

# *ASIAN NETWORK EXCHANGE*

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## **A Note from the Editors**

With this Spring 2009 issue of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, we complete the first full year of having transformed the consortium's newsletter into a journal. In concert with the *ASIANetwork* Board of Directors, we undertook this transformation because we all enthusiastically agreed that the new format would highlight our membership's belief that engagement in scholarly inquiry is an essential precondition to achieving teaching excellence. The pursuit of both of these goals is an aim to which we are deeply and collectively committed, and, with the contributions selected for publication in this issue, we are gratified that in format and content, such a commitment is clearly and effectively expressed in the following pages.

In further support of this aim, the current issue includes the first guest-edited section in the journal's history, with a thematic focus upon "Islam in Asia." We are particularly pleased that Barbara Metcalf of the University of Michigan volunteered to serve as our first guest editor, compiling several compelling articles with the close cooperation of Lisa Trivedi of Hamilton College. Not only is this focus timely, but Professors Metcalf and Trivedi, along with their contributors, treat this theme in a way that is both comprehensive and instructive. By giving our readership a greater context for understanding the presence of Islam in India, China, and Indonesia, and by challenging rigid categorizations and binaries that, although popular, obfuscate rather than enhance our understanding of Islam and its practitioners, the guest editors and authors of our special section perform an invaluable service.

At the same time, our other contributors to this issue offer creative possibilities for engaging students with Southeast Asian and Japanese traditions, cultures, and social practices. Their eclectic use of sources and varied media in support of their teaching reveals their genuine passion for their subject matter. Their desire to encourage students to pursue a similar degree

of engagement is clearly articulated throughout their articles. Our final contribution, by a student author, is based upon research she conducted in China during a Summer ASIANetwork Student-Faculty Fellows Program, funded by the Freeman Foundation Fellowship, and her report is an excellent example of the type of outstanding undergraduate student research we all seek to promote.

We wish finally to remind our readership that we are accepting applications from those who may wish to serve as guest-editor for a special section of the Spring 2010 issue of the *ASIANetwork Exchange*. Applications should include a rationale for the theme around which the special section is to be organized, a list of contributors or potential contributors to the section, and a statement regarding the qualifications of the guest editor and contributors. Applications should be submitted to us no later than July 1<sup>st</sup> and should be sent to: Illinois Wesleyan University, P. O. Box 2900, Bloomington, IL 61702-2900 or e-mail to [anexchange@iwu.edu](mailto:anexchange@iwu.edu).

Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein  
Co-Editors

## About the Contributors

### **Etin Anwar**

Etin Anwar is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. She is the author of *Gender and Self in Islam* (Routledge Curzon, 2006). Her interests include gender and sexuality in Asian societies, Sufi philosophy, as well as the role of women in Muslim societies through Islamic philosophy and theology.

### **Faisal Devji**

Faisal Devji is Assistant Professor of History at the New School for Social Research in New York. He is the author of *Landscapes of the Jihad* (Cornell, 2005) and *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (Columbia, 2008). Devji is interested in the political thought of modern Islam as well as the transformation of liberal categories and democratic practice in South Asia, particularly as they relate to ethics and violence in a globalized world.

### **James Frankel**

James Frankel is Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. A specialist of the history of Islam in China, his scholarly work emphasizes the comparative history of ideas and religious as well as cultural syncretism. He is currently working on the revision of a manuscript *Borrowing from Confucius to Obey Muhammad: Chinese Islamic Practice and Doctrine*. The book considers Chinese Islamic scholarship and literature of the early Qing dynasty, specifically the writings of Chinese Muslim literatus Liu Zhi.

### **Christy Ivie**

Christy Ivie is a graduating senior in Sociology at Illinois Wesleyan University. She first developed a strong interest in Asian studies through her first year writing seminar. As an undergraduate, she has studied abroad in both China and India.

### **Shoshana Keller**

Shoshana Keller is Associate Professor of Russian and Eurasian History at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. She is the author of *To Moscow, Not Mecc: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia* (Praeger, 2001) as well as scholarly articles including "Story, Time and Dependent Nationhood in the Uzbek History Curriculum" which appeared in *Slavic Review* in 2007. She is one of the chief

contributors to *Histories of Central Asia*, an on-line teaching resource tool that was funded by a grant from the Social Science Research Council, about which she writes for this issue.

### **Mark MacWilliams**

Mark MacWilliams is a professor of Religious Studies at St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY, where he teaches East Asian religions. His current areas of research are pilgrimage and religion and visual culture. His most recent publication is an edited volume, *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations of Manga and Anime* (M.E. Sharpe, 2008).

### **Barbara Metcalf**

Barbara Metcalf is the Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her areas of expertise include the history of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent with an emphasis on the rich traditions of Islam movements of reform and revitalization. She is the author of several scholarly books and articles including *Islamic Revival in British India* (Princeton, 1982), *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*. (California 1990), and *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (Oxford, 2004). Metcalf served on the ASIANetwork Council of Advisors for six years, 2002-2008. Her contribution was originally presented as the keynote address at the New York Conference on Asian Studies in 2008.

### **Lisa Trivedi**

Lisa Trivedi is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Asian Studies Program at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, and the author of *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Indiana 2007). Trivedi currently serves on the Board of ASIANetwork and worked closely with Barbara Metcalf to produce this special issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange*.

### **Thomas Williamson**

Thomas Williamson is Associate Professor of Anthropology at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. He teaches courses on globalization, Southeast Asia, nationalism, and ethnicity. He is especially interested in the anthropology of modernity, understanding the diverse and complex ways the world's people experience industrialization, motorized transportation, rationalized bureaucracies, and mass communication.

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***Introducing Guest-Edited Section***

**Islam in Asia**

Lisa Trevedi

Hamilton College

In this Spring 2009 issue of the new journal of ASIANetwork, *ASIANetwork Exchange*, the editors sought both an exceptional guest editor and a subject of broad interest to the membership. I am pleased that we were able to find both in Professor Barbara Metcalf (University of Michigan) and the subject of Islam in Asia.

