



IMAM CHEN KELI (1923-1970):
HIS LIFE AND THOUGHTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study is about Imam Chen Keli (1923-1970), a distinguished Muslim scholar who was martyred in modern China. The material for this work was done through library research and field-work performed both in China and Malaysia. It gives a brief account of Islam in China, followed by a literature review in this field. Imam Chen's life and scholarship are discussed in detail in the socio-political context. One of Imam Chen's masterpieces, *Understanding Islam from the Personality of Muhammad*, is explored. This study reveals that Imam Chen's life and thought were largely affected by the socio-political climate of the twentieth century China. His thoughts represent his response to the challenges posed by the Communist regime. He sought to reconcile between the universality of Islamic teachings and the particularity of Chinese culture. This thesis shows that Chen Keli was a conspicuous Muslim thinker, writer and translator during a critical period of China's history. The work suggests that he should be accorded the standing of one of the world's Islamic revivalists. It declares that because of his impact he has served as a contemporary exemplar and spiritual father of many Chinese Muslims. This study also serves as a memorial to Imam Chen on his 90th birth anniversary (1923-2013). Some recommendations about further research on Imam Chen are given at the end of the work.

ملخص البحث

هذه الدراسة عن الإمام تشن كيلبي (1923-1970)، العالم المسلم المتميز الذي استشهد في الصين الحديثة. تم جمع المادة اللازمة لهذا العمل من خلال البحث المكتبي والعمل الميداني الذي أجري في كل من الصين وماليزيا. هذا البحث يعطي وصفا موجزا للإسلام في الصين، يليه استعراض الأدبيات في هذا المجال. وتم سرد حياة وعلم الإمام تشن بالتفصيل في السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي. تم اكتشاف واحدة من أهم روائع الإمام تشن، وهي فهم الإسلام من خلال شخصية النبي محمد، كما تكشف هذه الدراسة أن حياة الإمام تشن وفكره تأثرا إلى حد كبير بالمناخ الاجتماعي والسياسي في القرن العشرين في الصين. أفكاره مثلت ردا على التحديات التي فرضها النظام الشيوعي. لقد سعى إلى التوفيق بين الطابع العالمي للتعاليم الإسلامية وخصوصية الثقافة الصينية. ويبين هذا البحث أن تشن كيلبي كان مفكراً مسلماً واضحاً، وكاتباً ومترجماً خلال فترة حرجة من تاريخ الصين. يقترح هذا العمل أنه ينبغي منح تشن كيلبي مكانة سامية باعتباره واحداً من مجددن الإسلاميين في العالم. وهذا يعود إلى تأثيره حيث كان بمثابة النموذج المعاصر والأب الروحي لكثير من المسلمين الصينيين. تبرز هذه الدراسة أيضاً كمنصب تذكاري للإمام تشن في ذكرى مولده التسعين (1923-2013). قدمت الباحثة بعض التوصيات حول إجراء المزيد من البحوث عن الإمام تشن في ختام هذه الدراسة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation of the degree of Master of Arts (Islamic and Other Civilizations).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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**IMAM CHEN KELI (1923-1970):
HIS LIFE AND THOUGHTS**

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This thesis is dedicated to
The late Imam Yusuf Chen Keli
Muslim leaders
Those who work for the path of Allah Exalted
Those who seek the Truth

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 ISLAM IN CHINA: A BRIEF HISTORY

Islam was peacefully introduced to China during its early period. Over the past 1300 years, Chinese Islam has experienced dramatic changes from different dynasties to contemporary times. Now in China, there are above 20 million Muslims, who are made up of ten ethnic groups, namely Hui, Uyгур, Kazak, Ozbek, Tajik, Tatar, Kirgiz, Dongxiang, Salar and Bao'an.¹ Amongst all races, the Hui minority (Chinese-speaking Muslims), occupy almost half of all Muslims; they are scattered throughout China with a notable concentration in the northwest. With the exception of the Tajik minority, China's Muslims are Sunnis of the *Hanifite* sect.

1.1.1 The Origin of Islam in China

Islam came to China as early as the Tang dynasty (618-907). Muslims always take pride in citing the *Hadith* "Seek knowledge, even unto China".² In fact, contacts between China and Arabia had existed even before the advent of Islam. Since the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), China had started to send envoys to the West and Central

¹ Besides the ten officially-designated Muslim ethnic groups, there are others who embrace Islam and who belong to other racial groups, including the ethnic majority, Han. These converts are excluded from the official count of Muslims though they exist in a great number.

