

# Patriotic and Pious Muslim Intellectuals in Modern China: The Case of Ma Jian

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## **Abstract**

The fall of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and the founding of the modern Chinese nation-state brought both opportunities and challenges to Chinese Muslims. No longer having to deal with emperorship and its foundational ideology, Confucianism, they were soon confronted with new state ideological impositions, namely, Han nationalism and socialism, imposed by the Republican and Communist regimes. These new challenges were both threatening and promising, for although the new ideologies were fundamentally antithetic to Islam, the new regimes promised an equal status to Chinese Muslims and saw how they could aid national diplomacy and international relations with Muslim countries.

Within this context, China's Muslim intellectuals tried to reorient and reposition Muslims and Islam by minimizing differences and maximizing commonalities during both the Republican and the Communist regimes. By studying Ma Jian (1906-78), one of modern China's most influential and representative Muslim intellectuals, as well as his juxtaposition of Islam and China, I look at the way of being a modern Chinese Muslim intellectual in China's post-1949 internal and international contexts. The Turkic Muslim communities in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China are excluded from this study.

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## Introduction

Having lived for nearly fourteen centuries in China, Muslims have become culturally Chinese but have kept their Islamic religion. This juxtaposition of “Chinese” and “Muslim,” as Jonathan Lipman aptly points out, has made them “familiar strangers” on Chinese soil.<sup>1</sup> Their dual status as cultural-social familiar strangers and as a minority group within Han-majority society makes any inquiry into Chinese Muslim intellectuals difficult, given their wide physical distribution and relatively small population vis-à-vis the majority non-Muslim Chinese population. At the same time, however, this attempted inquiry is meaningful, for it reveals much about Muslim intellectuals on the periphery not only of the Middle East and North Africa, but also of such Muslim-dominated societies as Malaysia.

From a global perspective, studying Chinese Muslim intellectuals also enriches discourses on Muslim intellectuals by adding Islam-Confucianism or even Islam-Communism to the monopolized discourses on Islam and the West in contemporary western scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarship on Confucian Muslims, known in Chinese as *Huiru*, has greatly promoted our understanding of Confucian Muslim intellectuals and of the Islam-Confucian discourse in imperial China, while studies on contemporary Chinese Muslim intellectuals remain little researched in English scholarship.<sup>3</sup> In addition, such research becomes more practical and important as the encounter between Islam and Confucianism increases, along with the growing economic prosperity of Muslims and Chinese, as the Malaysian case suggests.

Modern Chinese history begins in 1911, when the Republicans overthrew the Manchu dynasty and promised to erect a nation-state comprising five major groups (Manchurians, Mongolians, Tibetans, Han, and Hui [Muslims]). This promise appealed to many Chinese-speaking Muslims,<sup>4</sup> who subsequently participated in the regime’s political, social, and cultural movements. Under this short-lived regime (the KMT, or Guomindang, 1911-49), Muslim participation burgeoned and blossomed in the Chinese government as well as in the military, religious, journalistic, education, academic, and other sectors.<sup>5</sup> The most noticeable stratum turned out to be intellectual. It is this early Republican-era ferment of political, social, and cultural consciousness and concerns of Chinese Muslim intellectuals that gave birth to several famous Muslim intellectuals in Communist China, among them the al-Azhar graduate Ma Jian.

As a Chinese Muslim, Ma Jian’s influences were simultaneously religious and secular, as well as internal and international, as seen in the following observations. Ma Jian is widely considered to be modern China’s first

nationwide Muslim scholar and influential diplomacy consultant. At both the national and religious levels, he is known to ordinary Chinese Muslims primarily through his scholarship on Islam. His name is very meaningful to Chinese Muslims. For example, a contemporary Muslim stated that when he found two pictures of Ma Jian in Shanghai, they “were carved in my heart when I began to read the Qur’an [in Chinese] at the age of eleven years old.”<sup>6</sup>

Ma Jian’s secular and international reputation as a Muslim was solidly based upon his activities in Communist China’s second-track diplomacy with the Muslim world. As Clyde-Ahmad Winters noted, “the CIA (Chinese Islamic Association) and CII (Chinese Islamic Institute) have been instrumental in laying the groundwork for CCP [Chinese Communist Party] advances in Africa and the Middle East along with Ma Chien [Ma Jian].”<sup>7</sup> Ma Jian’s prominence in Islamic scholarship and in China’s informal diplomacy is enough to make him a representative modern Chinese Muslim intellectual. Thus, this article focuses on him as a Muslim intellectual, discusses his discourses and activities on behalf of Chinese Muslims and Islam in China, and examines the meaning of being a Chinese Muslim intellectual in the contemporary Chinese context.