Aside from having served as a past President of the Association for Asian Studies and her recent election as President-elect of the American Historical Association, Barbara Metcalf is known internationally as one of the leading scholars of modern Islam. Over the course of thirty years, Metcalf's scholarly focus has been on a subject and population that most Asianists, particularly at liberal arts colleges, have little training. Indeed, given the concentration of our membership in East Asia Studies, Muslim societies in Asia receive little focus in most of our courses. Yet as she persuasively demonstrates here, Asianists need to know more about the large and diverse Muslim communities that populate Asia. This is even more so the case in the post-9/11 era when our students need to be able to distinguish between the beliefs and cultures of Islamic communities in Asia and those taken up by groups who cloak their actions in religious idiom.

At the recent ASIANetwork annual conference, Catherine Asher (University of Minnesota) delivered a wonderful keynote address on the Taj Mahal as a contested site of communal identity in India. This special section of the journal provides an excellent follow-up in its design to showcase Muslim societies across Asia—from Central and West Asia to South, Southeast, and East Asia. Its contributors have training in anthropology, history, philosophy, and religious studies. While the special section does not attempt to be comprehensive, it has nevertheless been

conceived to highlight the diversity of scholarly and pedagogical issues taken up by specialists of Islamic societies across the region. It is our hope that the section will prompt those of us who do not generally address Muslim societies in Asia in our courses to make use of the scholarly and teaching materials that these scholars offer our field. In other words, we hope to open a conversation both in ASIANetwork and in the liberal arts Asian Studies curricula about Muslims and Islamic society.

Metcalf's piece challenges us to look beyond the comfortable, familiar ideas we have about Muslim society, and to see Muslims in Asia as we wish them to see us—as people with complex identities. In a similar vein, Frankel's work elucidates the complicated relationship followers of Chinese Islam have experienced with various Chinese governments, whereby official guarantees for their protection and security have arisen only after their submission to governmental authority has been acknowledged. Anwar's piece sheds light on the growing status of Islamist politics in Indonesia, helping us to understand how colonial and neo-colonial power as well as the U.S.'s War on Terror has empowered Islamist political parties in Indonesia, even as most Indonesians favor democratic government and reject the imposition of Sharia Law. Keller's article offers us as teachers valuable tools for teaching about Central Asia, including maps, mini lectures, time-lines—all available as of May 2009 through a website funded by the Social Science Research Council. Devji's contribution forces us to confront our misconceptions about Al Qaeda and its ideological goals. Devji challenges us to recognize that most of Al Qaeda's rhetoric, far from being overwhelmingly focused on anti-Americanism, is oriented at achieving humanitarian parity with the West, even if that can only come about through the shedding of blood. In short, the articles in this special section provide us with useful information and perceptive insights that can help us and our students better comprehend the reality of Islam in Asia. We are grateful to Professor Metcalf and the other authors for making this first guest-edited section of the journal a meaningful resource for our readers.

## **RESEARCH OF NOTE**

# **Telling the Story of Islam in Asia: Reflections on Teleologies and Timelessness**

Barbara D. Metcalf  
University of Michigan

### **Introduction: The importance of Islam in Asia**

Any of us who teaches about Muslims in Asia is likely to feel the need to insist on the importance of the subject and its neglect by people who reduce Islam and its adherents to the Middle East or conflate Muslim and Arab.<sup>1</sup> The chart of population figures listed in the appendix shows why, in terms of the sheer numbers involved, one might want to assert Asia's importance as the four largest Muslim populations in the world: Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are in Asia. The largest concentration of Muslims anywhere is in the area we demarcate "South Asia," the old British India with close to half a billion population of Muslims. Approximately one in three of the world's Muslims lives in the first set of countries listed in the appendix.

The population statistics within countries that automatically click "Islam" in people's minds just don't compare. Saudi Arabia may have a population of twenty-eight million, all Muslim, but Uttar Pradesh, the state I primarily study in the Republic of India, with only an eighteen percent Muslim population, has about six million more, some thirty-four million.

Numbers aside, sadly many of these areas have in fact come into popular purview in recent years because of war, violence, and strategic considerations. Afghanistan and Pakistan are widely considered as among the most dangerous places geopolitically in the world, and American troops are deeply

involved in the on-going fighting there. No country has matched Pakistan as far as I know in the illegal dissemination of nuclear technology. Terrorist blasts put idyllic Bali on the map. Territorial and culturally-distinctive separatist movements, some of which morph into Islamically defined movements, have been endemic in Kashmir, effectively now divided between India and Pakistan. They are persistent in the southern Philippine area and, more recently evident in Thailand. The new “stans” of Central Asia have also come into our consciousness in recent years, a consciousness defined primarily by fears of draconian militancy.

In many areas of Asia, Muslims have been significant victims of violence. This has been true for the Muslim population of western and southwest China, where Muslims have suffered human rights abuses, as they shockingly have in India, where anti-Muslim pogroms, notably in 1992 and 2002, killed thousands and shocked a world otherwise so appreciative of India’s democracy.

An important characteristic of many Muslim populations in Asia is their location within religiously plural societies and the fact that in many cases they form minority populations. The biggest countries of the Middle East, like Egypt, Turkey, or Iran, are 90% or more Muslim—Egypt is 90%, the other two almost 100%—as are others in the region. In contrast, as shown on the population chart, in most of these countries in Asia, Muslims live with populations of varied religious backgrounds. The only country on the list that is 100% Muslim is the tiny island Maldives (whose existence, global warming puts at risk!). Only Pakistan and Afghanistan merge with their western neighbors as countries of primarily Muslim populations, and Pakistan, like Bangladesh, has the proportion of Muslims it does because of the 1947 partition of British India that drew international boundaries precisely in order to separate out contiguous areas of majority Muslim populations. Bangladesh, like Indonesia, has a non-Muslim population of 15-20%.

### **Historical stories as the key to interpretations of “Islam” and Naipaul’s version:**

Interpretations of the origins of Muslims in South Asia and of the nature of Islam in these culturally pluralistic contexts typically revolved around stories that are largely historical. These stories often entail stereotypical thinking about Muslims, and are uniformly forged in the context of modern nationalisms. The recognition that these historical stories are as much “political” as they are “scientific,” is a problem that dogs not only our teaching and research on Muslims in Asia but that in varying ways engages profound issues in public life. *Historical narratives as nationalist myths become part of one’s common sense and are profoundly difficult to dislodge.* That is the reason why it seems to me that the history alluded to in my title, “telling the story of Islam in Asia,” matters so much to our teaching. Ideologies that underly *nationalism*, which worldwide have involved a most powerful loyalty of the recent past, shape history and culture in the direction that presumes the existence of shared national characteristics and cultural homogeneity. Those characteristics may be defined in relation to external powers or in response to internal populations whose existence is seen as problematic. However told, at the core of any nationalist ideology is, a collective biography that tells a version of the genetic continuity of a collective life. It is “timeless” in the sense of reading present values and loyalties anachronistically into the past; it is “teleological” in its development toward the present.