² There is still not enough evidence to show whether it is a sound *Hadith* or not. When *Shaykh* Yusuf Qaradawi was interviewed by CCTV during his visit to China at the end of 2009, he clarified that it is an Arabic proverb, not *Hadith*. Nevertheless, it implies the importance of knowledge in Islam, as well as the glory of China during the Prophet's time.

Asia.³ However, the first official contact with Islam occurred in 651, the second year of Yonghui (永徽) period (650-655)⁴. Othman (644-656), the third Caliph in Islamic history sent ambassadors to establish friendly relations with China. This event was recorded in Chinese historic literature entitled *JiuTangshu*, *XuanzongBenji* (旧唐书·玄宗本纪).⁵ Based on this report, officials consider this year as the beginning of Islam's arrival in China.⁶

From then on, more and more Arab and Persian envoys and traders came to China; they settled down in coastal cities and the capital of China, including Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Yangzhou, Hangzhou and Chang'an (today's Xi'an). They did not go back to their own countries because of the interests of foreign trade and the stable environment of the Tang dynasty. They married local women, and were the early *Hui* Muslims. Besides these traders, some soldiers from Arabia and Persia also settled in China after battles during the Tang dynasty. For example, one thousand Muslim soldiers who helped suppress the An Lushan rebellion of 756-763 settled in North China.⁷ Moreover, these Muslims came to China via two main routes: the sea route in the port cities of the southeast coast and the land route in the northwest

³ For more details, see Qiu Shusen, *History of Hui Minority in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1996), vol.1.3.

⁴ It was during the reign of Emperor Gaozong (高宗) who was the third emperor of the Tang dynasty.

⁵ *Jiutangshu* (旧唐书), Old Book of the Tang, is an official historical account of the Tang dynasty. It was compiled at the time of Houjing (936-947). The chief editor was Liu Xu (刘昫). Xuanzong (玄宗) was the reign title of Tang Emperor Longji (712-742).

⁶ There are many different opinions on the time of Islam's arrival in China, including the interregnum between the Sui and Tang dynasties (610-622), the middle of Tang Wude (610-627), the second year or the fourth year of Tang Zhenguan (627-650) and the eighth century. For more details, see Yu Zhengui, *China's Governments and Islam*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1996), 14.

⁷ The An-Shi Rebellion (安史之乱) erupted in 757. The Arab empire was asked to send troops to help the Tang dynasty suppress the rebellion.

China.⁸ This was the beginning of Islam in China.

According to Chinese Muslim traditional legendary accounts, Islam was first brought to China in 628 by an envoy, Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, who was the Prophet's maternal uncle. As suggested by the name, The Mosque of Holy Remembrance (*Huashengsi* 怀圣寺) in Guangzhou was believed to have been erected by the envoy in commemoration of the Prophet. However, there is no verifiable source to support it.⁹

A prominent Hui historian, Bai Shouyi (1909-2000), divided the history of Islam in China before the twentieth century into two parts. The first part is the period of consolidation of Islam, which includes two stages: the Tang-Song dynasties and the Yuan dynasty; the second part is the 'era of adversity', which includes the Ming and the Qing dynasties.¹⁰

1.2.2 Muslims in the Tang-Song China (618-1279)

The Tang dynasty (618-907) was considered a golden age of Chinese civilization; China was the strongest country in the world at that time. The flourishing economy and open-door policy attracted a lot of Arabs and Persians. From the Tang to the Song, Muslims businessmen, diplomats, and soldiers from Arabia and Persia settled in several coastal cities of China and the capital Chang'an. According to a historical

⁸ Both the sea route and the overland route were named Silk Road. Some scholars used the term Perfume Road to refer to the Sea Route, because perfume was the most important goods in China's foreign trade. See Li Xinghua, *History of Islam in China*, (China Social Sciences Press, 1998), 63.

⁹ For more details, see Ma Haiyun, "The Mythology of Prophet's Ambassadors in China: Histories of Sa'dWaqqas and Gess to Chinese Sources", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affair*, vol.26, no.3, (2006):445-452.

