

# China's Muslims and Japan's Empire: Centering Islam in WWII

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KELLY A. HAMMOND

Muslims in China have attracted academic attention because of their different religion and unique roles in Chinese Confucian societies. Scholars have noticed the deep involvement of Muslims such as Ma Yize (馬依澤) in Chinese astronomy since the Northern Song dynasty (906-1127). Muslim merchants headed by the Pu (蒲) lineage in coastal China was well known in their maritime trade during the Southern Song (1127-1279) and Mongol dynasties. Under Mongol rule (1271-1368), Muslims served as military officers, artisans, architects, and Mongols' trade partners, or "ortaq" (斡脫). The great voyages (1405-1421) of the following Ming dynasty (1368-1646), led by Zhenghe (鄭和) and his Muslim associates, reveal a much wider overseas Chinese Hanafi Muslim network in South China Sea and Southeast Asia, as documented in the *Malay Chronicles*. The Ming-Qing transition witnessed the rise of Sino-phone Islam and the production of Chinese-Islamic literature (or the Han Kitab, or Chinese book 漢克塔布). New Qing historians have recently pointed out that the Qing dynasty's long-term rule (1644-1911) over Chinese/

Han populations was attributed to its alliance with non-Han peoples including Mongols and Muslims outside China proper. The fall of the Qing dynasty and the formation of the Republic of China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to Muslim political and cultural activism. During the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), China's Muslims were equally visible in commercial, diplomatic, and cultural arenas.

A brief summary of Muslim roles in Chinese history helps to locate the large Chinese historical context in which Muslims had lived and to better understand the continued significance of their roles in early twentieth-century Free China and Japanese-occupied "North China" (北支) (namely, Beijing, Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, and Shanxi). Hammond's book in this regard examines the role of China's Muslims in the World War II configuration, composed of China, Japan, Axis powers, and Allied countries. It especially enriches the scholarship on Muslims in Republican-era China, following the works of scholars including Matsumoto Masumi, Hirayama Mitsumasa, Sawai Mitsuo, Mao Yufeng, Z. Hale Eroglu Sager, and Wlodzimierz Cieciora. In these studies of Muslims in Republican-era China, the focus is often on Muslims' political patriotism and cultural activism. By contrast, Hammond's study concentrates on oft-neglected Chinese Muslims living under Japanese occupation and their survival as both religious believers and political subjects.

By examining Imperial Japan's policy towards Chinese Muslims, Hammond admirably links Chinese Muslims in Japanese-occupied North China, Imperial Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, and Axis powers' Muslim policy and practice. As a result, Hammond has highlighted the perceived role of Chinese Muslims in Japanese imperialism as well as in Japan's anti-Soviet and anti-West/Chinese ideologies and strategies. According to Hammond, the legacy of Imperial Japan's policies and Chinese Muslims' role have continued during the Cold War; both mainland China and Taiwan similarly deployed Chinese Muslims in their outreach towards the Muslim countries in Africa and Asia. It is interesting to ponder the possible impact of this legacy on Japan's and China's respective relations with Muslim countries today. A rising China is

undertaking a Sinicization project in an attempt to isolate China's Muslims, while Japan and its former colony Taiwan implement Muslim-friendly policies to enhance cultural, political, diplomatic, and economic relations with Muslim peoples around the world.

The book consists of five chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Chapter One provides a concise history of Japan's scholarship and policy on Chinese Muslims (Hammond deliberately uses the term "Sino-Muslims" to refer to Chinese-speaking Muslims) from the Meiji restoration to the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, as well as the linkages between Japanese politics and scholarship on Sino-Muslims. Chapter Two examines the Chinese Nationalist government's responses to Japanese policies towards Sino-Muslims in North China and contrasts divergent Japanese and Chinese cultural policies towards Sino-Muslims in their respective nation-building and empire-building projects. In this chapter, Hammond explores the agency and ways that Sino-Muslims, as religious believers and political subjects, handled the challenges from China's nationalism and Japan's imperialism.

The next three chapters focus on how Imperial Japan centered Sino-Muslims in its outreach to Muslim regions and countries. Chapter Three describes a Japanese-sponsored hajj to Mecca for several Sino-Muslims from Japan-occupied North China to promote Japan's image abroad. It demonstrates how imperial Japan utilized Sino-Muslims as propaganda in their appeals to Muslim populations in Southeast Asia and illustrates how Japanese policies in occupied China expanded into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during World War II.

Chapter Four examines the plans of the Greater Japan Muslim League (大日本回教協會) to deploy Sino-Muslims as interlocutors to help market Japanese products in South Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Chapter Five discusses Imperial Japan's convergence and divergence with Fascist Italy's and Nazi Germany's policies towards Muslims under their domination or influence. Hammond pays a special attention to how the Nazi and Japanese attempted to connect with Afghanistan through,

respectively, Aryan mythology or Buddhist history. In conclusion, Hammond posits that the legacy and influence of wartime Japan's Sino-Muslim policy can be found in China's and Taiwan's outreach to Muslim-majoritarian countries in the Cold War.