V. S. Naipaul, the Trinidad-born, Sussex-settled, Nobel prize winning author of *Brahmin and Indian-indentured labor heritage* crafted one deceptively persuasive story about Muslims in the broad swathe through southern Asia—Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia—a story that turns out to be one of “Western” difference forged precisely, as we have learned long since from Edward Said, by projecting all that the narrators reject onto their own version of an “East,” often equated with “Islam.” European nationalisms were shaped in a context of self-distinction from populations, including those they conquered, that were seen as trapped in a distant past characterized above

all by “religion” that determined all they did. Islam, at times admired for its monotheism, more typically was excoriated for fanaticism, despotism, and irrationality.

In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution of 1979, that so shook the certainties of Cold War politics and the rationality of market logic, Naipaul travelled via Iran on into South Asia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. His subsequent book, *Among the Believers*, told its readers what they wanted to hear. Presented as the work of a mere transmitter, a listener telling us “just the facts,” Naipaul, the voice of Enlightenment reason, depicted “Islamic” rage and resentment, for which, as the anthropologist Michael Gilson puts it, “this one-dimensional, historically unvarying ‘Islam’ has a special affinity” (Gilson 1998). The story of the Iranian revolution as one of unbridled fanaticism—not, for example, as a story of a non-violent revolution against Iranian and foreign exploitation—led America, for example, to its support of Saddam Hussein in his ghastly unprovoked war against Iran and continues to distort foreign policy in the region. Naipaul’s credibility to Euro-American readers was double, simultaneously a brilliant writer and himself sufficiently part of an undifferentiated “other” that he must be right.

Naipaul’s history thus had a timeless “Islam” as its motor. The historical experiences of colonialism, the north-south divide, and incipient globalization had little place in his narrative.

Almost 20 years later, in the late 1990s, Naipaul returned to Iran, and also to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan and wrote *Beyond Belief* (1998), a work that evoked his earlier title—“among the believers.” Now his issue proved not only to be Islam—the timeless Islam of rage and resentment—but also, as his subtitle put it, in isolating a second historical theme as key for the experience of all these diverse peoples: *Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*. [underline added] Not only is Naipaul’s timeless Islam a dark blot of fanaticism, but in all these non-Arab speaking countries, Islam is a layer, an archaeological stratum, an undigested deposit over the authentic, the indigenous, the real, that leaves its followers dislocated and alienated from self and place. This is certainly a scary story, a depiction of Islam beyond the Arab world as a

simmering volcano, a place where Muslims are particularly likely to cultivate extremes, whether of fanaticism or violence.

It is a truly astonishing argument. How can Naipaul attribute this imagined fractured “conversion” to one religious tradition and one part of the world? To do so, he must ignore the way that cultural change takes place everywhere as new symbols come to give meaning to changing contexts, and all cultures reinvent themselves over time. He must imagine some rigid “Islam” that arrives fully formed in every place. And he must not only be imagining conversion as some sort of dramatic fracture—already a leap—but also assume that some residual culture is passed on through some kind of genetic memory. Naipaul clearly never heard what I think may be the most useful single sentence any history teacher—in this case Philip Curtin (the distinguished historian of Africa) said to me during my first year of graduate work—“Never forget, ‘tradition’ is exactly one generation old.”

What gives Naipaul’s argument some plausibility, I think, is that that some version of his view of “foreign” and “layering” is in fact a relentless theme in colonial-era historiography. Among Muslims and others forging modern reform movements, it has been supported by ideologies invoking identity politics, and nationalist myths. These modern visions are, I would argue, not actual descriptions of historical experience but rather subjects that need to be historicized in the context of modern societies.

### **Asking what purposes a story serves: the British colonialist story, the nationalist echo**

If we buy the Naipaul-style story of cultural layers, we are trapped into a particular set of questions, like what is foreign, i.e. “really” Islamic, and what is local. Once we move beyond that layered approach to culture, we can ask other kinds of questions. Of these, a central one is how symbols and interpretations actually work for those who embrace them. Historical stories about Muslims and about Islam in British India, for example, were *useful*. The *locus classicus* for the colonial story is the *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, first published in 1849, a compilation of translated selections in

eight substantial volumes, taken from Persian (and some Arabic) sources. It does not take any sleuthing to see what was at stake in preparing these translations. Sir Henry M. Elliot wrote as follows about the period of Muslim dynasties in his preface to the first volume:

The common people must have been plunged into the lowest depths of wretchedness and despondency. The few glimpses we have, even among the short Extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Muhammadans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures, of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them, show us that this picture is not overcharged....<sup>2</sup>

Elliot had no doubt about the purpose of these translations—totally ignoring the fact that they were isolated from their original context, transformed by translation, and taken not in their rhetorical context but as positivist fact. The translations, Elliot wrote, “[would] make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and the equity of our rule.”<sup>3</sup> India was “Hindu,” equally undifferentiated “Muslims” were foreign, and if you believed his version of a period that ignores urbanization, population growth, a renaissance of Sanskrit literature, and the emergence of modern Hinduism’s most beloved text (the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Ramcaritmanas*)—you can agree with his conclusions. The colonialist story in turn would find its way into important themes of fiction, Hindu reform movements (imputing deviance to Muslim influence), and nationalist rhetoric, and, in those contexts, it would serve to provide the negative to all that was good about “Indian” culture.

Let me turn here to an example of one of the key actors in Elliot’s drama. In the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, Mahmud, head of a

Turkish-Afghan kingdom based in an urbane and cultivated court in Ghazna, in current day Afghanistan, conducted raids as far as the coastal area of Gujarat. Now, he also tried to conquer Muslim-ruled lands to the west, a fact often forgotten in the colonial tale. Mahmud was a favorite of British historians as well as a subject of Hindu nationalist histories, which fixated on Mahmud's raids as a handy metonym for nothing less than the imagined destruction of Hindu civilization by Muslims as a whole.