### **A Concise Biography**

Born in 1906, Ma Jian came from Shadian, a famous village in Yunnan province known for its rich production of past Muslim scholars. Ma Jian seems to have continued the village tradition of learning during a chaotic time. After completing his middle school education in 1925, he taught at a Chinese Muslim primary school (Zhong A Xuexiao) in his hometown and then headed to Gansu (northwestern China) in 1928 to study Islam with the famous reformist and modernist *ahong* (imam) Hu Songshan (1880-1955).

In the same year, Chinese Muslim activists headed by Da Pusheng (1874-1965), Ha Decheng (1888-1943), Wu Tegong (1886-1961), and Sha Shanyu (1879-1968) founded the private Shanghai Islamic Normal School (Shanghai Yisilan Shifan Xuexiao, 1928-38) as an attachment to the earlier formed Academic Association of Chinese Islam (Zhongguo Huijiao Xuehui, 1925), which purported to promote Islamic research in China by training Muslim students in Chinese culture at home and in Islamic sciences abroad. Ma Jian’s immersion in both Chinese and Islamic cultures qualified him for entrance into this school and, in 1929, he enrolled in it to begin his formal training. His record of academic excellence earned him a place among the first Chinese Muslim student group sent by the Academic Association of Chinese Islam to Egypt in 1931 for professional training in Arabic and

Islam. The underlying goal of this program was to produce a comprehensive Muslim translation of the Qur'an in modern vernacular Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

For the next eight years, Ma Jian studied a broad range of Islamic knowledge, including the Arabic language, literature, religion, philosophy, history, and education at al-Azhar and Dar al-'Ulum.<sup>9</sup> In 1939, he returned to China and began translating the Qur'an in Shanghai, as the Academic Association of Chinese Islam directed. The outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 endangered the Chinese Muslims' activities in Shanghai, and so he went to his hometown and continued translating. In addition, he taught Muslim education and Islamic studies, both of which he had excelled at in Egypt, part-time at various Muslim schools and at Yunnan University.

Due to the Cairo Declaration (1943) and the end of the Second World War, the Chinese government realized the importance of Arabic in its diplomacy with the Middle East. As a result, it set up Arabic language programs in Chinese universities. Beijing University adopted this mission and, in 1946, created the first Arabic language major in its Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures (Dongfang yuyan wenxuexi). Ma Jian's mastery of both Chinese and Arabic, as well as his professional training in Cairo and his ability to translate Arabic texts, made him the ideal candidate for this newly created position. Therefore, he began a new career as a professor of Arabic language and Islamic studies. This event also represented a milestone for Arabic education, for this was the first time that Arabic and Islamic culture had ever been included in China's system of higher education.

He also was asked to participate in new China's political life. As a result, he was elected as a member of China's Political Consultative Committee in 1949, a member of the Asia and Africa Association, and a standing member of the Chinese Islamic Association. From then on, Ma Jian was an influential figure in China's internal political consultancy and external diplomatic politics directed toward Islam and Muslims. His articles defending Islam and promoting understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in China frequently appeared in such leading newspapers as *The People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*).

According to his wife, Ma Jian served as the official Arabic translator for China's national leaders, among them Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai.<sup>10</sup> Thus, he became a national symbol of Communist China's freedom of religion and Muslim participation in the nation's political life. He translated the Chinese constitution into Arabic and the Egyptian constitution into Chinese during the 1950s to strengthen the relationship between socialist China and nationalist Egypt. He also translated and broadcast China's official declaration of support for the Egyptian and Lebanese anti-imperialism struggles in 1956 and in

1958, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Ma Jian even joined the official Chinese delegation that attended the Asia-Africa Conference in 1959, held in Egypt.

After experiencing the bitter period of the Cultural Revolution, Ma Jian continued to work on his translation of the Qur'an until his death in 1978. In 1987, the Religious Department of Saudi Arabia accepted his translation, known as the *Jian Ma Yi Ben* (Ma Jian translation), as the standard Chinese translation for distribution to Chinese-speaking Muslims. These accomplishments project Ma Jian as a famous activist Muslim intellectual, though still Chinese, who served his motherland as a teacher, researcher, translator, writer, political consultant, and social activist in its political center: Beijing.

