

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious pluralism of Muslim practices in China: the cases of ritual participation from Hui and Uyghur societies¹

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Abstract

In this article we explore the practical conditions of ritual practices of Hui and Uyghur Muslims in China. Ceaseless conflicts among different religious ideas and elements exist, but they are integrated into religious pluralism, which meets the needs of Muslims' daily practices. Furthermore, we probe the reasons for the resulting religious harmony through investigating the historical process of the formation of religious pluralism, and showing present ritual performances in which there is a hierarchically built ritual structure functioning to make religious integration possible, though different opinions regarding diverse religious elements occur elsewhere among Hui and Uyghur Muslims. Finally, the discussion supports the related assertion that rituals can be reliable and effective ways of understanding the sociological and psychological functions of religions, or religious beliefs, and other related socio-cultural realities.

Keywords: Hui; multi-layered structure of rituals; religious pluralism; ritual study; Uyghur

Research subjects and ritual studies

There are ten Muslim nationalities recognized in China: Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Qirghiz, Uzbek, Tatar, Salar, Dongxiang, Bao'an, and Tajik.² Among them, Hui people use mainly Chinese language, Uyghur, Kazakh, Qirghiz, Uzbek, Tatar, and Salar are Turkic-speaking, Dongxiang and Bao'an are Mongolian-speaking, and Tajik is an Indo-European-speaking group. In addition to their linguistic cultures, their different geographic locations and historical experiences are also important factors contributing to their religious traditions.

The Hui and Uyghurs, the two largest Muslim groups, each with a population over ten million, make up about 90% of the total Muslim population of China, and can be taken as representative of Muslim groups in China (Table 1). Hui people are scattered all over China, having folk traditions closely related to Han Chinese, while the Uyghur population is concentrated in the Southern Xinjiang area, using Arabic letters in writing and having cultural traditions similar to other Turkic

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²For those special pronunciations of Turkic vocabularies, we use "kh," "gh," "sh," "h," "q" to demonstrate the consonants which are not familiar in English and Chinese, for instance "Kazakh," "Uyghur," "ishan," "Qirghiz," "Konliq"; and use "ü," "ä" to indicate those vowels with special pronunciations also not usual in English and Chinese, for instance "üch," "sayahät." For the Muslim group Bao'an, we use Chinese spelling but with an apostrophe to avoid possible mispronunciations.

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Table 1. Populations of ten Muslim groups in China

Minzu	Hui	Uyghur	Kazakh	Dongxiang	Qirghiz	Salar	Tajik	Bao'an	Uzbek	Tatar	Total Pop.
Pop.	11,377,914	11,774,538	1,562,518	774,947	204,402	165,159	50,896	24,434	12,742	3,544	25,951,094

The data quoted from China Statistical Yearbook 2021, compiled by National Bureau Statistics of China (source: <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2021/indexch.htm>).

and Indo-European speakers in Xinjiang and Central Asia. Thus, the study of their religious traditions can serve as theoretical and methodological references to understand all Muslims in China.

Academic studies on the religion of Muslim groups in China have two main trends. One focuses on Islamic traditions of the so called “three big religious sects, four great Sufi families” (*sanda jiaopai, sida menhuan*) (Ma 1983) and the other concentrates on folk beliefs such as saint mausoleum worship (*mazar, gongbei*) (Dawut 2001; Ma 1987) and various magic and shamanism practices (*jadu, peribakshi*) (Wang 2003, 2010). However, academic understanding of the complexity and pluralism of Muslim religion in China, especially from the perspective of rituals, is far from complete. Here, to make my question clear, a brief glance at the related academic discussions of religious pluralism and rituals is needed for our further investigation.

The term religious pluralism has two dimensions: one indicates the complex nature of a religion, and the other concerns academic discussions and ideological trends that compare different religions (Li 2007). The religious pluralism used in this paper is close to the former meaning of a cultural phenomenon indicating mainly the complex composition of Islam, based exactly on ethnographic descriptions of religion as a cultural system, as observed in Muslim rituals in China.

Anthropological studies of rituals have a long history. Catherine Bell pointed out that “the study of ritual began with a prolonged and influential debate on the origins of religion that gave rise to several important styles of interpretation.....from which new fields of scholarship emerged” (1997, p. 3). The study of rituals in Muslim societies in China also has a specific background.

A case study of Sufi mystic rituals among Hui Muslims in Ningxia on the chanting practice of ritual recitation by the members of the Sufi order Jahriyya provides us with a precious insight into the soundscape created by Sufi meditators in Northwest China (Ha 2013). The author probes the contents and styles of two kinds of Sufi chanting, *Awräd* (Quranic verses and Holy praises) and *Mukhammas* (Sufi poems), revealing in detail the vocal techniques to keep reciting balance and build up a kind of collective harmony by which the audience on the spot gets spiritually inspired first, then experiences a state of integration of human relations through voicing and listening. The author starts with a descriptions of Islamic classics, then moves to psychological, and eventually to sociological analyses.

Applying historical and sociological approaches, Ildiko Beller-Hann shed light onto an important side of the core of the Uyghurs’ religion, the ritual for dead spirits (2001). Through examining various rituals dedicated to the dead parents and ancestors, by quoting precious studies and local records from before 1949, she builds up a holistic picture on the death rituals held in that period, including funerals, commemoration rituals, and Barat month rituals. While she makes clear the social functions of various death rituals in benefiting both the dead and living, she finds a very important perspective of viewing the rituals, the gender divisions in the local Uyghurs, in which women played a crucial role that could not be observed in the rituals run by the official Islam. This study of death rituals reveals both the syncretic essence of Uyghur religion and the rituals’ function in empowering women.