Recently, the distinguished historian of early India, Romila Thapar, rewrote the story of Somnath. What she did, in a sense, was to make Mahmud *simply ordinary*. To begin with, she placed Mahmud's raids of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in the context of what, by that period, could be called "a warrior culture" throughout the Indian subcontinent, when, for example, genealogies, epics, and folklore celebrated warfare and valor on all sides. Mahmud and the Ghaznavids at one end of the subcontinent were, after all, contemporaries of the great Chola dynasty of the southeast, a Hindu dynasty celebrated by Indian nationalists. But the Cholas were conquerors as well, with their power extending from the Maldives across the south, with raids and conquests far north into Orissa and beyond, and eastwards toward southeast Asia.

Mahmud's raids at the time were simply not at all the defining moment they became in modern nationalist ideology. This is clear, Thapar argues, from contemporaneous texts and epigraphy. Mahmud did indeed seize the wealth of Hindu temples, but he was only one of many raiders, including pirates, Hindu rajas, and others, who were lured by the prosperous coast and fertile hinterland of the northwest. Temples, as active sites of accumulation and investment of wealth, were always a major magnet for warrior plunder. It is also noteworthy, lest one assume, as nationalist histories do, a monolithic "Islam," that Mahmud justified his incursions into the subcontinent on the grounds that some of the rulers adhered to the Shi'i Isma'ili and Qarmatian heresies—so his targets were many.

It was *later* chroniclers of the Turko-Afghan rulers, two to three hundred years after the fact, Thapare points out, who embroidered Mahmud's career to make him a great iconoclast

and hero of Islam and add legitimacy to the heritage of their respective sultans. It is these accounts, extracted from the ideological contexts of their production, that are read as fact about an imagined past. Thapar in contrast makes Mahmud part of the context of his times in which his fundamental strategies of rule *are not fundamentally Islamic* and in which the boundaries of contemporary territorial nationalism have no place.

The British did not stop with words. In the midst of the unmitigated disaster of the First Afghan War that took place from 1839 to 1842, India's Governor-General Ellenborough ordered one of his generals to secure a set of gates from Ghazna on the grounds that they were the very gates looted from one of Mahmud's primary targets, the temple at Somnath in Gujarat. Ellenborough issued a triumphant declaration *that the return of these gates meant that an "insult of 800 years is at last avenged."* The idea that a category of people called "Indian" had harbored a grievance continuously over eight hundred years (Davis 1997: 201-02) is as implausible as Naipaul's formulation of Islamic angst over conversion over all those centuries. Ellenborough, however, organized a ceremony to welcome the gates, and then had them carried in procession across India in anticipation of their "reinstallation" in Gujarat. Of the many reasons why this scheme was misplaced, it soon became apparent (even if kept under wraps), was that the gates not only had no connection with Somnath but none with Gujarat at all (Davis 1997: 209)

Performative history at Somnath was to have a second chance. The ground had been laid over several decades by an idealization of "pre-Islamic" India, as it was imagined, as part of a strand of political rhetoric and blockbuster historical fiction in Indian nationalism. Then, in a triumph of this current within the explicitly secular nationalist movement, shortly after Indian independence, a project was undertaken to actually "rebuild" a temple at Somnath. Even Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the president of India, over the objections of Prime Minister Nehru, who was deeply committed to secularism, subsequently attended the ritual inauguration of the new temple. And the language used on that

occasion depicted Muslims as foreign and emphasized the importance of the recovery of Indian self-respect. The implications from the whole undertaking were that Hindus were the real natives and the real citizens of India, a perspective little different from that of the British a century before.

The histories created in the colonial period are thus not academic. Mahmud's story reached its climax, in a sense, with an even more dramatic post-colonial intervention in history. This was a procession in 1990 involving another allegedly historical figure, the god Ram, who was launched in a "chariot" from Somnath to Ram's purported birthplace in Ayodhya, the site of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal mosque.. A campaign to destroy the mosque, of which the procession was a key element, culminated two years later when a well-organized crowd of hundreds of participants, inspired by Hindutva ("Hinduness") destroyed the mosque by hand. The retelling and reenactment of these historical stories does not occur in a vacuum but is brought to life and serves functional ends in specific social and political contexts. The episode of the mosque destruction, for example, was a call to Hindu unity at a time of social unrest among disadvantaged lower strata of society. A call to Hindu unity displaced those tensions onto the Muslim population, imagined as both a historic and present threat. It led to an anti-Muslim pogrom that felt its impact most dramatically in the great city of Mumbai, hundreds of miles distant from the now destroyed mosque.

### **An alternate nationalism**

There is a second historical story about Muslims in South Asia: a story equally nationalist, equally in need of historicization, namely the story that Islam in this part of the world is in fact not at all foreign. It is different from some (imagined, "real") Islam out there in the Middle East. It is uniquely "Indian." The genius of India's civilization, through this argument, is its "tolerance," its "absorptive" capacity, its "syncretism." What is interesting in this story, of course is the fact that it connotes nationalism in a mirror version, but, perhaps what is even more interesting it seems to me, is the fact that it implicitly takes for

granted that “real” Islam—perhaps Arab Islam is foreign, intolerant, rigid, and so forth. This argument serves as a kind of “liberal,” inclusive nationalism. Given academics’ penchant for this kind of political position, we find in relation to Islam in the Indian subcontinent, an abundance of studies of Sufi shrines, devotional music, life cycle rituals, and always, always, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal Akbar, whom Amartya Sen, the Nobel prize winning economist and public intellectual, turns into a modern liberal. And the new Bollywood crossover film “Jodha Akbar” gives us a reason: Akbar is *different* from all the other Mughals, all the other Muslims—in this case, thanks to the influence of his Hindu wife (New York Times). The fact that Akbar is so singled out is a reminder that this mirror version of the history of Islam carries within itself unspoken assumptions of the original story as well.

Partha Chatterjee calls this second story the “domestication” of Islam. He writes, “The idea of the singularity of national history has inevitably led to a single source of Indian tradition, namely ancient Hindu civilization. *Islam here is either the history of foreign conquest, or a domesticated element of everyday popular life* [italics added] (Chatterjee 1993:113). “Domestication,” ironically, implicitly confirms all the bad things that are already “known.” One is better off closing one’s eyes not only to conquest per se, but to South Asia’s traditions of Islamic scholarship, canonical rituals, *shari`a* institutions and so forth, which would disrupt the theory of domestication that seems to offer so much hope.