The use of "Sino-Muslim" in "China's Muslims and Japan's Empire" seems inaccurate and not contextualized. "Sino-Muslims" have identified themselves or have been identified as the Hui since the Yuan dynasty (and the Japanese equally deployed the same term "Hui"). It should be noted that the term "Hui" itself bears a specific historical, geographic, legal, and ethnic connotation in China, overlapping but not identical with "Islam" or Muslims." To better understand Imperial Japan's policy towards the Hui, one needs to look at Imperial Japan's encounters with and scholarship on Hui Muslims from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, when Imperial Japan began to encroach upon the East Asian continent after the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5 and the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-5 in Manchuria. During this period, Japan's study of Hui Muslims fell in two academic categories: one is Japanese Sinology that studied traditional Confucian China as well as Confucian Islamic literature (or Han Kitab) and Confucian Muslims in traditional China (e.g., Jitsuzo Kuwabara [桑原鷲藏], "On Pu Shougeng" [蒲壽庚考]). The second one is Japan's study of China's peripheries or frontier region under the framework of "Asian history" sponsored by the Southern Manchuria Railway Company, or Mantsu (滿鐵), since 1906, when Imperial Japan penetrated China's frontier region of Manchuria. Imperial Japan's westward ambitions and expansion from Manchuria to Mongolia—North China—Turkestan/Xinjiang greatly promoted frontier studies, especially on Manchus, Mongols, and Turks.

Although Japan's "Islamic study" simultaneously developed in the early twentieth century and overlapped with the Hui study as part of frontier studies, it is largely a response to Russia's Bolshevik revolution and the rise of right-wing Pan-Asianism in an effort to cooperate with Muslim populations in Eurasian continent against the West and Bolshevik. From the 1920s to 1930s, Japan's Hui

study, frontier study, Sinology, and Islamic studies began to converge, especially after the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932 and the occupation of North China (where a certain number of Turkic and Hui Muslims lived) in 1937-8. In late 1938, Japan's army, navy, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a concerted national policy toward "Islam," formulating a comprehensive strategy toward Islam and Muslims in China, Central Asia, and Middle East.

The direct result of this move was to establish All China Muslim League (中國回教總聯合會) in occupied China and Greater Japan Muslim Association (大日本回教協會) to promote Japan-led New Asia and later the Great East Asian Sphere of Co-Prosperity order. By critically studying Axis powers' experiences in North Africa and the Middle East, Tokyo attempted to build a political, economic, and ideological bloc independent of Western imperialism and Soviet socialism. From this context Hammond links China's Muslims to Japan's empire and highlights "Islam" in Japan's Great East Asian Sphere of Co-Prosperity during World War II. From the Japanese perspective, however, it seems that Sino-Muslims were perceived as indispensable components next to the Han people in Japanese imperial ambition in China, as stated by Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe (近衛文麿) in 1938 (Yao Jinxiang, "Japan's Islamic Policy during the Pacific War").

There are some interesting questions stemming from this book. First, to what extent do cultural and religious terminologies such as Islam and its derivatives (such as "adobe of Islam"), which appear in Hammond's book, make sense during the early twentieth-century nation-state system, particularly since pan-Islam (not pan-Islamism) faded away after the end of the Ottoman Empire? Throughout the book, Hammad highlights the importance of Sino-Muslims' religious connection and trade expertise in the Japanese imperial diplomacy towards the wider Muslim world. It is worth inquiring about the qualification of these Sino-Muslims, who were not religious leaders and not from Islamic centers of China, in imperial Japan's Islamic diplomacy. It seems Turkic and Tartar Muslims such as the Imam at the Tokyo Mosque were more capable and qualified to carry out Imperial Japan's mission to unify Muslims. Also, "Sino-Muslims"

from occupied North China were no doubt specializing in trade such as fur and meat due to their geographic location and historical tradition. Thus, how could they be expected by the Greater Japan Muslim Association to serve as middlemen to sell Japanese or Southeast tea to Muslim countries after the Pacific war?

In her discussion of Axis powers' policies towards Muslim regions under their dominance or influence, Hammond mentions Germany's Berlin-Istanbul-Baghdad railway plan for circumventing the British/West-controlled Suez Canal, but she notably does not mention Japan's ambition to connect Eurasia by building a so-called "anti-communist" and "Muslim railway" from Beijing to Baotou, Hami, Kucha, Kashgar, Afghanistan, Tehran, Baghdad, Istanbul, and Berlin conducted by Kahoku Kotsu (華北交通) company (Matsumoto Masumi, "Islamic and Chinese Peripheral Studies in Imperial Japan: A Problems of Japan's Sinology and the Legacy of Romanticized Silk Road Discourses"). These plans illustrate Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan's ambition to dominate the Eurasian continent and explains why these powers developed a particular interest in Afghanistan, the heartland of Eurasia.

In conclusion, Hammond continues to highlight the importance of Sino-Muslims in contemporary Chinese diplomacy towards Muslim countries. Hammond also hints that the presence of Chinese Muslims in Muslim-majoritarian countries such as Malaysia help silence these Muslim countries on the Uyghur issue. As we know today, it is not Sino-Muslims but rather Malaysian leaders' connections with China that drives Malaysian policy on the Uyghur issue, as Mohammad Mahathir's recent rectification of Najib Razak's Uyghur policy demonstrates. Despite these questions and minor issues, this book deserves serious attention for those who are interested in transnational history, World War II, and Islam in East Asia.

HAIYUN MA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

FROSTBURG STATE UNIVERSITY, FROSTBURG, MD