Rachel Harris and Rahila Dawut investigate *mazar* (saint mausoleum) festival rituals among the Uyghurs in Southern Xinjiang, concentrating on the links of the ethnic music to the spiritual life of local residents, which is connected closely with the worship of Islamic as well as non-Islamic saints (2002). The authors reveal that ritual music, played by the Uyghurs when visiting *mazars*, are also vessels carrying cultural codes connected to the past traditions either Islamic or pre-Islamic. Since such rituals of the mausoleum worship connected also to similar practices in Central Asian areas, they resist political integration and cross the red lines set by the government administration.

Clearly, the above studies of Muslim rituals afford us with both methodological references, either approaches to formal Islam or some cross disciplinary methods to investigate the supernatural side of the local combination of pre-Islamic customs and Islamic doctrines, and practical materials for us to understand the complex core of Muslim religion in China. However, there are still some unclear points in ritual studies we have to investigate further. Therefore, this paper aims firstly at searching for the essential reason of the harmonious integration of the complex contents of Muslim rituals, that is the historically formed multi-layered ritual structure which makes the coexistence of diverse religious elements possible; and secondly demonstrates the interactive processes among different religious

elements and their integrative dynamism by quoting related contemporary studies. The study finds that Muslim religions in China are actually compound cultural systems made of various historically formed and pragmatically organized religious elements. Though Islam basically plays the role of a legitimate religious kernel, the ritual practices are sufficient evidence for this assertion.

Historical formation of the religious pluralism and ritual complex

The formation of the religious pluralism among Hui and Uyghur Muslims to some extent is related to how the two Muslim groups formed, the migration experiences of their ancestors to fuse into local societies in ancient China. That is a basic factor for understanding the religious pluralism in those Muslim societies.

The Muslim ancestors of the Hui entered China from the early Tang Dynasty through oceanic and continental routes. From the oceanic route, Arab and Persian merchants came to China for commercial transactions, and settled down in southeast coast cities, such as Guangzhou and Quanzhou (Wang and Guan 2020). Through the continental route, the military conquest of Arab Kingdoms expanded into Central Asian areas; its diplomats, military officers, and merchants were sent to China and became permanent residents, after two empires confronted in the northwest peripheries of the Tang Dynasty (Li 2006).

At the first stage of the Muslim migration into China, the Arab and Persian merchants and military enterprises seldom undertook missionary activities. They had focused on their economic, diplomatic, and military enterprises, whereas they treated missionary works only as socio-cultural exchanges with local Chinese (Bai 1982). Increased inter-marriage led to Islamic beliefs being gradually rooted through cultural interactions with their Chinese spouses, descendants, and relatives. There were three historical factors that made Islam successfully fused into local cultural traditions, apart from their successful construction of Muslim communities and Chinese-style patrilineal kinship organizations.

Firstly, the early Muslim migrants accepted Chinese literary education, absorbing Chinese traditional scriptures related to those of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist sources, and succeeded in social occupations. Arab migrant Li Yansheng from Kaifeng was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations and was appointed as a member of the Imperial Academy of the Tang dynasty. Persian descendant Li Xun and his sister became famous poets in Sichuan province during the same Tang dynasty. The powerful Pu families in Quanzhou in the Song dynasty, the governor of Yunnan province Sayyid Ajall Omer Shams al-Din in the Yuan dynasty (Ma 1983) were all distinguished cases to verify that Hui ancestors effectively mastered Chinese knowledge by which they could fit smoothly in local societies.

Secondly, the formation and development of the Islamic-Confucian school in Nanjing from the Ming dynasty demonstrated another aspect of Hui ancestors' efforts to search for ways of sharing theological ideas with Chinese traditions. For example, those Islamic-Confucian scholars such as Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi (Murata 2000) in the late Ming and early Qing period in Nanjing, and Ma Dexin and Ma Lianyuan in the late Qing period in Yunnan (Nakanishi 2013, pp. 182–202) were all great masters of both Chinese classics and Islamic teachings. They applied Confucian and Daoist expressions to explain Islamic classics, disciplines, and ritual routines, using Confucian concepts of loyalty (*zhongzhen*), morality (*de*), and human instinct (*bingxing*) to formulate an Islamic definition of personalities, and Daoist concepts of chaos (*wuji*), the great ultimate (*taiji*), two opposite poles (*yin-yang*), and the five elements (*wuxing*), to describe the creation and moving rule of the universe. All their works provided ordinary Muslims with familiar stories and ethical ideas to understand Islam (Yao and Yao 2017).

Thirdly, local socio-political situations also compelled Hui Muslims to accommodate historical realities, especially entering the Ming dynasty when the imperial government implemented a cultural policy urging Muslims to completely accept Chinese traditions without reservation (Zhao 2008, pp. 223–30). The first emperor of the Ming dynasty called for “driv[ing] out barbarian tribes, restor[ing] China’s territories,” and forced Muslim residents to speak Chinese, take Chinese names, wear local

clothes, and overall adapt to the Chinese traditions (Ge 2002). As a result, the ethnic group of Hui Muslims took shape in mainland China in a way we might recognise today, with their religious traditions related closely to Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist, and other Chinese folk traditions. Therefore, the Hui-Confucian scholars as described above and their educational tradition to “explain Islam by adopting Confucian concepts” came up at a certain historical stage in China, at least from the late Ming period. We have ample evidence to prove that the mainstream of Islamic doctrines and religious routines have gradually become a Hui-Confucian one (mixed also with Daoist, Buddhist, and other folk elements) from about the seventeenth century throughout the present time (Ji 2021).