### **Stories in Southeast and East Asia**

Going beyond South Asia to Asia as a whole, stories about Muslims are, again, largely forged in a national or nationalist context. At times it seems that East Asia tends more toward the model of depicting Muslims as foreigners, and in Southeast Asia, the model of a “domesticated” Islam in much of public life and even scholarship is often expressed.

In the latter area, again, a kind of local Islam is posed against a Middle Eastern Islam. Thus the Wikipedia article on Islam in Malaysia explains that “Islam came to Malaysia with the Indian

traders from South India and was not of the more orthodox Islamic tradition of Arabia. Islam was adopted peacefully by the coastal trading ports people of Malaysia and Indonesia, absorbing rather than conquering existing beliefs.”<sup>4</sup> Similar arguments are made about a peaceful Islam, historically coexisting with other religious traditions, in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. Recent separatist movements in the latter two countries or movements calling for strict reformist standards may, therefore, be treated as aberrant. As the Dutch anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen writes in relation to Indonesia

To foreign observers as well as to many Indonesians themselves, Indonesian Islam has always appeared to be very different from Islam at most other places, especially from the way it is practiced in the Arabian peninsula.... especially in Java, Islam was not more than a thin veneer, underneath which one could easily discern an oriental worldview that differed in essential respects from the transcendentalism and legal orientation of Middle Eastern Islam. The religious attitudes of the Indonesians, it was often said, were more influenced by the Indian religions (Hinduism, Buddhism) that had long been established in the Archipelago and the even older indigenous religions with their ancestor cults and veneration of earth gods and a plethora of spirits.<sup>5</sup>

Van Bruinessen goes on, however, to make two extremely important points. One is that such judgments were typically made by people who had never observed, or chose to ignore the diversity of practice in what are taken as core Muslim areas of the Middle East. These may in fact, include some cases when the source of what is assumed to be aberrant practice is situated, when contrasted with a reified, textual Islam. Second, such a story marginalizes and makes foreign, even dangerous, rich traditions of cosmopolitan Sufism and Islamic scholarly learning. Today such interpretations may be used to position

Southeast Asian states globally in order to contrast them with images of Muslims as “Wahhabis” and “Taliban.” But they also have served historically as part of indigenous contestations within an Islam which have many competing strands, including new interpretations that find stories about “syncretism” a way of condemning popular practices in favor of new standards. Thus, these generalizations about Islam in this region as inherently “syncretic,” “tolerant,” or whatever, should not be taken as fact simply because Southeast Asians also say them, but seen rather as positions that serve certain kinds of political or cultural goals. They also need to be recognized, in the historian William Roff’s famous phrase, as stories that give us an “Islam Obscured.”<sup>6</sup>

The images produced about Muslims in China are similarly ones produced in the context of modern nationalism, presumably making them one of the marginalized groups (as Dru Gladney writes [2004]) against which the Han Chinese have identified themselves. Muslims in China are imagined, about half of them, as distinctive Hui, on the one hand, scattered throughout the country and ethnically and linguistically indistinguishable from Han Chinese. This population in turn distinguishes itself from the Uigur and other Turkic Muslims of China’s far west. Even so, Paul Theroux, the travel writer, claims in writing about Muslims generally that “Muslims have been in China for well over a thousand years and yet they are still regarded as strange and inscrutable and backward, and politically suspect” (in Forbes 2001). They are thus always at risk for the “foreign” label, so dangerous to anyone so named in our continuing era of nationalism. Again, the “work” of images like these in sustaining particular ideologies must always be distinguished from the actual histories of Muslim populations over time.

### **Conclusion: Challenging Stereotypes, Abandoning “Culture Talk”**

What constitutes successful college teaching? Recently Mark Edmundson, writing in *The New York Times*, made a provocative argument that the key to successful teaching, whether in biology or in the kind of disciplines taught by Asianists,

was the ability to see a subject afresh, to present it in a way that challenged students' preconceived notions. He explained his argument as follows:

Because really good teaching is about not seeing the world the way that everyone else does. Teaching is about being what people are now prone to call “counterintuitive” but to the teacher means simply being honest. The historian sees the election not through the latest news blast but in the context of presidential politics from George Washington to the present. The biologist sees a natural world that's not calmly picturesque but a jostling, striving, evolving contest of creatures in quest of reproduction and survival. The literature professor won't accept the current run of standard clichés but demands bursting metaphors and ironies of an insinuatingly serpentine sort. The philosopher demands an argument as escape proof as an iron box: what currently passes for logic makes him want to grasp himself by the hair and yank himself out of his seat.

The discussions in public life and even in some of our textbooks that describe Islam and Muslims may make some teachers feel the same way. Teaching about Muslims and Islam in Asia cries out for voices able to show the way the images and the narratives about Muslims have been constructed in specific historical and political contexts that may not be true to the populations they purport to describe. Above all, in our modern world, these contexts are driven by nationalist ideologies that should be part of our data, not taken as accurate representations of the people we hope to study. One of the contrarian stances we must most urgently need to take is the need to bracket “Islam” as our explanation of everything Muslims do—to abandon what Mahmud Mamdani in his aptly title book, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, calls “culture talk” (Mamdani 2004). Arguably we learn more about Mahmud of Ghazna from studying the Cholas than from reading the Qur'an, just to take one example.

To turn from the eleventh century to the present, for all of the understandable despair over the appalling lack of cultural literacy about Islam in public life, important though that is, surely our leaders, and all of us as citizens, would often do better to figure out that Muslims are motivated not by something obscurantist and fanatical but by just about everything that motivates everyone else: nationalism, the goal of self-determination, elite competition and other forms of self-interest, and opportunities to lead a good and moral life. It is this larger context of Muslim life and history that our classrooms need to illuminate.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Lisa Trivedi for inviting me to speak on this subject at the annual meeting of the New York Conference on Asian Studies, held at Hamilton College, Clinton New York, 29 September 2008, and to colleagues at both the talk and conference generally for their stimulating questions and presentations. The talk overlaps in part with my introduction to an anthology of primary sources, *Islam in South Asia in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming [2009]).

<sup>2</sup>H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, trans. and eds., *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, 8 vols. (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, n.d.), 1:xxi.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:xxii, xxvii.