### **Ma Jian and China's Islamic and Middle East Studies**

There seems to be a trend among Chinese Muslim intellectuals, regardless of when they live, to associate the fate of Islam with thinking about the condition of Muslim education in China. Ma Jian was no exception in that he made, with some sadness, the following observation concerning the history of Muslim education in China: "Although the history of Islam in China is over one thousand years old, a history of Muslim education does not exist due to the lack of records."<sup>12</sup> This situation was, in his opinion, largely the result of China's traditional mosque-centered education (this system is common throughout the Muslim world).<sup>13</sup> Ma Jian commented and critiqued this time-honored system by saying that Muslim students in such schools "only study Arabic and Persian, but not Chinese ... thus they know little about their rights and duties of being citizens of China and cannot express in Chinese what they achieve in understanding Islam."<sup>14</sup>

Ma Jian argues that not every Chinese Muslim youth needs to become a religious master: "[T]he need for religious masters is limited," but "Muslim parents force their children to go to religious school despite their poor potentiality in this field."<sup>15</sup> In his eyes, this practice only fulfilled the parents' wishes instead of encouraging the children to pursue modern knowledge. The result, he concluded, was that young Muslims either dropped out and learned nothing useful, or somehow made Islam a way to earn a livelihood. Muslim societies, he argued, "do not need only religious masters; they also need teachers, doctors, judges, lawyers, tailors, carpenters, and so on."<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, he critiqued the Republican government's complete imposition of "scientific" and nationalistic new-style modern school upon Chinese Muslims, a system that excluded any type of Islamic religious education:

The new school does not offer general courses on Islam, nor does it pay attention to religious cultivation. Muslim students who graduate from these schools know little about the basic teachings of Islam and disobey the Islamic Law. They smoke, drink, gamble, and engage in other immoral activities. These results have disappointed their parents and provided conservative Muslims with excuses against the new-style education. The opinion of these conservative Muslims that studying Chinese would become Han Chi-nese is not necessarily unreasonable.<sup>17</sup>

In Ma Jian's eyes, the traditional Muslim education system and the new-style public education system were either too rigid or irrelevant to Islam, and therefore did not meet the community's needs. The ideal system, he thought, would teach Muslim students both Chinese and Islamic subjects, because these two areas of knowledge studies are inseparable and indispensable for being both good Muslims and modern Chinese. Ma Jian insisted that Chinese Muslims must create their own special education system in order to serve their community and their nation.

To make such an education possible, he proposed that religious courses be added to the state-controlled public school curriculum in line with the special education policy granted to non-Han minority peoples.<sup>18</sup> He detailed this proposal by suggesting that two or three Qur'anic classes be provided to Muslim public school students each week so that they would learn how to fulfill such religious duties as prayer and fasting and so that such basic Islamic virtues as obedience, time-keeping, and persistence would not be corrupted by the social environment.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Ma Jian did not view teaching Islam to Muslim students merely as a way to fulfill one's religious duties, but also as a way to become a modern Chinese citizen. However, the Republican government rejected his reasoning, although such courses would not affect the students' major study, for, in Ma Jian's words:

The education department of the reactionary nationalist regime thought that this would prevent their aim of assimilating minority peoples, and therefore was opposed to incorporating these special courses into the curriculum for Chinese Muslim students, under the excuse that this would violate public education policies.<sup>20</sup>

Years later, as a member of the Political Consultative Conference, established after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Ma Jian asked the new communist leaders to consider the special needs of Chinese Muslims, such as the Hui minority nationality:

The school courses for Hui students at different levels should meet the Hui people's special needs and actual situation. In addition to the general courses, special courses on the Hui people's culture should be added.<sup>21</sup>

The Communist party's response was no better than that of the Republicans. Clearly, an atheistic communist ideology leaves no space for religious "penetration" into the education arena, even for those minority peoples who have a different faith and culture. It seems that Ma Jian discerned the fate of this appeal under both regimes. Accompanying his early appeal for adding religious education to the minority students' curriculum during the Republican period, he suggested an alternative means of promoting Muslim education by establishing a scholarship institution to encourage Muslim students:

We can use the money for building [Muslim] schools to grant scholarships to Muslim students who have a good school record and a good personality. Would this not be a better way? We can send our youths into the public or private schools and reward them with the funding that we gather from Muslims for their good performance at schools. During vacations, we can provide education in Islam.<sup>22</sup>

It seems that this alternative suggestion for a scholarship system governed by Muslim communities, as an indirect intervention into Muslim education, would facilitate Muslim education in a mixed-population society. As his case shows, Ma Jian himself is a good example of the success of such a scholarship system, for he was funded by his Muslim community, a situation that linked him, as a student, to his Muslim community by sharing with it his progress and achievements of his studies in Islam and Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

Ma Jian could not conduct a top-down reform of education for Chinese Muslims in this new era of Chinese society due to the state's dominance of power and discourse on the majority's behalf. However, his recognition of education's importance, as well as of the means needed to achieve it, were valuable to Chinese Muslims during a time when China was transforming itself from a dynastic empire into a modern nation-state. According to his wife Ma Cunzhen, Ma Jian first became aware of the importance of a formal Arabic and Islamic education after he had taught in his hometown for two years, and his studies in Egypt convinced him that traditional methods for teaching Arabic and Islamic subjects in China had to be reformed.<sup>24</sup>