The genealogical origin of Uyghur identity is inherited from their tribal ancestors who migrated into ancient China from the Mongolian plateau after the Uyghur Khanate was defeated by Qirghiz tribes around the middle of the ninth century (Gladney 1990; Yijiahan 1991). Many historical records tell us that they were not only Buddhist believers, they also believed in Manicheism, Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism, and Shamanism (Yang 2004). The first step of the Islamic conversion happened in the Tarim Basin from about the tenth century. A mythological episode about the conversion of the Qarakhanate’s ruler Satuq Bograhan shows the characteristics of Sufi tradition in its early history in the region. The legend tells that one day the king went out hunting; a rabbit the king chased in the woods suddenly became a white-bearded elder who taught Islam to the king, and persuaded the king to convert to Islam. It was said that the elder, Nasir ben Mansur, was a Sufi missionary from Central Asia (Hamada 1991). After that, his fellow missionaries supported a series of wars on local non-Muslim residents including Uyghur Buddhism believers in Kucha, Kurla, and Turpan (Shimata 1952), and eventually made local residents convert to Islam by the fifteenth century (Wei 2000).

During the Islamic conversion, which continued until the end of the seventeenth century, those Sufi orders from Central Asia, such as Yasaviye and Nakshibandiye, took turns to promote an Islamization movement in oasis areas, using their political power assumed from local Turkic and Mongolian rulers. Especially during the Yarqand Khanate period (sixteenth to seventeenth century), the Nakshibandiye families, the black mountain sect and the white mountain sect, succeeded greatly in spreading their Sufi traditions while helping those local rulers to build up a “sacred state” for which they played very important political roles (Hartmann 1905). Just because of their successes both in religious missionary and political struggles, they made their Sufi traditions gradually spread out in the seven cities around the Tarim basin, and even to Hui people in Qinghai and Gansu provinces, and became one of the major Islamic traditions in mainland China as well (Gao 1995). Also, a series of military riots led by those Sufi families, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century around the Tarim Basin area, had shown their enormous influence over the local residents (Fletcher 1995). Though the Sufi families were forced into political integration by the central government from the late nineteenth century, those Sufism-related daily routines and folk ritual practices had already taken root in local Muslim practices.

Another undercurrent of Uyghur religious traditions, which originated long ago in their tribal history and survived after Islamic conversion, is Shamanistic belief and its related ritual practices. Different from Manicheism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorianism, which were uprooted or fused into local customs, Shamanism remained with its function mode changed to support folk healing rituals. In an interesting episode, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin became sick in a village called Meget. Local elders arranged a Shamanistic healer to hold a healing ritual to save his life after he had been unconscious for nearly one month (Hedin 1966, pp. 20–22). The story reveals that Shamanistic elements had been very popular in the ritual practices in local Uyghurs at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similar kinds of ritual phenomena can still be easily observed in various present-day Uyghur ritual practices (Wang 1994).

To summarize, Islam came to the Hui society from about the seventh century, and Islamic conversion happened in the Uyghurs until the fifteenth century; Islam in the two Muslim groups has since then been coexisting with various local customs, forming syncretic religious traditions which can be defined as religious pluralism. Thus, while Islam has become the main religion of the two Muslim

groups, it coexists with other religious elements forming two different kinds of religious pluralism: the Islamic-Confucian oriented one in the Hui, and the Sufi-Shamanism one in the Uyghurs. Therefore, we can say that the religious pluralism determines the complexity of rituals in each of the two Muslim groups.

Emergence of the multi-layered structure of Muslim rituals

The historically formed religious pluralisms had continued to exist and function in both Muslim communities for several hundred years until the founding of the PRC. Then, a series of socialist movements happened and Muslim ritual customs encountered radical social changes for about thirty years. Though all religious elements in Muslim rituals eventually survived, they were hierarchically re-arranged by a new multi-layered structure under the influences of government administration.

From the beginning of the 1950s throughout the end of the 1970s, the social order in Muslim communities was disturbed as the previous social hierarchy was turned upside down, in which rich classes were put down to the social bottom and poor people got power to become leading classes. Meanwhile, different religious elements of Muslim rituals were also forced to change their appearances. Islam, which was officially admitted as a legitimate tradition, came to play the leading role at the top of the hierarchical structure of Muslim ritual activities, with Sufi traditions downgraded as deviant, as various folk practices were strictly prohibited as harmful superstitious practices. From the beginning of the 1980s, after the Reform and Opening Up policy issued by the central government of the PRC, the socio-political atmosphere became tolerant to various religious beliefs and practices. Muslim ritual activities gradually revived, but the multi-layered structure of Muslim rituals continued to be taken for granted until the present time.