<sup>4</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_in\\_Malaysia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Malaysia)

<sup>5</sup>“Global and local in Indonesian Islam”, *Southeast Asian Studies* (Kyoto) vol. 37, no.2 (1999), 46-63. [http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Bruinessen\\_Global\\_and\\_local\\_in\\_Indonesian\\_Islam.pdf](http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Bruinessen_Global_and_local_in_Indonesian_Islam.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>William R. Roff, “Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia,” *Archipel* 29 (1985): 7-34

**Appendix:**  
**APPROXIMATE POPULATION FIGURES**

from CIA: The World Factbook  
(<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> 9/18/08)

**SOUTHASIA**

Pakistan	164m (95% of 173m)
India	154m (of 13.4% of 1, 148.m)
Bangladesh	128m (83% of 154m)
Afghanistan	32.6m (99% of 33m)
Sri Lanka	1.6m (7.6% of 21m)
Nepal	1.3m (4.2% of 30m)
Maldives	386k (100%)

**SOUTHEASTASIA**

Indonesia	204m (86% of 238m)
Malaysia	14m (50% of 25m) [other sources: 60%]
Philippines	4.5m (5% of 96m)
Thailand	3m (5% of 65m)
Burma/Myanmar	2m (4% of 48m)

**CENTRALASIA**

Uzbekistan	24m (88% of 27m)
Kazakhstan	7m (47% of 15m)
Tajikistan	6.3m (90% of 7m)
Turkmenistan	4.5m (89% of 5m)
Kyrgyzstan	3.8m (75% of 5m)

**EASTASIA**

China	13m-26m (1-2% of 1,330m)
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## **Benevolence for Obedience:**

### **Policies on Muslims in Late Imperial and Modern China**

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In telling the story of Islam in China, scholars have tended to depict the historical encounter of China's Muslim population with the social, political and cultural forces of Chinese state and society in terms of either "conflict or concord." This generalization, which reduces a complex and nuanced history to a simple binary, is flawed not because it is completely untrue, but rather because its truth is incomplete. Chinese Muslims' responses to the social and cultural context in which they live have been diverse and multifaceted, and the phenomenon of Islam in China is no more a monolith than either of the two great, multifaceted civilizations that lend it its name. In late imperial China, within the same century, albeit at different ends of the Empire, examples of both types of Muslim response to Chinese hegemony were witnessed: intellectual rapprochement and armed rebellion. In between those extremes, however, we see varying degrees of Muslim assimilation to the norms of Chinese society and a variety of positions adopted by the imperium and officialdom *vis-à-vis* the Empire's Muslim subjects. In many ways, this pattern is repeated in the People's Republic of China (PRC) today.

The story of Muslims' relations with the Chinese state, whether in imperial times or today, has been shaped by the vicissitudes of Chinese history, as well as the global history that has brought different peoples into contact with one another. It must, therefore, not be viewed synchronically. Nor can we overlook the geographic complexity behind this story; all histories (like all politics), no matter how global their consequences, are, after all, local.

Islam first arrived in China during the Tang dynasty (618-906), brought by merchants and mercenaries. Since that time, Muslims have established a permanent minority presence in the country, required to acquiesce to government authority as well as social and cultural forces. However, there have been instances of Chinese Muslim uprisings and even armed rebellion over the long history of Islam in China. The fact that Chinese Muslims, both in the past and today, demonstrate a variety of social, political, and religious perspectives, which are largely determined by historical and geographical factors, serves to remind us of the tremendous diversity within Chinese Islam, from one region to another. The treatment of Muslims by various Chinese governments also reflects the fluctuating state of affairs of different epochs, ranging from suspicion and persecution, to benign indifference, to expressions of outright political benevolence.

After nearly a millennium of naturalization on Chinese soil, the Muslim population of China, enhanced by periodic waves of immigration from the central Islamic lands, reached a point of cultural critical mass, following a familiar pattern in an ethno-religious minority's response to rival pressures. The urge to assimilate in order to survive and be accepted into the mainstream society competed with an impulse to assert a distinct religious and cultural identity to save the community from being inundated and washed away by the mainstream. The intensity of these rival pressures has varied from period to period and from region to region, resulting in greater or lesser degrees of acquiescence or resistance to assimilation.

There is, nevertheless, some continuity to the story. A Muslim population (of indeterminate size),\* ethnically and linguistically Chinese, and scattered across the country in both rural and urban areas, traces its roots back to various tides of Muslim

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\*Overall population figures for Muslims in China are elusive and vary according to source. According to PRC government sources, about 2% of China's approximately 1.3 billion people are classified as Muslim (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/ch.html>). That would make the overall Muslim population of the PRC somewhere around 20-25 million, though some non-governmental estimates reach upwards of 50 or even 100 million.

migration and intermarriage with non-Muslim Chinese. These people, called the Hui and categorized officially by the Communist government as one of the minority nationalities of the People's Republic, exhibit great diversity in terms of religious practice and integration into the cultural mainstream of Han Chinese society.\*\*

Tracing the historical pattern of Chinese Muslim naturalization under rival pressures leads us to examine cultural and intellectual trends among a highly assimilated Chinese Muslim intellectual elite of the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, who attempted to express the teachings of Islam in the classical Chinese idiom of Neo-Confucianism. The period was marked socio-politically by the transition from the toppled Ming dynasty (1368-1644), a native Chinese regime, to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), established by Manchurian invaders from the North.

### **Muslims in the Early Qing**

The second Manchu dynast, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722), sought to establish political hegemony and assert the new dynasty's cultural legitimacy for disparate constituencies. The Emperor and his successors strove to project an image of culturally coherent sovereignty, despite their foreign origins, over an ethnically diverse empire, held together by traditional Confucian ideas of moral order. This socio-political situation provided an opportunity for other communities in China to follow the Manchu example. Among them, Chinese Muslims expressed their beliefs and collective identity as being not only unthreatening to Chinese culture and society, but, moreover, completely consonant with the teachings and values of the dominant

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\*\*The Hui are one of ten Muslim minority nationalities (*Shaoshu Minzu*) in the PRC. The others (Uighur, Kazak, Dongxiang, Kirghiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Bonan, and Tatar), are not ethno-linguistically Chinese; they all speak Turkic (or other Altaic) languages. According to Chinese census statistics, approximately 91.5% of China's people are members of the Han majority nationality, leaving all minorities to round out the population at 8.5%. Of the official estimate of 20-25 million Muslims, nearly half are Hui with an estimated 45% comprised of the Uighur population, and roughly 5% belonging to other Muslim minority nationalities. While those proportions are credible, the overall number of Muslims in the PRC is disputed.

