



The Land of the Pure and True (Muslims in China) By Ethar El-Katatney

"Chinese Muslims love their country and its people. We are Chinese. We cannot be part of China. There is even a hadith that says, 'Love of your country is part of faith.'"

Examples of the fusion of Chinese and Islamic traditions are everywhere.

Islam in China I got into a rickshaw in Beijing and my 65-year-old wrinkled driver immediately whizzed me through the hutongs — old, narrow alleyways. He looked at me and talked in Chinese. I turned to my guide.

"He's asking where you are from." "Aygee," I replied in my broken Chinese — meaning "Egypt." He pointed at my headscarf. "Are you Hindu?" "No! Muslim." He smiled and pointed to himself. "Moosleeman."

For many people, it comes as a shock to learn that officially there are at least 20 million Muslims in China- that is a third of the UK's total population. Unofficially, the number is even higher, some saying 65.3 million and even 100 million Muslims in China — up to 7.5 percent of the population.

Regardless of the real figure, the reality is that Islam in China is almost as old as the revelation of Islam unto Prophet Muhammad. Twenty years after the Prophet's death, diplomatic relations were established with China by Caliph Uthman. Trade was followed by settlement, until eighty years after the Hijrah, pagoda-style mosques appeared in China.

A century later, in 755, it became common for Chinese emperors to employ Muslim soldiers in their armies and also as government officials.

Today, the population of China includes 56 ethnic groups, 10 of which are Muslim. Out of these 10 minority groups, the Hui (short for Huizhou) are the largest group at 9.8 million, making up 48 percent of China's Muslim population.

The second largest group is Uyghurs at 8.4 million, or 41 percent of the Chinese Muslim population. The Hui speak Chinese, unlike Uyghurs and five other Muslim ethnic groups, which speak Turkic languages. Overwhelmingly Sunni in belief and practice, the Hui are ethnically and culturally Chinese, virtually indistinguishable from the Han, who make up China's billion-strong community. If my rickshaw driver had not told me he was Muslim, I would have never guessed.

For over a millennium, and across five major imperial dynasties, the Hui have lived in China peacefully, spreading in every province and contributing to every aspect of Chinese life, from the military and economy to arts and sciences.

Thriving in a non-Muslim civilization, the Hui managed to create an indigenous Islamic culture that is uniquely and simultaneously Chinese and Muslim.

Their experience, as Dru Gladney, author of *Dislocating China*, puts it, is a "standing refutation of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations." No identity crisis whatsoever!



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