¹⁰ Bai Shouyi, *Brief History of Islam in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 2000), 41.

report, from 651 to 798, Arabia sent envoys to China 39 times and most of them were merchants.¹¹ These foreigners were called *Fanke* (蕃客 foreign settlers)¹²; they lived around mosques¹³ and formed many communities called *Fanfang* (蕃坊 foreigners' communities). Moreover, the Tang and Song Chinese called these Arabs *Dashi* (大食 Tazi), in relation to that, they named Islam *Ta-shifa* "Law of Islam". In sum, Muslim communities as foreigners were administered by the governments at that time. They were segregated from the Chinese community and generally preserved their own language, customs and religion.

It is known that although many foreign religions were under attack at the end of the Tang dynasty, Islam was not.¹⁴ Generally, the Tang government was relatively tolerant of Islam and Muslims. The most important reason was the special position of Muslims in foreign trade.¹⁵ This situation gradually strengthened until the Song dynasty.

By the Song dynasty (960-1279), the number of Muslims had increased rapidly; Muslims played a more important role in foreign trade. With the expansion of the maritime trade of the Song, more and more ports were opened up for foreign trade along the southeast coast. During this period, Muslims dominated foreign trade and the import-export business to the south and west. In this regard, Muslims were treated

¹¹ For more details, see Yang Huaizhong, Yu Zhengui, *Islam and Chinese Culture*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1995), 48-52.

¹² *Fan* 蕃 refers to a foreign identity.

¹³ The earliest mosques in China were built during this period in Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Yangzhou, Hangzhou and Chang'an (Xi'an).

¹⁴ Yu Zhengui, *China's Governments and Islam*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1996), 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

leniently. In order to encourage mutual trade, the Tang and Song governments set up Trade Commissions (*Shibosi* 市舶司) in coastal cities. Pu Shougeng (蒲寿庚), a famous Hui Muslim Trade Commissioner (*Shiboshi* 市舶使) at the end of the Song dynasty made great contributions to foreign trade.

From the Tang to the Song dynasties, a lot of *Fanke* foreigners resided in China. They learned Chinese culture, married Chinese ladies, eventually they became *Tushengfanke* (土生番客 local-born foreign settlers). Since then, they began to integrate into the Chinese society. However, the purpose for coming to China was not to preach Islam (*Daw'ah*), but to do business. In fact, Islam was spread by their activities. For example, they would employ Chinese laborers or marry Chinese women who probably converted. Overall, no matter how many generations lived in China, they were still considered “foreigners” or “local-born foreigners”. This situation did not change till the Yuan dynasty.

1.2.3 Muslims in the Yuan China (1279-1368)

Established by the Mongols, the Yuan dynasty was a time when Chinese were subjugated by a fierce foreign power. As a result of the westward expeditions of the Mongols in the early thirteenth century, hundreds of thousands of Muslims, including soldiers, craftsmen and merchants, were brought from Central Asia and Persia to China. These Muslims became the main origin of the *Hui*, and played a decisive role in the subsequent formation of the *Hui*. The Yuan period was considered “a milestone

in the history of *Hui Muslims*".¹⁶

The situation of Muslims in the Mongol Yuan dynasty was quite different from that during the Tang-Song dynasties in three aspects. First, they considered citizens of China, not foreigners any longer. Second, they were distributed all over China, not restricted to coastal cities and capitals only. During the Yuan dynasty, "*Huihui* were spread wide under the Heaven". Third, they held important positions in the military, finance and other sections of the Mongol administration, second in authority to the Mongol overlords. At the time of the Yuan, the entire population was divided into four classes. The Mongolians as the ruling class belonged to the highest rank. It was followed by the *Semuren*,¹⁷ the main part of which was Muslims. The third class was *Hanren* (Northern Chinese), and the bottom was *Nanren* (Southern Chinese).

The reason why Muslims held such a high social position was that *Hui* Muslims helped the Mongols capture the regime, and they continually made important contributions to the development of the Yuan in a variety of fields, from politics to military and from astronomy to calendar. For example, in the history of the Yuan dynasty, six Muslims were prime ministers (*Chengxiang* 丞相)¹⁸, compared with only two Han people.¹⁹ Sayyid Ajall Shams ad-Din (Chinese name Sai Dianchi, 1211-1279), who conquered the Yunnan province on behalf of the Mongols, was nominated by Kublai Khan as the first governor of that province, and established a

¹⁶ Zhou Chuanbin, Ma Xuefeng, *Development and Decline of Beijing's Hui Muslim Community*. (Chiang Mai: Asian Muslim Action Network, 2009), 7.