Confucian intellectual and cultural paradigm. In this way, the early Qing period witnessed a great flourishing of Chinese Islamic literature and communal pride among the more assimilated Muslim communities of central and eastern China.

Chinese Muslim scholars, beginning in the late Ming and continuing into the early Qing period, produced a body of literature collectively called the *Han Kitab*, a name that evokes both sides of their dual heritage: the Chinese word *Han*, referring to the Chinese language, and the Arabic word *Kitab*, meaning “book”. Quite aptly, the term refers to a literary corpus devoted to explicating Islamic belief and practice in classical Chinese, highly evocative of and influenced by Confucian thought. The *Han Kitab* literature was intended for a dual audience: first Sinicized (and Sinophone) Muslims and then curious non-Muslim literati. Their use of Neo-Confucianism to translate the tenets of Islam reflects the authors’, and their primary audience’s ethnic and cultural simultaneity.

Many of the *Han Kitab* authors were politically astute and sensitive to the interests of their community. Muslims in China, then as now, have lived under non-Muslim jurisdiction, free to apply Islamic law within the usages of individual or communal religious practices, as far as government indulgence would allow. Yet obedience to government regulations was motivated not only by fear of reprisals for disobedience or loss of religious rights. Muslims who have regarded China as their home have also assimilated the traditional Chinese reverence for state authority. The Chinese Muslim literati shied away from discussing potentially controversial subjects, focusing instead on topics that were easily aligned with mainstream Chinese culture and could help grant legitimacy to Islam. One of the major topics on which they focused was the origin of Islam in China, which they recounted in narratives that explained and justified the existence of their community. One such narrative highlights the *Han Kitab* view of the position of Islam *vis-à-vis* imperial authority.

The *locus classicus* of this origin narrative is a 17<sup>th</sup> century work called the *Huihui Yuanlai*, or “The Origin of the Muslims,”

attributed to Liu Sanjie. It recounts a story involving the Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649) of the Tang dynasty (618-906), who had a dream in which a monstrous entity threatened his realm. In the dream, the Emperor beheld a bearded, turbaned man who was able to quell the monster. The Emperor's advisors told him that the dream depicted a great "Sage" in the West. The Emperor dispatched emissaries to fetch the Sage and bring him back to China. The Sage, none other than the Prophet Muhammad, declined to go to China himself, but sent a delegation led by his close companion (and maternal uncle), Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas. According to the Chinese Muslim tradition, the Prophet's delegation remained in China, where they served the Emperor and helped pacify the Tang Empire. The historicity of this oft-repeated Chinese Muslim legend is highly doubtful, yet its mythic message is clear: Muslims were sent to China on a divine mission, and by remaining there have contributed to the peace and prosperity of the country. As Liu Sanjie writes: "We have dwelt peacefully in China and have brought perpetual tranquility. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the Emperor of the Tang for his ritual solemnity and proper treatment; even today we safeguard the state, without moving anymore."<sup>1</sup>

The *Han Kitab* literature reflects a positive attitude towards imperial authority. Liu Zhu (ca. 1660 – ca. 1730), son of Liu Sanjie and the most prolific *Han Kitab* author, in his renowned work on Islamic ritual law, the *Tianfang Dianli*, affirms a simultaneous allegiance to the ideals of the Confucian social hierarchy and the duties of Islam, which he presents as being synonymous:

This is the Teaching of the Five Ethical Relationships. In Islam, they are also called the "Five Accomplishments." Now, the proper relationship between sovereign and subject completes the state... When these Five Standards are completely cultivated the Way of Man is made complete.<sup>2</sup>

For the Muslim literati of China, an integral part of one's religious duties was obedience to a righteous ruler. According to this

view, Chinese Muslims were obligated to show loyalty and obedience to the Emperor.

In terms of honoring the throne, Liu Sanjie actually mentions the Kangxi emperor in the *Huihui Yuanlai*. He frames the story of the Tang Emperor's dream within another story about a meeting between the Kangxi emperor and a Muslim general, Ma Jinliang. As the story goes, the emperor was returning from one of his imperial tours of inspection and stopped overnight at the general's headquarters. The two men spent the evening discussing Confucian philosophy. The emperor then questioned the general about his religion, asking him why his ancestors had first come to China. The general had to confess his ignorance of this history. The emperor responded by handing him a book about Islam.<sup>3</sup>

The Kangxi emperor is depicted as both cultured and learned in the Chinese tradition, a tacit endorsement of state orthodoxy. The Emperor is also shown to be a ruler concerned with the affairs of his people and sensitive to the diversity of cultures in his realm, even an advocate for Islamic learning among his Muslim subjects. Again, the historicity of this encounter between the Kangxi Emperor and General Ma is doubtful,<sup>4</sup> yet the story's portrayal of the emperor is based on historical realities, like the fact that he was known to have amassed a collection of foreign religious texts.<sup>5</sup>

An astute politician, the Kangxi emperor was well aware of the value of maintaining good political relations with friendly Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims on the western frontier of the expanding Qing Empire. It was from among the Muslim population in the vicinity of Hami, Turkestan, that the early Qing rulers "drew the additional military strength to conquer and control Central Asia," particularly to wrest it from the grasp of the Mongol Khan, Galdan.<sup>6</sup> The Kangxi emperor did not underestimate the value of Muslim cooperation, nor the potential for Muslim unrest; anti-Qing hostility had plagued the dynasty soon after its establishment, and would again be a source of trouble for Kangxi's successors as they tried to exercise control over the Turkic Muslim-dominated lands in present day Xinjiang

Province. Thus, the attitude of the Kangxi court towards Muslims in the realm alternated between paternalistic solicitude and cautious circumspection.