After accepting the position of professor at Beijing University in 1946, Ma Jian was able to fulfill his two hopes: teaching Arabic and translating Islamic texts. This suggests that Chinese Muslim intellectuals must actively participate in China's institutionalized education system for the sake of legit-

imacy and so that they can serve Islam by serving the country. In this sense, his translations of the Qur'an and other Islamic texts not only symbolized a great practice of state-encouraged *ijtihad* (independent judgment in juridical matters) among modern Chinese Muslims so that Islamic texts could be understood in the Chinese Muslims' native language, but also marked a clear transformation of the Muslims' status from "subjects" of various dynasties to "citizens" of the Chinese nation-state. In other words, unassimilated Muslim "strangers" in the Chinese nation-state have to become familiar with all of the nation's aspects, including the Chinese language. Education, armed by the state, began to function as a means of making citizen-believers.

As chairman of Beijing University's Arabic program, Ma Jian focused on developing Arabic and Islamic studies and training high-level experts of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in Chinese universities. His hope to find a solution to the need for Muslim education in modern China led him to pay special attention to the history of early Arab Muslim education. This affiliation generated a rich scholarship on Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East. While working at this university, his prolonged project of translating the Qur'an into Chinese, initiated in 1939, was finally finished and printed in 1981 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.<sup>25</sup> Bai Shouyi, a contemporary Hui intellectual and historian, stated that Ma Jian's translation surpassed all existing versions.<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising that it became the most popular Chinese-language Qur'an among Chinese-speakers. Moreover, its accuracy and elegance gained it the approval of the Islamic Center of the Middle East, which caused the Religious Department of Saudi Arabia to accept it as the standard Chinese translation for circulation among Chinese-speaking Muslims in 1987.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to this translation, known as *Gulanjing*, Ma Jian also translated, among many other publications, Hussein al-Jisr's *Haqiqah al-Diyana al-Islamiyah* (*Huijiao Zhenxiang*),<sup>28</sup> T. J. de Boer's *Geschichte der Philosophie im Islam* (*Huijiao Zhexue*),<sup>29</sup> Khalil Adbullah Totah's *Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (*Huijiao Jiaoyushi*),<sup>30</sup> and Philip Hitti's *History of the Arabs* (*Alabo Tongshi*).<sup>31</sup> His extensive translations and writings on Islam and Arab Muslims laid a solid foundation for Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in China's academia.

In his capacity as a well-known university professor, Ma Jian also personally taught and trained many Muslim and non-Muslim Arabic and Islamic experts. All of his students became the first generation of China's experts on the Arabic language and Middle Eastern studies. Many of them went on to dominate Arabic teaching and research at Beijing University, the Beijing Foreign Languages University, and other Chinese universities. Some

contemporary influential Muslim scholars, among them Lin Song, were students of Ma Jian. Therefore, it is fair to say that Ma Jian is the founder of modern Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in China.

The significance of Ma Jian's contribution to Arabic language education and Islamic studies in China can be fully understood and appreciated from two historical angles. The first one is from that of Muslim education. As mentioned above, the traditional mosque-centered education system (*Jingtang Jiaoyu*) managed to produce enough imams and mullahs to sustain Islam in pre-modern Chinese society. However, it has encountered many difficulties and challenges from modern secular education because it cannot offer the necessary natural and social sciences and must compete with the state-enforced atheistic education for the souls of Muslim students. Bringing Islam and Arabic into the nation's universities provides a platform to deepen Islamic studies and research and to combine them with mainstream education. Furthermore, since such courses are centered on Arabic and Islam, other Muslim sciences dealing with history, culture, education, and geography have greatly expanded the knowledge of Islam in China. In this sense, Ma Jian's efforts have succeeded and surpassed those of the Confucian Muslims to make Islam known to Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in China.

The second angle is that of the state. Chinese history shows that it is almost impossible to insert Islam into any Chinese educational institution. Although Islamic sciences, especially astronomy and medicine, had been used by Chinese scholars for centuries, subjects on Arabic and Islam had never been presented in state-sponsored non-Muslim schools and scholarship. The Qing dynasty's inclusion of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang Dianli* (*The Rites of Arabia*) in the catalog of the imperial libraries (*Siku quanshu*) in 1782, despite being full of derogatory commentary, is probably the first time that this non-Muslim state showed an initial – but limited – interest in Islam and Muslim writings.<sup>32</sup> Ma Jian's conversion of interest in Islamic religious, cultural, and historical texts and research into state-recognized and legitimate scientific disciplines of academic inquiries, under official sponsorship and supervision, built a bridge between the indigenous Muslim community and the Chinese nation-state.