¹⁷ *Semuren*, means people with colored eyes. As is known, Chinese have black eyes, but Muslims from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia had green eyes. Hence, Muslims were called *Semuren*.

¹⁸ *Chengxiang* (丞相) was ancient Chinese Prime Minister, whose position was only inferior to the emperor.

¹⁹ Yu Zhengui, *China's Governments and Islam*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1996), 84.

permanent Muslim presence in southwest China. The Persian astronomer Jamal ad-Din brought astronomical instruments and books from Persia. He built an observatory at Beijing and prepared a calendar for the Yuan court in 1267.²⁰

Until the late Yuan period, the word commonly used to denote Muslims in Chinese documents was *Huihui* (回回) which means return.²¹ Islam was called *Huihuijiao* (the religion of double return, which means to submit and return to Allah), *Tianfangjiao* (the religion of Arabia), or *Qingzhenjiao* (the Pure and True Religion). In order to administer Muslim affairs and protect the interests of Muslims under Islamic law, the Yuan dynasty set up the Department of the *Qadi*. Moreover, *Huihui* first settled in central China at the beginning of the thirteenth century;²² mosques were widely built in areas where Muslims settled.

Although Muslims first settled in China in the seventh century, they did not become Chinese citizens until the thirteenth century when a Mongol dynasty was established. Yuan's policies towards Muslims allowed them to play a significant role in the political and economic administration of China, which strengthened the Muslim community under the Mongols. This prosperity continued to the beginning of the Ming dynasty.

²⁰ Yang Huaizhong, Yu Zhengui, *Islam and Chinese Culture*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 1995), 248.

²¹ The study of the origin of *Huihui* becomes popular in recent years by virtue of the special meanings of the name "Hui". The character, *Hui* (回), is formed by two squares or circles, one embedded in the other. The word means "return". According to Zhou Chuanbin and Ma Xuefeng, the shape of the word represents the shape of the Holy Mosque of Mecca, and its meaning denotes the foreign origin of Chinese Hui Muslims and their religious goal: ultimate return to the paradise of Allah. For more details, see Zhou Chuanbin, Ma Xuefeng, *Development and Decline of Beijing's Hui Muslim Community*, (Chiang Mai: Asian Muslim Action Network, 2009), 3.

²² It is the hometown of Chen Keli.

1.2.4 Muslims in the Ming China (1368-1644)

The Ming dynasty was founded by the Han people after the Mongolian exit from central China. The Hui played an important role in its foundation. Muslim generals, such as Chang Yuchun, Feng Sheng, and Mu Ying, all fought for and contributed to the Ming; they are well-known personalities in Chinese history. During the Ming dynasty, Muslims became truly integrated into the Chinese society, and influential in military affairs, astronomy and medicine, etc. The most famous was the navigator, Zheng He (or Cheng Ho 郑和 1371-1435), who led seven voyages across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433, and reached as far as Arabia and East Africa. In light of the contributions of the *Hui*, Muslims were granted political, economic, social and religious freedom at the beginning, but later the emperors' attitude changed. The latter's concern was not the betterment of Muslims, but, first, to win their support and then, accelerate their acculturation into the Chinese society.

For this reason, drastic assimilationist measures were taken. Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), the founder of the Ming dynasty promoted a nationalist policy under which Muslims were not allowed to maintain their language, dress and names; they were not allowed even to marry their own race.²³ For the first time in Chinese history, Muslims' distinct Islamic identity was beginning to deteriorate.

In face of the new circumstances and the resulting weakening of Islamic understanding among Muslims, Chinese Muslim intellectuals searched for solutions so

²³ In the Statutes of the Imperial Ming, "Mongolians and *Semuren* may marry Chinese. They are not allowed to marry their own race. Those who violate the law will be flogged eighty times and turned into slaves." For more details, see Bai Shouyi, *Brief History of Islam in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 2000), 28-29.

as to preserve Islamic knowledge and the identity of Muslims. The emergence of Islamic education and the *Ulama* translation movement during the Ming-Qing transition were a response to the Ming's nationalist policy.