Among the Hui, there are mosques in rural villages and urban streets, playing the role of community centers and being managed by religious professionals (*akhon*) and community elders (*xianglao*). Those mosques belong to different religious sects identified clearly by religious leaders' proselytizing orientations and ritual routines. Some of the mosques belong to the traditional sect (*gedimu*), others are supported by radical groups (*ikhwani* or *sarafiye*), or belong to Sufi orders (*menhuan*). However, all mosques are taken as the symbols of Islam, and they represent the officially admitted legitimate Islam, locating themselves at the top of the multi-layered structure of ritual practices.

Apart from the mosques representing great traditions of Islam, there are various locally originated and popularly accepted folk beliefs. For example, the worship of saint mausoleums (*gongbei*), which belong to late Sufi leaders and are located usually in the religious lodges (*daotang*) of Sufi orders, are very popular among the members of Sufi groups among Hui Muslims. Because of their close relations with legitimate Islam, they can be taken as the middle part of the multi-layered structure.

The magic incantation (*chuiduwa*) used to treat unknown ailments in folk healing rituals is also observed among ordinary residents believing in spiritualists (*mola*) who have language power to expel evils and bring about good fortunes. Sometimes in severe illnesses, local people will invite Shamanistic healers (*maoyan* or *duashi*) to undertake exorcist rituals to drive out evil spirits from human bodies (Ma and Yang 2009). However, all these folk ideas and ritual practices are rejected by Hui elites and harshly restricted by the state's regulatory administration. Therefore, these parts of religious beliefs and ritual activities are located at the bottom of the multi-layered structure of ritual practices.

For Uyghurs, the governmentally permitted Islam, the Suni Islam of the Hanafi school, plays the role of the superstructure of ritual practices. Mosques play the role of religious centers for daily prayers and collectively organized ritual routines, such as Friday sermons (*warz*), mourning rituals (*mevit*), and religious lessons on the Quran and other scriptures (*dini oqush*). As a rule, religious professionals (*molla*, *akhon*) should be both elected by local residents and appointed by local governments to the post of preachers (*imam*) at local mosques. Then they can take responsibilities for all ritual routines with the assistance of some religious intellectuals (*muazin*) and a group of local elders (*aq saqal* or *chonglar*). Those religious professionals serve as Quranic teachers, mosque preachers, ritual guiders,

coordinators dealing with civil conflicts and ethical issues, and community representatives in the governmentally oriented political consultant organizations. Mosques, religious professionals, and Islamic doctrines are the three governmentally supported and popularly accepted holy institutions, which are taken as three canons (*üch gherip*). They are the symbols of the great tradition of Islam, and therefore stand at the top of the multi-layered structure.

Under the great tradition of Islam, there are folk religious elements, composed of Sufism rituals (*zikir*), saint mausoleum worship (*mazar ziyaret*), shamanism and exorcist healings (*ret qilish*), magic rituals (*jadu*), natural beliefs in mountains, springs and spiritual existences (*konliq*), and so on. Although Sufi practices and saint mausoleum worship actually have close relations to Islam, quite different from folk beliefs which are absolutely taken as superstitious ones and prohibited officially in Muslim rituals, they are still discriminated by social elites and their existence resented. Therefore, Sufism and saint mausoleum worships are located at the middle, while those so-called superstitious elements are located at the bottom of the multi-layered structure of Uyghur ritual practices.

In summary, the Hui and Uyghur rituals similarly have the multi-layered structure which supports a kind of religious landscape which can be described as syncretism as Clifford Geertz found in Java Muslims (1976), while the contents of ritual activities are different in local contexts. Among the Hui, the upper layer of ritual practices is officially admitted Islam which takes influences from Chinese religious traditions, with the saint mausoleum worship as its middle layer, and the Shamanism-magic healing practices and other folk beliefs at the bottom of the multi-layered structure. Among the Uyghurs, the mosque-centered official Islam of the Hanafi Sunni sect stays at the top, with the saint mausoleum worship at the middle, and Shamanism-magic healing practices and various natural worships at the bottom of the multi-layered structure.

Therefore, in both Muslim communities, if we consider that the historically formed religious pluralisms determined the complexity of ritual, then we should also note that the multi-layered structure, which was taken for granted, is an essential condition for the coexistence and interactions of different religious elements in ritual activities.

Ritual participation of folk beliefs in the legitimate representations of Islam

Here we will take some religious texts, used at the mosque preaching of those officially admitted religious professionals in Hui and Uyghur communities, as materials to demonstrate the ritual participations of folk beliefs in the canonical representations of Islam, verifying the salient religious pluralism.

The texts are in the style of metrical poems or free verses written or edited by local religious elites, such as mosque preachers (*akhon*) or Sufi leaders (*laorenjia* in Hui and *ishan* in Uyghur), used for the similar purposes of mosque sermons, religious exchanges, or religious instructions. These sermon poems support one of the most important channels for Islamic professionals to express opinions upon various ongoing social events, giving guidance to Muslim residents, and therefore can be taken as effective materials to see the symbolic participations of folk beliefs in the formal representations of Islam.

Islamic sermons (*khutba*) are regarded as an important part of Islamic tradition from the Prophet Muhammad period. The sermons take place at fixed times with Friday prayers, the prayers at Muslim festival rituals, or some unhappy happenings such as eclipses and droughts. The contents of those sermons, as a series of admonitions, may cover a wide range of socio-cultural phenomena, from political issues, legal regulations, social problems to some small particulars of Muslim life, but a single sermon text must be specific, short, and comprehensive.