### **Ma Jian's Religious Patriotism**

Ma Jian's love of Arabic and Islam was accompanied by his patriotism, which originated from his great love of Chinese culture. As hinted at above, among his virtues were his mastery of Chinese culture, his insistence that Chinese Muslims study Chinese culture, and his effort to introduce Chinese

texts to the Arab world during his student days in Egypt. As a student, Ma Jian began to translate Chinese classics and other texts dealing with Chinese history, culture, and mythology into Arabic. A few of these are *Analects (Lun Yu)*, *The Tea God (Cha Shen)*, *The Story of Hebo's Marriage (He Bo Qu Qi)*, and *Chinese Idioms and Axioms (Zhongguo Geyan Yanyu)*.

Ma Jian's love of Chinese culture developed into political patriotism during China's resistance to the Japanese invasion of the 1930s and 1940s. Even while he was studying at al-Azhar, he actively spread China's policy of forming a United Front for Anti-Fascism (*Fan Faxisi Tongyi Zhanxian*) and uncovered Japan's plot to divide-and-rule China by offering superficial support to establishing a separate Hui-Muslim nation (*Huihui Guo*) in north-western China.<sup>33</sup> He even carried his patriotism to Makkah, where, during the 1939 pilgrimage season, he spoke out against the politically motivated, Japanese-sponsored Chinese Muslim delegation.

Ma Jian's early record of patriotism was paid back politically after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949: He was invited to participate in new China's Political Consultative Conference (*Zhongguo Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi*) in 1949, made a key member of the Asia and Africa Association (*Yafei Youxie*), and a standing member of the Chinese Islamic Association (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiehui*). All of these memberships were designed to develop diplomacy and friendship with Muslim nations at a time when communist China was facing the West's (American-led) policies of isolation and sanction.

Although the degree of his involvement in and influence on China's diplomacy with Muslim countries is hard to measure, his visibility in the second-track diplomacy conducted between the 1950s and the 1970s, as Winters has observed, was tremendous. Ma Jian undertook political translations that strengthened the relationship between China and the Arab world. For example, he translated such political texts as the Chinese constitution into Arabic in 1954 and the Egyptian constitution into Chinese during the 1950s.

Ma Jian also became an essential interpreter for the growing friendship between China and various Muslim states. Through his efforts, together with those of his other Muslim comrades, China established foreign relations with many Islamic countries in Asia and Africa. Ma Jian personally served Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai as their Arabic translator when Arab leaders visited China.<sup>34</sup> During the special time of Chinese political support for Arab countries, Ma Jian translated and broadcast Beijing's declarations of support for Egypt's anti-imperialism war in 1956 and for those of Lebanon and Jordan in 1958.<sup>35</sup> In 1959, he joined a high-ranking Chinese delegation to the Asia-Africa Conference in Egypt, where, after twenty years, he met his old

friends, teachers, brothers, and now comrades. Hence, as a Chinese Muslim intellectual, he played a dual role of engendering political solidarity and nation-to-nation friendship between the peoples of his motherland (China) and of his “brother lands” (Egypt and other Islamic countries).

Ma Jian’s enthusiasm and devotion to Sino-Arab diplomacy was not merely the result of his early language and cultural training in the Middle East. A close reading of his mind reveals that as a Chinese Muslim, he hoped to use his community to build up solidarity between China and the Muslim world against their common enemy: American imperialism. Ma Jian’s combination of piety and patriotism became particularly evident after the Korean war broke out: He published a famous article in *The People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), in which he argued that American imperialism was Islam’s deadly enemy (“*Meidiguozhuyi Shi Yisilanjiao de Sidi.*”).<sup>36</sup> To defend Islam and China, Ma Jian detailed the American conspiracy against the Islamic world and proposed a united front between China and the Muslim countries:

They [the American imperialists] deploy various conspiracies against Muslim countries and treat and cheat Muslims as naïve children by establishing hospitals and schools. The most condemned [act] is that they insult our Prophet Muhammad by propagandizing that he holds the Koran with his left hand and a sword in his right hand, implying that he converted people into Islam by force. This poisonous propaganda was even found in textbooks during nationalist rule to cheat the Chinese people.

If we can cooperate with this great bloc [the Muslim world] through diplomatic means via the Hui people, we can beat and break the conspiracy of the imperialist war of America. Thus, we can gain a strong shield for the peace of the world.<sup>37</sup>

To unravel the imperialists’ degradation of the Prophet, Ma Jian wrote a book on Muhammad’s sword to refute the West’s propaganda against Islam.<sup>38</sup> As a Chinese Muslim intellectual at that particular time, defending Islam and protecting China converged with the political movement of anti-imperialism. In this sense, his political writings served to demonstrate to the internal public the religious freedom and political rights enjoyed by Muslims in socialist China (in contrast to the imperialist countries) and, on the international stage, to consolidate relationships of friendship between China and its Third World Muslim allies. By transcending his local Muslim community and moving to the center of Islamic learning in Egypt, and from being born a member of his nation’s Muslim minority community and rising to become an influential diplomatic consultant, Ma Jian fulfilled his mission as a twentieth-century Chinese Muslim intellectual.

