
Islam in China

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CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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Preface

*T*he history of Islam in China has gone beyond 1300 years. Since the beginning of its advent to this ancient civilized country far away from Arabia, Islam has devoted itself to finding a room for existence in such different circumstances, while keeping its own characters all the time. It was via Silk Road that Islam was introduced into China. According to Chinese historical records, there were many Western and Middle Asian Muslim businessmen and scholars living in Chinese coastal cities, such as Quanzhou, Guangzhou, Yangzhou and Hangzhou. They did Da'wah (missionary work) while doing business with local Chinese. The mosques in these cities that were built over 1000 years ago bear best witness to their life in China at that time. China was the strongest country in the world during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Many Muslim merchants and religionists came to China for commercial or cultural purpose. Later, as their business was extended, a lot of Muslims living in China moved northward along the Grand Jinghang Canal, and brought Islam to this region as a result. It was during the 10th to 18th

centuries that Islam was introduced to the northwest of China, and 10 minority groups like Hui, Uygur, Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tatar, Dongxiang, Sala and Bao'an accepted Islam as their national religion. Presently, the population of Muslims in China has gone beyond 20 millions. Due to historical reasons, Muslims in China are scattered widely, and concentrate in small numbers in certain places. They are engaged in various works and lead a normal religious life.

There are a good number of ancient mosques spread all over China. Many of them have very long history, and are regarded as Islamic architectural treasures. Islam in China bears unique characteristics; the Chinese mosque architecture reflects different style from that of Arabian countries as well. Mosques in China are usually of traditional Chinese architecture, and reserved Islamic features in the mean time. To be in line with Muslims' faith and life, the architects tried their best to manifest Islamic characteristics in mosque ornament. The Mihrab (a recess in the mosque that indicates the direction of prayer), pillars and lintels are decorated with exquisite Qur'anic calligraphies. Human or animal images are abstained from appearing in mosque ornament; only a few flower designs are used to decorate corridors or walls. Running Islamic education at mosques is a tradition that has been practiced for hundreds of years among Chinese Muslims. Every mosque has a schoolroom in which Imam teaches students. Actually, Islamic missionary work in China is done within mosques, not beyond. Therefore,

mosques in China are not only religious sites for Muslims, but also schools for their Islamic education.

After Islam was introduced into China, the Chinese Islamic culture with its own characteristics gradually came into being. Besides the unique mosque culture we mentioned above, the campaign represented by translating and writing Islamic scriptures launched by Chinese Muslim scholars in the 17th century is another good presentation. Ma Zhu, Wang Daiyu and Liu Jielian, who were called Scholars Mastering Four Religions by Chinese Muslims, made great contribution to the spread of Islamic culture in China. Their immortal works such as Islamic Guidebook, Expounding Islam, Islamic Great Learning, Arabian Principles of Nature, Arabian Ceremonies, Life of the Greatest Prophet of All are of great importance to learning Islam in China.