In the Hui case, the text we want to introduce here a memoir dictated by the founder of the Sufi order Lingmingtang ("Memoir of Master Lingming," *Lingming Shangren Luezhuan*), composed of 733 words. In addition to an introduction of forty-two words, the main text of the memoir has three parts covering the origin of the order, the Sufi views about the formation and movement of the universe, the theological recognition of God, general worldview, the essence of mystic practices, and mutual

relations between Islamic theology and Confucian-Daoist traditions³ (Wang 2015). We will go on with the discussion by showing three quotations from the memoir.

- (1) Fate (*ming*) is the sky,
 Mentality (*xing*) is the moving of the Sun,
 Seeds grow from stones after spring wind,
 Winter plums blossom in Summer,
 Spirit (*chi*) is energy coming and gone.
 (A quotation from the first part)

This paragraph aims at illustrating the basic reasoning of Islamic mysticism about the movement of the universe. In the first two sentences, “fate” stands for the universe while “mentality” indicates its dynamic principle. The following two sentences mean to explain that the miracles of the Sufi meditation may cause symbolic changes in the moving rule of the universe. After that, the memoir introduces the key word “spirit” (*chi*) into its explanation, which is taken as the energy source of the movement of the universe, emphasizing its importance as a theological essence. The terminologies that appear in this paragraph, such as “fate,” “mentality,” and “spirit,” are critically important also in the philosophical reasoning of Confucian and Daoist traditions.

Here, we can clearly see the connections between the key words used in the memoir and the religious scriptures by those Hui-Confucian scholars. The explanations about the formation and movement of the universe in the memoir are extremely similar to what was written by Ma Zhu in the third chapter of his “Guidance to Islam” (Qingzhen Zhinan); therefore, the contents of this part may possibly be quotations from the latter. Ma Zhu explains the formation of the universe by using dualities of “chaos” (*wuji*) vs. “fate” (*ming*) and “origin” (*taiji*) vs. “mentality” (*xing*), describing the natural existences and their movement by using the keyword “spirit” (*chi*), and takes the “spirit” as the energy source creating movements (Sato 2006). We can say that the religious thought observed in the memoir connects to Confucian and Daoist traditions.

- (2) Our master is a disciple of Babu,
 Because he promised so,
 Dragon (*long*)’s earth, dragon’s sea,
 The saint doctrines are from the Prophet.
 (A quotation from the second part)

This paragraph emphasizes the legitimate position of Lingmingtang as a Prophet tradition. Sentences are comparatively short, but signify close connections between Islamic doctrines and Chinese religious traditions. The metaphors of the *long*, its living places in lakes and seas, all represent the Islamic legitimacy of the order. Clearly, these metaphors are very easy to understand even by non-Muslim people in China.

- (3) Material (*jing*) turns to spirit (*chi*), the spirit becomes mind (*shen*) and the mind goes to God,
 all Confucian (*ru*) and Sufi traditions (*dao*) are combined into the only way of God.
 (A quotation from the third part)

³All the texts had been collected in my fieldworks separately, from the last decade of twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century; here I choose a part of them in my analyses, the 100 metrical verses (*yuz qoshaq*) or the so-called “admonitory songs” (*nashet nezimliri*) written by an Uyghur imam Ismayil Qarahaji in Yarbash village of Turpan city of Xinjiang UAR, and the religious instructions of the late leader of Lingmingtang, Ma Mingxin, at the order’s Wuxingping center in Lanzhou City (Wang Jianxin, Sermon Poems in Uyghur and Hui, *Religious Studies Bulletin* No. 1, 2015, pp. 89–93, Kazakhstan AL-Farabi Kazakh National University).

This is the last paragraph of the memoir, indicating directly the significance of Confucian ideas in the Islamic teaching of the order. The first sentence describes the process of Sufi meditation through which the believers can reform their mental conditions from ordinary human beings to a higher level of wisdom, and at last develop to the highest conditions to be united with God. While the first sentence indicates clearly the highest destination of Sufi meditation, the second sentence then pinpoints the critical importance of Sufi meditation: combining Islamic doctrines with Confucian traditions. Of course, Confucian traditions here are not the ordinary ones but the thoughts of the Hui-Confucian scholars saturated with Confucian ideas.

All the above discussions tell us that one of the thinking sources of Lingmingtang's religious doctrines is the thought of Hui-Confucian scholars who have played a very important role in Islamic missionary activities in non-Muslim Chinese contexts from the seventeenth century (Wang 2014). The participations of Confucian and Daoist ideas occur apparently in the Sufi representations of Islamic doctrines.

Now let's see the case of the Uyghurs. Here, I would choose three pieces of the sermon verses used by a Uyghur preacher, which are very interesting to show his attitude toward illegal religious behaviors and those folk religious worships and ritual practices. We can understand clearly that the participation of folk religious ideas symbolically functions as a negative example to form a discursive structure needed in the legitimate representations of Islamic elites (Wang 2004).