## Conclusion: Muslim Intellectuals in Modern China

Ma Jian's case outlines an aspect of the Muslim intellectual that is different from those of Muslim intellectuals living in Muslim-dominated societies. His career as a scholar and a political consultant poses the question of how we define a Muslim intellectual in contemporary China. Chinese Muslim intellectuals differ from their counterparts in Muslim-dominant societies in terms of their activities and discourses. While the latter mainly focus on the "Islamic" economic, cultural, and political issues faced by their societies, the former have to consider the concerns and priorities of the majority non-Muslim population of the society and nation-state in which they function.<sup>39</sup>

Another major difference is the civilizations to which they react and respond. Many discourses of Arab, Persian, or even Malay Muslim intellectuals focus on Islam and the West and so develop a Muslim-Christian reaction model that mainly focuses on their similarities and differences and how they interact with each other. In contrast, the discourses of Chinese Muslim intellectuals have to be framed in the Chinese context, and therefore concentrate on showing conformity between Islam and the dominant state ideologies, ranging from Confucianism to communism.<sup>40</sup>

From a historical perspective, the nature of Muslim intellectual discourses and activities in China is predicated on the attempt to assure the non-Muslim regime of the Muslims' political loyalty. The early generation of Muslim intellectuals of imperial China, namely, the *Han Kitab* (Chinese book) scholars, worked through the existing cultural and social institutions to show that the "dao (path) of Muhammad" conformed to that of Confucianism and that the various schools of Muslim scholarship agreed with those of the Han Chinese.<sup>41</sup>

Both the Republican and the Communist regimes transformed the previous emperor-subject relations, which characterized Muslims and the empire in pre-modern China, into Chinese-nation and Muslim-citizen relations. As Ma Jian's case shows, he located his activities to save/protect the Islamic religion (*Jiujiao/Baojiao*) under the Republican regime, albeit in a very complex manner, within the various political and social movements of saving/protecting the Chinese nation (*Jiuguo/Baoguo*). After the Communist regime consolidated its power, the relationship between the state and Islam had to be reformulated in the guise of an updated patriotism that juxtaposed one's love of country with one's love of religion (*Aiguo Aijiao*). All of this now informs the dualistic nature of Chinese Muslim intellectuals.<sup>42</sup>

This definition of an intellectual differs markedly from that provided by Edward Said, whose definition, although favorable to such minority peoples

as Chinese Muslims, cannot be applied to the Chinese Muslim case. The Muslim representatives appointed by the state at either the village or the provincial level favor the government's interest over that of the Muslims. Thus, the vocation of intellectuals to "represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug" in an the unrepresentative tradition (such as China's) cannot be fully fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>

So, the discourse of Chinese Muslim intellectuals on Islam in the twentieth century is, to some degree, a byproduct of the discourse on the nation from the perspective of China's Muslim citizens. Believing in Islam and living in a Confucian society, as well as under Republican and Communist regimes, Chinese Muslim intellectuals have become accustomed to speaking in dualistic discourses (to majoritarian regimes and minority Muslims) either simultaneously or otherwise. This dualistic discourse, while mixed with Islam and nation and deliberately designed and prepared by Muslim intellectuals, is always harmonious on the surface but conflicting in nature.

As we can see, Ma Jian's transition from Islamic and Arabic studies in non-official schools in China and at "religious" schools in Egypt to working at a legitimate official institution – Beijing University – reveals a serious dilemma that Chinese Muslims have to face in the nation-making context: Muslims either enter the Chinese education system to receive a completely secular education to "make" them Chinese, or continue their *private* or even *illegal* religious studies at local schools to "make" themselves Muslim. As Ma Jian's case shows, modern Chinese Muslim intellectuals have attempted to nationalize and "scientificize" Arabic and Islam in national universities and make Islam relevant to the Chinese nation, and vice versa, in order to achieve both: piety and patriotism.

According to Benite, the *Han Kitab* ultimately made up the basic curriculum of Chinese Muslim education in late imperial China. However, neither republican Nanjing or communist Beijing allowed this curriculum to be taught in public education institutions for Muslim students. Ma Jian's efforts to insert Islamic "language and religious studies" into the curriculum at universities shows both his identity as a Chinese (citizen) and reflects his concern with the difficulty and problematic of being a Chinese citizen because of his Muslim religious and ethnic background. This uncovers the discrepancy in the discourse of dualism. At this point in time, being Chinese does not mean merely being members of a "civilization" as opposed to a backward "minority," as was the case in the past. Rather, it has now become an apparatus that interferes with such relatively independent domains of "backward" peoples as education.