Mosque-centered Education

Mosque-centered education (*Jingtangjiaoyu* 经堂教育) was initiated by Hu Dengzhou (胡登洲 1522-1597), also known as Hu *Taishi* (太师) – a title given to a very learned man. Inspired by his experience of *Hajj*, Hu *Taishi* had a strong desire to cultivate Muslim elites and spread Islam in Chinese society. Therefore, he started to teach students in his house first, and then the mosque. Since then, a mosque-based educational system called *Jingtangjiaoyu* was established. His students soon spread this educational system throughout China. As time went on, different schools of educational thought were developed. The most famous were those of Shaanxi and Shandong.²⁴

Jingtangjiaoyu was originally conducted in the Arabic and Persian languages. The courses included Arabic Morphology, Arabic Grammar, Arabic Rhetoric, Theology, Jurisprudence and Sufism. This educational system made a great contribution to the recovery and spreading of Islam in China. It trained *Ulama*, and laid a foundation for the subsequent translation movement and for Islamic education in its modern form. Hence, Hu *Taishi* played a decisive role in the development of Islamic education in China. However, there were a lot of limitations in this

²⁴ The difference between the two schools was that Shaanxi School was well versed in the Persian language while Shaanxi School was not.

educational system. For example, the courses were limited to traditional Islamic knowledge; Chinese language and other disciplines were not included.

The Translation Movement

Muslims lived in China since the seventh century. However, Islamic books written in the Chinese language did not appear until the seventeenth century. What called for the writing of Islamic texts in Chinese at this particular juncture was the change of the language of Muslims from Persian and Arabic to Chinese during the Ming period. The other reason was that the misunderstanding of the ruling class towards Islam and Muslims needed to be cleared. Such a task was shouldered by several Muslim elites.

It was pioneered by Wang Daiyu (王岱輿 1584-1670), who was also known as the True Muslim Elder (真回老人), and was a fifth-generation disciple of Hu Dengzhou. His *Zhengjiaozhenquan* (正教真詮), published in 1642, is the earliest extant work of Islamic texts written in the Chinese language. He was followed by Liu Zhi, Ma Zhu and several others, who were called Muslim Confucians (回儒 *Huiru* or *Hui-ju*)²⁵, and their writings were named as *Han Kitab* (汉克塔布)²⁶ by contemporary scholars. The aim of these Chinese *Ulama* was to provide texts not only for Muslims, but, more importantly, to the Han elite in an attempt to convince them that Islam was

²⁵ According to a leading New Confucian scholar, Tu Weiming, the term “Muslim Confucian writers” (*Hui-ju*) was suggested by Kuwat Rokuro, Anmu-tao and some others. See Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*, (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2000). Foreword by Tu Weiming, xi.

²⁶ “*Han Kitab*” refers to the corpus of Chinese Islamic texts written by the *Hui Ulama* during the Ming-Qing dynasties, who attempted to articulate Islam in Confucian terms.

not inferior to Confucianism.²⁷

This translation movement reached its peak in the early eighteenth century with the emergence of the then most sophisticated Chinese Muslim scholar and thinker, Liu Zhi (刘智 1660-1730), who “signaled the renaissance of Sinicized Islam”.²⁸ By using the terminology of Confucian philosophy to articulate Islam, Liu established a system of Islamic thought in China. Moreover, a strong Sufi influence existed in his writings.

These Hui Confucians’ attempt to transmit Islamic ideas in Confucian terms is regarded by contemporary Muslim scholars as an effective practice of adapting Islam in the Chinese context. It is seen as having enriched not only Chinese culture, but also Islamic civilization.²⁹

The Ming dynasty was a crucial turning point in the Chinese Muslim history, for the *Hui* changed from outsiders to insiders, from “Muslims in China” to “Chinese Muslims”³⁰. Muslim population had increased considerably. This trend continued in the Qing dynasty until the Qianlong era (1736-96).³¹ Under the Qing rulers, however, the prominent status of the Hui declined.

²⁷ Ma Tong, *The Origins of the Islamic Branches and Menhuan in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 1983), 114.

²⁸ See Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*, (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2000). Foreword by Tu Weiming, vi.

²⁹ Ding Kejia, Ma Xuefeng, *The Hui in Global Perspectives*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 2008), 141.

³⁰ This term was first used by Daniel Leslie. For more details, see Donald Daniel Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*, (Belconnen, A.C.T: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986), 105.

³¹ Qianlong (乾隆 1711-1799) was the fourth emperor of the Qing dynasty. He reigned from 1736 to 1796. Since the mid-Qianlong reign, inequality and discrimination could be seen from the Qing legal system.