- (1) Keeping their eyes on the wrongs of others,
 Claiming themselves as just and avoiding evil,
 Holding stately rituals while mixing the lawful and forbidden;
 Moses outside, perikhon inside, are there such Muslims among us?
 (Uyghur text from p. 409 of Wang 2004)

In the first two sentences, "wrong," "just," and "evil" are key words used to declare a fact that some bad and illegal religious behaviors against Islamic doctrines and ritual standards exist among his fellow Muslims. Then, in the third sentence, "rituals," "lawful," and "forbidden" are terms used to evaluate various ritual practices with unclear qualities according to Islamic ritual standards. And the last sentence, with the terms "moses" and "perikhon" (Muslim healers in Uyghur eastern dialect), points out that the target the verse criticizes is the Shamanistic folk healers and their unusual ritual practices. Clearly, this verse attacks folk beliefs in Shamanism and exorcism, indicating that those healers (*perikhon*) are not qualified Islamic professionals.

- (2) Calling Allah but be Sufi rustling long rosaries,
 Saying hu hu, be buwi covered with large veils,
 Holding rituals in accessed places;
 Getting money by making hu hu, are there such Sufi and buwi among us?
 (Uyghur text from p. 410 of Wang 2004)

In verse (2), the first sentence uses three key words "Allah," "Sufi," and "rosaries" to indicate a fact that Sufi practitioners are among Uyghur Muslims, reading the Quran and taking rosaries while performing prayers similar to other Islamic professionals. Its second sentence has "hu hu" and "buwi" as key words to show that those Sufi practitioners undertake exorcist rituals (*hu*, is an onomatopoeia to stand metaphorically for those related ritual activities), some of them are male and others are female (*buwi*). Then, by using "get money," the author calls his fellow Muslims to distinguish those male and female Sufi practitioners by their illegal purposes to obtain money from false religious practices. Clearly, this verse shows us that Sufism is also a popular practice among Uyghur Muslims, but being taken as an incorrect religious stream in the legitimate representation of Islam.

- (3) Calling Allah, shaking bodies and reciting incantations as *buwi*,
 Until finishing incantations they whisper,
 They please demons as well as increasing sins;
 Are there such ignorant people among us? (Picture 1)
 (Uyghur text from p. 410 of Wang 2004)

In the first two sentences of verse (3), “shaking bodies,” “incantations,” and “*buwi*” are words indicating those magic practices to cast black curses to hurt other people or compel spiritual existences in crazy body movements, and sometimes also female magicians host ritual practices (*buwi* also means female magician). Then, the next two sentences have “please demons,” “sins,” and “ignorant people” as key words, to evaluate the qualities of those magic rituals and their practitioners as bad Muslims violating Islamic doctrines, who thus may get punishments from God. This sentence makes clear that there are also various beliefs in magic powers popular in Uyghur ritual practices.

Here, a very interesting phenomena is that the locally originated folk beliefs appear in the formal representations of Islamic rituals, Confucian-Daoist ideas among the Hui, and Shamanism-magic items among the Uyghurs. By using the law of participation to view these phenomena (Levi-Bruhl 1966), we can say that those folk beliefs exist not only as a part of Muslim rituals to form religious syncretism, but function also as a structural support to those formal representations of Islam.

Ritual participation of Islam in folk beliefs and exorcist healings

Similarly to the fact that folk beliefs participate in the legitimate representations of Islam in local ritual occasions, we can observe the participation of official Islam in those locally originated folk beliefs and their related ritual practices.

Cases observed in saint mausoleum worship

The worship of saint mausoleums is very popular among both Hui and Uyghur Muslims; its ritual occasions provide us with opportunities to observe the participation of Islam in folk customs and Sufi practices. Since many important mystic prayers and healing rituals should be carried out at the tomb sites of saint mausoleums, different from mosques whose functions are limited to routine prayers, the saint mausoleums play the roles of religious centers for observing folk rituals and mystic meditations.

Among Hui Muslims, especially in Sufi orders (*menhuan*), there are numerous saint mausoleums (*gongbei*) belonging to late leaders and functioning as religious centers for undertaking mystic rituals (*zikir*). The worship concentrates on the souls of Sufi leaders who have important positions both in the genealogical trees of patrilineal families and Sufi orthodoxy. The legendary origin of saint mausoleum worship can be taken as coming from the Uwaisi legend of ancient Sufi traditions, which states that the soul of great Islamic leaders could come back to the places where their bones were buried and communicate with their disciples (Julian Baldick 1993). Also, another legendary teaching is popular in religious elites. The Prophet Muhammad once got two bunches of sacred rays (*nur*) from Allah, one of the rays had already been sent to Muslims as the teaching of the Islamic legal system *shari'a* (*jiao*) in Quranic sentences and Sunna traditions, while another ray was sent only to those saint disciples who had special ability to catch it and understand its meaning. Since the second ray contains the more important messages about being Muslims and following the Islamic way, the *tariqa* (*dao*), Muslims have to learn it following those saints. Therefore practicing meditation beside the mausoleums is a reliable way to communicate with the saints who may come down to their tombs (Wang 2014).

During daytime, many believers visit the center to offer prayers to the buriers for the purpose of getting help in achieving good fortunes or dealing with illnesses. Some people may be there for only a moment to pray, but other people may stay there for some days undertaking mystic rituals (*zikir*). At night, the leaders of Sufi orders, their students, and mosque preachers will practice meditation at tomb sites. Also the saint mausoleums are taken as ideal places for educating young people

and providing support to elders, orphans without families, and Muslims with disabilities. The economic support of the mausoleums is partly based on the donation of the order members, but in return, the mausoleums provide shelters for their believers. In some local places, the mausoleums are also taken as sightseeing spots and resources for local tourism enterprises.

