open

a Chinese restaurant in the neighborhood of the international students dorm of Al-Azhar University. Although Khalid had not been particularly good at academic studies, he did manage his business well. Hand-pulled noodles, stir-fries and hotpots attracted many curious diners. Khalid not only earned enough profit to pay back the original financial support from his family, but also sent extra money back to Henan. However, as the Arab Spring continued, many international Muslim students – Khalid's restaurant's major clientele – left Egypt. If the political uncertainty continued, he would not be able to keep the restaurant afloat. However, if Khalid returned to China without Arabic language skills or religious training, his employment prospects would be bleak, which was the reason for him to leave in the first place. Khalid found his niche in Egypt, but his way of making a living is threatened by the political instability. To leave or to stay, that was a big question for him when I met him in July 2013.

Khalid's case is by no means unique among Sino-Muslim students at al-Azhar University. In fact, a majority of them are like him. Not being able to enter a college in China, they went to Egypt without much religious or Arabic language knowledge, or even awareness of what to expect. As a result, they needed to first take prerequisite language classes. However, as the Arabic language is very difficult, most of them cannot pass the language exam after repeated trials, which means they cannot enter the Al-Azhar University degree program either. Out of frustration or financial constraints, they drop out of school, but have managed to make the best of their experience in Egypt by finding different jobs to make a living. Some Sino-Muslim students work in marble-making, shoe-making, and plastic recycling factories. Others sell small made-in-China inexpensive products at the Khan al-Khalili market. Some even become door-to-door sales persons or tour guides. For them, Egypt has become a place of survival rather than religious learning.

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References

- 1 Sino-Muslim is a term coined by scholar Jonathan Lipman in his book *Familiar Strangers* (University of Washington Press, 1997). Names of the Sino-Muslim students in this essay are not their real names.

CONFERENCES IN CHINA

You Must Create?

7-9 April 2016, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
<http://acgs.uva.nl/news-and-events/news/content/2016/04/you-must-create.html>

You must create – to be less bored, to be more authentic, to be free in the digital world? These questions were the linchpin of a three-day event of conferencing and site visits held early April in Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

The event took place in the historical juncture when creativity has become an imperative, when China aspires to move from a 'made in China' towards a 'created in China' country (Keane 2011), to transform creativity and culture into a crucial source for innovation and financial growth as well as part of its 'soft power' to both the citizenry as well as the outside world.

"You Must Create? Boredom, *Shanzhai* and Digitization in the Time of 'Creative China'" opened with scholarly talks and a roundtable discussion with practitioners to map out the field and major concerns of the three themes. The second day involved a site visit to the ambitious West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong, where more artists, cultural administrators and government officials joined in discussions. The final day took place in different localities of Shenzhen: Wenbo Gong, a state-promoted creative district; Dafen Village, known for its fake paintings; and New-Who Art Museum, a bottom-up art village. Young researchers also reported their findings on a diversity of topics, ranging from water calligraphy, eco-documentaries, to the aesthetics of overabundance.

"You Must Create?" was jointly organized by the Amsterdam Centre of Globalization Studies, University of Amsterdam and the Department of Humanities and Creativity Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University, as part of the European Research Council funded project "From Made in China to Created in China – A Comparative Study of Creative Practice and Production in Contemporary China". The five-year project is led by Professor Jeroen de Kloet (UvA).

Explorations during the event will be organized and developed into an open source set of (audio-visual) materials, scheduled to be published by the Amsterdam University Press in the summer of 2017.

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World Forum on China Studies

20-21 November 2015, Shanghai
www.chinastudies.org.cn/english.htm

Sponsored by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China and the Shanghai Municipal Government, the World Forum on China Studies is a Shanghai-based biennial academic event jointly organized by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Shanghai Municipal Information Office. Founded in 2004, the Forum is held every two years in Shanghai and has convened seven times including two symposiums. The Forum has served as a platform for distinguished scholars to communicate with each other and explore the past, present and future of China studies. It is also dedicated to reflecting on the state of art in the field of China Studies while fostering an informed mutual understanding between China and the world.

The forum has established its fame internationally in academia, with the attendance of around 1600 scholars, experts and veteran politicians from over 40 countries and regions all over the world. Meanwhile, diplomatic institutions and representatives of think tanks from more than 50 countries have participated in the Forum, which received extensive coverage by dozens of professional media outlets as well. Academic circles at home and abroad speak highly of the forum; scholars from Russia, the United States, Japan, India and other countries have widely quoted the important academic points of view proposed during the forum.

Themed "China's Reform, Opportunities for the World," the 6th World Forum on China Studies was held in Shanghai on 20-21 November 2015. Over 200 scholars and opinion-leaders of different professional specialties and cultural backgrounds discussed a range of topics on China's reform in the current global setting.



that is in perpetual competition with a non-Muslim Chinese community over the limited economic resources, and has to survive in a context of social and cultural tension. Islamic education is like the soul of the community, binding all Muslims into a strong organization, regardless their social, economic, or political background.

Thirdly, the *qubba* (tomb of a Muslim scholar or elderly) forms the nexus of the Sufi community of Islamic Mysticism. More than one third of the Chinese Muslims are affiliated to one or another Sufi order. Many *qubbas* do not merely function as the burial places for the Sufi saints or Sufi leaders, but are places of pilgrimage for Sufi followers, turning them into a religious complex that combines the functions of a mosque, *maktab* and *madrasa*, and the tomb. The *qubba* thus plays a comprehensive role in the Sufi social network.

In conclusion, Chinese Muslims have strategically formed a religious, social, and cultural network that has made Islam in China an institutionalized entity binding the widely dispersed and ethnically diverse Muslim communities or enclaves into a considerably coherent, partly unified Muslim *umma*. Confronted with increasing Islamophobia in the wake of recent terrorist attacks around the world, these networks are crucial for the survival of a minority living in a country dominated by a culture of atheism and materialism.

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Above: A village mosque near Sancha Town, Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Qinghai Province. (Aug 2011).

Below: Imam and Hui Muslims in the courtyard of Gucheng Mosque, Wuzhong City, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. (Aug 2016).
 Photos by author.