In this sense, Ma Jian's case suggests a new stage of China's old assimilation pattern. If the sophisticated writings of "Confucian" Muslim intellectuals of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, who focused on the philosophies of Islam and Confucianism, were not written for the "common man" but for Muslims who had been integrated to some degree into the educated Chinese elite, to use Sachiko Murata's words, then Ma Jian's translations of Arabic Islamic texts into modern Chinese, as well as his writings on Islam and nationalism for the Chinese Muslim community, obviously served the "common man" of the Chinese nation, whether this "common man" was a Muslim or a non-Muslim.<sup>44</sup> This implies that this nationalization of Islam is the latest stage of assimilation, the stage that pushes Chinese Muslims to be acculturated by the "national" (Han) culture through a public education system in the name of state-required compulsory education.

The problems that Ma Jian identified for Chinese Muslim education in both traditional Muslim education systems and in modern public education reflect the tension between the Muslim minority and the Han majority, rather than the new tension raised between the Islamic tradition and "western" modernity. What Ma Jian's proposal and efforts suggest is not the issue of accepting Chinese-language education or modern education, but the issue of de-Islamization at "public" schools – in other words, deconstructing Muslims in the public sphere. It reveals that Muslims, to use Lipman's words, must be persuaded or educated into conformity with the dominant cultural norm: the Han Minzu [Han Chinese].<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, Ma Jian's case shows that when Chinese Muslim intellectuals for the first time began to speak of Islam through the voice of their nation in the twentieth century, though not through Confucianism, by adding new such terminology as "citizenship," "patriotism," and "imperialism," they showed themselves to be highly political on both the national and the international level. As Ma Jian's case indicates, modern Chinese Muslim intellectuals have attempted to fit Arabic and Islam into the modern Chinese nation-state. These Islamic and nationalistic activities outline the new form of the modern Chinese Muslim intellectual's dualistic identity: that of continuing to justify Islam's legitimate existence within China and also of directing their diplomatic speeches and activities toward Islam and Muslims within the context of the Chinese nation.

This dualism transcends the traditional Islam-Confucianism discourse, for it exposes a complicated phenomenon of juxtaposing assimilation by means of nationalization and consciousness of the collective Muslim community within the context of nation-state. This juxtaposition can be seen in

two ways. On the one hand, the Chinese authorities expect it to quicken the transformation of Chinese Muslims into “full” or “real” Chinese “citizens.” On the other hand, Muslims view it as a legitimate expansion and strengthening of their communal identity from Muslim intellectual identity to Muslim ethnic identity in the name of citizenship. After all, a national minority gains much of the legitimacy it needs by revising the *raison d’être* for its continued existence within a new context. In this sense, as Chinese Muslims struggle to justify Islam’s legitimate existence and prove that they are as much citizens of China as they are followers of Islam, Chinese Muslim intellectuals represent the vanguard members of society who are actively transforming traditional Muslim communities into a Muslim ethnicity.

### Endnotes

1. For a study on Chinese Muslims as “familiar strangers” in China, see Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
2. For a study on contemporary Muslim intellectuals in Muslim societies and countries, see John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
3. For a study on Muslim intellectuals in imperial China from the Ming to Qing dynasties, see Donald Daniel Leslie, *Islamic Literature in Chinese, Late Ming and Early Ch’ing: Books, Authors, and Associates* (Belconnen: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1981); Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-Yu’s Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih’s Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* (with a new translation of Jami’s *Lawaih* from the Persian by William C. Chittick), tr. William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). For a gleam of Muslim nationalism in modern China, see Ya’qub Wang Jingzhai, “Imperative for Encouraging Islamic Culture,” in *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 368-75.
4. It should be noted that the term *Hui* (Muslims), which is used for one of the five peoples of the Republic of China (ROC), is highly ambiguous in that, on the one hand, it refers to Turkic-speaking Muslims (Uyghurs) of Xinjiang, while on the other hand, it often indicates inclusion of Chinese-speaking Muslims (*Hui*). This ambiguity, however, reflects the legacy of the Qing dynasty’s cultural-religious labeling of all Muslims. I use “Chinese-speaking Muslims” in this article to refer to the Hui nationality minority of present-day China (*Huizu*), which is ethnically different from Turkic-speaking Muslims and other Muslim ethnic groups in the People’s Republic of China. For a short

discussion of the “Hui,” see Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese, Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*.