Some mausoleums can attract visitors, with their luxuriously constructed tomb sites and beautifully decorated courtyards, providing a kind of landscape combining Sufi spirit and the beauty of Chinese geomancy together. During ritual activities undertaken at saint mausoleums by the Hui, we can see the ritual participation of Islamic doctrines in various worships, which provides Chinese patrilineal organizations with Islamic legitimacy, and functions as a vector to combine Chinese kinship and Islam together.

The rituals held at saint mausoleums by Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang can also be taken as a cultural complex, or a form of religious syncretism. Being mentioned in different Uyghur dialects, “mazar” in the Southern areas and “hojam” in the East, saint mausoleums are ideal sites for holding prayers to both get blessing from God and undertake folk rituals for the purposes of healing complicated diseases, illnesses, and spiritual ailments. Furthermore, some of them are taken as the symbols of the historical development of Uyghur cultural traditions, getting supports from local governments and being exploited as local tourist resources. Above all, numerous saint mausoleums in Xinjiang constitute a unique landscape of local folk beliefs. However, we can understand their popularity by a noting the existence of about 20,000 mausoleums in only Khotan District (Xinjiang Shehui Kexueyuan Zongjiao Yanjiusuo 1989, p. 193). So we can say that saint mausoleum worship is more popular in Southern Xinjiang, and most of them are not officially supported, but pilgrimage rituals are being undertaken for the pragmatic purposes of dealing with various illnesses and life problems by local Uyghurs.

In Uyghur language, the visits to saint mausoleums are usually mentioned as “go to saint mausoleums” (*hojamgha berishi*) or “go to visit” (*ziyarat*) or “sight seeing” (*sayahät*) or in a sense of serious ritual observance at sacred places as “circumambulation” (*tawap*). In the religious discourse of local Uyghurs, some of them take the visits as somewhat similar to the pilgrimage to Mecca. In this sense, many Uyghur residents use “*tawap*” to describe their visits to saint mausoleums (Wang 2004, p. 262). Also, in the case of Sufi rituals, believers take them as important opportunities for conducting religious meditation or contributing sacrifices.

However, Islamic specialists in Uyghurs take the matter quite seriously. They reject those saint mausoleums without Islamic origins, opposing also conducting magic healing at the sites of saint mausoleums. For them, the visits to saint mausoleums should have Islamic contents and must be correctly understood and properly conducted in Islamic ways.

Firstly, the rituals held at saint mausoleums provide opportunities to fulfill the duty of Islamic learning, which is expressed in Uyghur as “pursuing knowledge” (*ilim talap*). This duty is taken as a tradition of the Prophet (*Sunnet*), and should be observed by all Islamic learners. Secondly, the ritual activities at saint mausoleums should not be taken as a dedication to saints, since those behaviors possibly relate to the worship of some supernatural existences other than God. These rituals have to be understood as the chances of thinking about God; saint mausoleums are suitable sites for submitting effective prayers to God. Thirdly, describing the ritual held at saint mausoleums as circumambulation is totally confused and wrong, since the only place for Muslims to do the circumambulation is the “Ka’aba” at the sacred mosque in Mecca. Moreover, undertaking rituals at saint mausoleums is not part of obligatory Muslim duties, but voluntary activities (*mustahäp*) (Wang 2004, p. 263).

Here, we can easily confirm the ritual participation of Islamic doctrines in folk rituals. Islamic specialists, especially those mosque preachers who have the government-approved privilege of making sermons, belong basically to a social group that supports formal Islamic rituals while rejecting folk beliefs such as Shamanistic or magic practices. Ordinary Muslims are usually not so serious about such kinds of controversies, they just go to hold rituals at the mausoleums for various pragmatic purposes when they need to.

Therefore, both Hui and Uyghur Muslims are facing some sensitive questions about their stances toward their Islamic faith and folk beliefs, as well as toward different ritual practices. A rule that exists here is that different social groups would pragmatically choose attitudes toward the issues, just depending on their respective social realities.

Cases observed of magic healing and exorcist rituals

Among Hui Muslims, fewer cases have been observed of worship of natural beings, or fetishism-related beliefs and shamanism-magic rituals, such as those observed in Uyghur Muslims. However, we still have some academic reports on the ritual of local shaman healers (*duashi*), to shed light onto the related folk conventions. Let's take a look at an interesting exorcist healing case, which shows vividly the ritual participation of Islam in popular folk practices.

A well-known woman healer (*maoyan*) had been holding exorcism rituals to her patients who have some unknown illnesses (Ma and Yang 2009). She was good at reciting the Quranic verses, and took bowls, eggs, corn flour, rolling pins, a kitchen knife, a wolf paw, some silver earring, some pieces of cloth, alcohol, cotton, and a moxibustion therapy set, as her instruments for holding healing rituals. Sometimes, she went to her patients' homes to hold the rituals, while her patients usually came to her house to receive healing.

One of her ritual cases was described as: at the beginning, she recited the Quran, and then invited some spiritual entities to attend her ritual to drive out evils. Then she asked questions to the patients about their problems, confirming the illness and its causes by consulting with a bowl of rice. After identifying the evil causes that made patients uncomfortable, she began to beat the body of the patients with the kitchen knife and the wolf paw, meanwhile massaged the patients' body with cupping therapy, and rolled the egg on the body as a way to call back the soul of the patient. Then her ecstatic actions indicate that the female shaman sent her soul out of her body to communicate with evil beings, driving them out of the body of the patient. After all the processes of the exorcism, she completed the ritual by reciting the Quran and guiding the people on the spot to make prayers (*dua*). We can see here that the ritual participation of Islam is important critically as a formal condition to start as well as complete healing rituals, though its process is composed of many folk elements.