1.2.5 Muslims in the Qing China (1644-1912)

The Qing dynasty was established by the Manchus in the seventeenth century, and they were less tolerant of Muslims than previous rulers. The Manchus implemented a high-pressure policy upon the *Hui*: they slaughtered Muslims and tore down mosques. In reaction to the persecution, a series of rebellions sprang up in the northwest and southwest of the country at the end of the Qing dynasty. The authority reacted heavy-handedly. Most revolts were suppressed and millions died.

Although Muslims experienced persecution and humiliation during this period, it did not affect the general growth of the community. On the one hand, the hostile government policy forged the unity of Muslims. On the other hand, when rebellions occurred in southwest and northwest China, Muslim population in central China increased with Islam penetrating into the rural areas.³² According to historical records, a number of mosques were built in central China, such as Shandong and Henan, after the Qianlong era. Moreover, during the Ming-Qing transition, Sufism entered the northwest of China.³³ Mosque-centered education and the *Ulama* translation movement still continued although they slowed down during the rebellion period.

From the Tang to the Qing dynasties, the attitudes and policies of the Chinese ruling classes towards Islam and Muslims changed from openness and tolerance to assimilation and discrimination. The status of Muslims in Chinese society declined sharply. With the elimination of imperial rule and the establishment of a modern

³² Bai Shouyi, *Brief History of Islam in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Press, 2000), 41.

³³ Sufism was first introduced to China during the Yuan dynasty. By the Qing dynasty, China's four major *Menhuan* (Sufi orders) have been formed, namely *Jahriyya*, *Khufiyya*, *Qadiyya* and *Kubrawiyya*. The first two belong to *Naqshbandi* Sufi order.

nation-state after the 1911 Revolution, Chinese Islam embraced a new phase.

1.2.6 Muslims in the Republic of China (1911-1949)

The Qing dynasty fell in 1912. It was succeeded by the Republic of China, which was established by Sun Yat-sen. Sun advocated a policy of equality between different ethnicities; accordingly, the country belonged equally to the Han, Man (Manchu), Meng (Mongol), Hui (Muslim), and the Tsang (Tibetan) peoples. Sun's friendly policy gave a tremendous boost to Muslims. Seeing the Republicans as allies, Muslims participated actively in the 1911 Republican revolution. Sun was highly appreciative of the Hui's role in the revolution. In his words, "Huizu are the most oppressed people and have had the bitterest experiences in dynastic China; ...hence, they are the most revolutionary"; and "the Chinese national movement will hardly be successful without the participation of the Huizu."³⁴

With a strong patriotic consciousness, a great number of outstanding Muslims played important roles in the national struggles of the first half of the twentieth century, such as the conflicts among warlords (1916-1928), the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Civil War (1945-1949). A typical example was Bai Chongxi (白崇禧 1893-1966). A Nationalist general and a warlord in Guangxi, Bai was probably the most influential *Hui* Muslim at that time. He was the top-ranking *Hui* official in the Nationalist government, and made great contributions to both the government and

³⁴ It is quoted from Sun Yat-sen's public speech in Beijing on September 12, 1912. For more details see, Wan Lei, *The Hui Minority in Modern China: Identity and Struggles*, (Istanbul: Faith University, 2012), 150.

Muslim community. Other examples of active Muslim participation in the national scene included the "Ma Clique" of warlord generals³⁵ and *Hui* anti-Japanese guerrilla, etc.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Muslim intellectuals in China launched a cultural movement in order for Muslims to adjust to contemporary social changes. There were two major aspects of the movement, namely, religious reform and promotion of education. It was initiated by some Imams and the literati. Later on, officials, businessmen, and the Muslim common all joined this movement. The pioneer of the movement was Wang Haoran (also known as Wang Kuan). During his return journey from *Hajj* in 1906, Wang travelled to many Muslim countries, including Egypt, Turkey and some others in West Asia, and investigated their educational conditions. On his return to China, he, together with other *Hajjis*, founded the first modern Islamic school. Meanwhile, keen in improving education and developing Islam, a group of thirty-six *Hui* students who studied in Japan established "The East Pure-True Education Society" (*Liudongqingzhenjiaoyuhui* 留东清真教育会) in Tokyo, and published its bulletin "Awakening the Hui" (*Xinghui pian* 醒回篇). The two events marked the beginning of this revival movement.

Soon, the movement extended to other parts of China. It consisted of religious reform, educational reform, as well as cultural and social activities.

³⁵ It was a family of *Hui* Muslim warlords, who ruled the northwest provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1949.