5. That the contour of the Chinese Muslims intellectuals becomes clear does not mean that there were no Muslim intellectuals before this time. Rather, it emphasizes the degree of connective participation in the social, cultural, and political movements of modern China. Although collective Muslim cultural activities have existed among Chinese Muslim scholars since the seventeenth century, as Benite’s study suggests, it cannot compare with modern Chinese Muslim activities in terms of political and social influence. For a study of Chinese Muslim cultural activities and networking, see Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*. For a study on Chinese Muslim social and cultural moment, see Zhang Juling, *Lüyuan Gouchen* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2002).
6. Sun Yuqing, “*Aiguo Aijiao de Guanghui Bangyang*” (“A Brilliant Model of Patriotism and Muslims”). Online at [www.guicheng.com/nn/info/info2.asp?w=130](http://www.guicheng.com/nn/info/info2.asp?w=130).
7. Clyde-Ahmad Winters, *Mao or Muhammad: Islam in the People’s Republic of China* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1979), 49.
8. The non-Muslim translations of the Qur’an were by Tie Zheng (Beijing: 1927) and Ji Juemi (Shanghai: 1931). Chinese Muslims at the time were not satisfied with the translations by their non-Muslim contemporaries. Muslim translations of the Qur’an before the publication of Ma Jian’s version include Wang Wenqing’s *Gulanjing Yijie* (Beijing: 1932), Liu Jinbiao’s *Kelanjing Hanyifuzhuan* (Beijing: 1943), Wang Jingzhai’s *Gulanjing Yijie* (Shanghai: 1946), and Yang Zhongming’s *Gulanjing Dayi* (Beijing: 1947).
9. Ma Cunzhen, “Majian Qinfeng de yisheng,” *Yilanyuan (Yunnan Kaiyuan Azhuan)* vol. 13-15, nos. 1-2, (2001).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ma Jian, tr. *Huijiao Jiaoyushi* (Changsha: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1941), “*Yizhexu*” (“Preface of the Translator”), 3.
13. For a study of Muslim mosque education in China, see Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*.
14. Ma Jian, tr., *Huijiao Jiaoyushi*, “*Yizhexu*” (“Preface of the Translator”), 1.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 3.
17. Ibid., 5
18. Ibid., 7
19. Ibid.
20. Ma Jian, “*Di Sanshici Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Ti’an*” (“The 30th Proposal for the Political Consultative Committee Conference”), in Li Zhenzhong, *Xuezhe De Zhuiqiu: Ma Jian Zhuan (A Scholar’s Pursuit: A Biography of Ma Jian)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2000), 177-78.
21. Ibid.

22. Ma Jian, tr., *Huijiao Jiaoyushi*, “Yizhexu” (“Preface of the Translator”), 7.
23. Two wealthy Muslims should be mentioned for their general funding for Ma Jian’s study: Ma Jinqing and Bai Liangcheng.
24. Ma Chunzhen, “*Majian Qinfeng de yisheng*,” *Yilanyuan* (Yunnan Kaiyuan Azhuan Xuebao), vols. 13-15, nos. 1-2 (2001).
25. Ma Jian, tr., *Gulanjing* (The Qur’an) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe, 1981).
26. Bai Shouyi, “Preface,” in *Gulanjing*, 4.
27. Ma Cunzhen, “*Majian Qinfeng de yisheng*,” *Yilanyuan* (Yunnan Kaiyuan Azhuan Xuebao), vols. 13-15, nos. 1-2 (2001).
28. Ma Jian, tr., *Huijiao Zhenxiang* (Shanghai: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1951).
29. Ma Jian, tr., *Huijiao Zhexue* (Shanghai: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1946).
30. Ma Jian, tr., *Huijiao Jiaoyushi* (Changsha: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1941).
31. Ma Jian, tr., *Alabo Tongshi* (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1979).
32. For a bibliographic introduction of *Tianfang Dianli*, see Leslie, *Islamic Literature in Chinese*.
33. Ma Chunzhen, “*Ma Jian de yisheng*,” 2.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ma Jian, “*Meidiguozhuyi shi Yisilanjiao de sidi*,” *Renmin Ribao*, 26 November 1950.
37. Ma Jian, “*Muhanmode De Baojian*” (“Muhammad’s Sword”), *Renmin Ribao* (*The People’s Daily*), 20 January 1952; also in *Guangming Ribao* (*Guangming Daily*), 19 January 1951.
38. Ma Jian, *Muhanmode de Baojian* (Tianjin: Jinbu Ribaoshe, 1951).
39. For the relationship between Muslim minorities and the historical Chinese regimes, see Yu Zhengui, *Yisilanjiao Yu Zhongguo Lidai Zhengquan* (*Islam and Regimes in China*) (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1996).
40. Although Chinese Muslims had felt the challenges imposed by the West and Christianity at the turn of twentieth century, the dominant discourse of Chinese Muslims has continued to focus on the Islam-Confucian relation.
41. For a study on elite Chinese Muslim identity in imperial China, see Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*.
42. This dualism might be helpful in understanding Muslim ethnicity in China.
43. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1994), 11.
44. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, “Introduction,” 5.
45. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, xxxiii.