Among Uyghur Muslims, Shamanistic rituals and magic healing are quite popular. There are many shamans and similar magic healers providing folk rituals for local residents to deal with unhappy ailments, especially related with supernatural existences. There are different kinds of Shamanistic healers with different names and modes of ritual services. Those magicians (*jin molla*, *rammal*) who are known as fortune tellers, palmists, physiognomists, and prayer teachers (*dakhan*) are good at driving out evils by reciting the Quran and fighting with evil spirits in sleep. Exorcism healers (*perikhon*, *bakshi*) perform healing rituals to deal with various health problems their patients encountered.

A field report provides us with a full picture of a healing ritual held in Kucha town (Sui and Yang 2007). The ritual was carried out in a Uyghur family courtyard with a vine arbor. A large rope was tied on the roof of the arbor, with its other side attached to a timber piling into the ground. There were some jujube tree branches and leaves tied to the rope with some strips of cloth, and another thin rope connected the large rope to a white poplar and a timber piling drove onto the wall of the courtyard, forming up a symbolic ritual space. The healer sat on a cotton fabric in the center of the ritual space, with some straw torches arranged in front of him, three drummers standing behind him and a woman with her sick child sat beside him. After reciting the Quran, the healer explained the aim of the exorcism ritual and basked the drums, the feet, and hands of the patient with a sheep oil lamp, then guided all people on the spot to make prayers (*dua*) by raising hands.

The healer started to sing by playing a Chinese violin, standing up and walking around the mother and child together with three drummers. Then he took some cotton from an assistant, and wiped the body of the mother with the cotton, and then burned the cotton. After repeating these actions several times, the healer took the child from the mother, and let the mother run quickly around the large rope by catching the rope in the center of the ritual space. Meanwhile, the healer was whipping her body

with a tree branch symbolically, burning a piece of cotton and running around crazily, then suddenly sat down to pray. Then, the healer stood up, and grasped a cock handed over by an assistant, running around gripping an arm of the mother, the atmosphere of the ritual reached its climax. A moment later, he left the mother and pulled two male observers into the ritual space, directing each man to put a red scarf on his head, a piece of white cloth on their shoulders, dress in a red skirt, then raise the cock and a small sheep over their heads. The healer let the mother run around gripping a small rope with her teeth following his assistants, while he stepped out of the ritual space to fight with the observers on the spot.

Then the healer took the dead cock, let its blood drip on the ground, and burned the grass on the ground symbolically exorcising the evils. Then he whipped the bodies of the mother and child with a bunch of burning cotton, and gradually stopped his crazy dance. His assistant held up the dead cock above his head, running around the mother and child, and put red scarfs and skirts on their heads. The healer imitated fighting with some evil beings, driving them out of the scene, then let the assistants throw the dead cock out of the courtyard's ward, and put the jujube tree branches from the large rope on the shoulder of the mother. Lastly, the healer started to pray by counting his prayer beads, and then finished the ritual by guiding all the people at the scene to observe Islamic prayers (*dua*).

In summarizing both the Hui and Uyghur cases, the important conditions to initiate and finish the exorcist rituals are to recite the Quranic verses as well as perform Islamic prayers. We still see numerous cases of using the Quranic recitation and Islamic prayers as elemental premises to legitimise those folk rituals. Here the participation of Islamic routines in folk healing rituals obviously exists, verifying eventually the religious pluralism of Muslim practices in China.

Conclusion

There are multiple ways to understand rituals in academic discussions. For the discipline of religious studies, the subject is institutionally organized, having its prophets, holy scriptures, god or gods, religious disciplines and doctrines, and regulated routine rituals. However, anthropological studies of religion take rituals as cultural carriers, which are composed of diverse elements including some institutional religion as well as various folk beliefs, just as what was demonstrated in the above ritual practices. By applying the law of participation, we make clear the mechanism in which all religious elements function together to form those integrated ritual events.

The cases of ritual participation among Hui and Uyghur Muslims provide convincing evidence supporting the fact that Muslim rituals are cultural complexes. Furthermore, those different religious elements could coexist and possibly be organized in multi-layered structures. Islam is supported by the government administration and Muslim elites, and stays at the top of the multi-layered structure of Muslim rituals, while those Sufi-related practices such as saint mausoleum worship are located at the middle, being taken partly as useful resources in promoting tourist enterprises. However, folk beliefs such as shamanism-magic practices and exorcism healing are passively located at the bottom of the structure, being downgraded and discriminated as superstitious, backward streams of religious traditions.

Therefore, local Muslims choose attitudes flexibly toward different religious elements, depending on their respective social realities and government policies. All religious elements observed in the above rituals, either on the top or bottom of the multi-layered structure, actually coexist and interact with each other in Muslim rituals, therefore religious pluralism is a historically formed and structurally built characteristic of Muslim rituals. Though different styles of religious pluralism among Hui and Uyghur Muslims show us that those Muslims' pragmatic needs in accommodating social realities always cause controversies, a kind of religious harmony can be achieved under the multi-layered structure of rituals in Muslim practices in China.

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