From 1646-1648, Muslim rebellion in Gansu province had threatened the nascent dynasty's territorial integrity under Kangxi's father, the Shunzhi emperor (r. 1644-1661). Consequently, the Kangxi emperor inherited a persistent concern over the outbreak of Han-Hui quarrels that could destabilize frontier territories. This concern helped shape early Qing ethnic and religious policies, as summarized by historian Donald Leslie: "Autocratic rule was to be tempered by imperial benevolence; and religious freedom was allowed so long as it did not interfere with good order and obedience to the state."<sup>7</sup>

The Kangxi emperor was sophisticated in his understanding of ethnic politics, and did not make the mistake of painting all Muslims with the same brush. Chinese Muslims were to be distinguished from the Turkic Muslims, most notably the Uighurs, who resided on the Central Asian frontier. (Indeed, even today, the ethnic Chinese Hui commonly distinguish themselves from these Turkic Muslims, whom they regard as un-Chinese, unruly, even uncivilized despite their common bond of Islam.) But even among Sinophone Muslims, there were distinctions; Chinese Muslims in Gansu and other western provinces were far less Sinicized than those living in central and eastern provinces, the cultural heart of China. The emperor was able to discern a difference between "good" and "bad" Muslims. And the highly urbane, acculturated *Han Kitab* literati assisted in the promotion and maintenance of their positive image by flattering the throne and supporting the regime, as in this passage from a preface by Yang Peilu to Liu Zhi's *Tianfang Dianli*, in which he praises the Kangxi emperor's handling of the annexation of Hami:

The sage Son of Heaven has presided over the Empire for forty-eight years.<sup>8</sup> Virtue covers the realm, benefiting areas both inside and outside China. The Emperor first installed a ruler in Hami, thereby giving

that country a new lease on life...our Emperor's way of showing kindness to people from far-off lands...Thus, it may be said that Muslim people heard about and admired the Emperor's reputation for righteousness...<sup>9</sup>

Evidence of the Kangxi emperor's tolerant disposition towards his law-abiding Muslim subjects comes from various sources. First, we see from his personal writings that he was aware of Islam as one of many faiths in the world and of Muslims as one people among many:

Every country must have some spirits that it reveres. This is true for our dynasty, as for Mongols or Mohammedans, Miao or Lolo, or other foreigners. Just as everyone fears something, some snakes but not toads, some toads but not snakes; and as all countries have different pronunciations and different alphabets:<sup>10</sup>

An Imperial Edict dated 1694, prominently displayed on a plaque at the Niujie (Ox Street) Mosque in Beijing, reveals the Kangxi Emperor to have been rather well informed about his Muslim subjects:

We have reviewed the great customs and classics of the Han and Hui people, from ancient times until today, and have found that from the beginning they are both on the magnificent Way. (By contrast) the seventy-two sects have been cultivating Immortality or striving to become Buddhas,<sup>11</sup> corrupting the truth and leading people astray, with lawless heterodoxies of all kinds springing up all over. What has already passed we shall not prosecute, but in the future, the violators will be summarily executed. The Han Chinese ministers and officials all have their allotted duties and from time to time enjoy the benevolence of the Sovereign,<sup>12</sup> participating in the affairs of court according to the

calendar. On the other hand, the Hui face their Lord and do obeisance to their Sage five times everyday, and certainly do not enjoy subsidies from us, and yet they still know to give honor where honor is due.<sup>13</sup> And so the Han are not as good as the Hui. Let this be known in every province: If any officials or common people, due to a petty grudge, use some pretext falsely to accuse the Hui religion of plotting a rebellion, the official in charge will execute them first and report to me afterwards. Throughout the realm, the Hui people shall abide by the principles of Purity and Truth, nor would they disobey a command or betray our kind intentions and appreciation of the significance of the Way.

Respect this and comply.<sup>14</sup>

While this proclamation can hardly be compared to Constantine the Great's Edict of Milan, and was not even momentous enough in the context of Chinese history to have received much attention in official Qing sources, it was nevertheless of great significance to Chinese Muslims. This is why the community around the Niujie Mosque displayed the plaque so prominently. While all Qing "emperors from 1644 to 1781 issued occasional decrees in favor of Muslims,"<sup>15</sup> these were mostly political proclamations, which rarely made mention of Muslim subjects in such flattering terms. In this regard, the 1694 edict has a couple of precedents from the Ming period. In 1407, the Yongle emperor (r. 1403-1425) issued a decree protecting the Muslims of Quanzhou, Fujian province, threatening those who would "maltreat, insult, cheat or bully" them with severe punishment.<sup>16</sup> However, this decree was issued mostly as a personal favor to his close advisor, the Muslim admiral Zheng He, and it did not reflect any special understanding of Islamic teachings. By contrast, an edict of the Zhengde emperor (r. 1506-1521) praised the "teaching of the Pure and True" (*Qingzhenjiao*, i.e., Islam) for its superiority to Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism in its ability fully to

integrate social and spiritual concerns. However, the edict did not address the place of Muslims in Chinese society *per se*.<sup>17</sup>

The Kangxi edict addressed both social and doctrinal matters, demonstrating the emperor's knowledge of Islamic belief and practice as well as his determination to protect the lives and well being of Chinese Muslims. Yet one should not infer that he felt a strong personal affinity to Islamic doctrine or Muslim culture. The edict was surely motivated in part by the need to "juggle constituencies," pitting rival groups against one another as part of early Qing ethnic politics. We may glean from the wording of the edict strong political motivations, probably more concerned with checking the power of Han Chinese officials than elevating the status of Muslims.

The pro-Muslim edict of 1694 probably had very little impact outside the capital. However, the value of this imperial nod in their direction was understandably of great significance to Chinese Muslims, explaining why a tradition of folklore has developed around it. A local Beijing legend tells of how the Capital Prosecutor witnessed what he considered to be strange behavior in the Muslim quarter: throngs of people gathering at night in the mosque. Because this kind of activity was usually associated with seditious, heterodox sects, he concluded that the congregants were up to no good. He supposed that reporting his observation to the emperor would earn him merit at court. His report alleged that the Muslims were plotting a rebellion, inspired by their devotion to a foreign god, under the leadership of the mysterious Muhammad. Sufficiently concerned, the emperor, who was known to disguise himself in commoner's clothes to venture out of the Forbidden City, decided to visit the Niuji district to investigate the charges himself. Upon entering the mosque, he learned that the Muslims were celebrating Ramadan and were gathering for prayer and nothing else. Soon thereafter, he dismissed the official who made the complaint and issued the edict. He reportedly presented a souvenir of his visit (a sedan chair and/or bell) to the Muslim community; he also sponsored the renovation of the Niuji Mosque two years later in 1696.

This legend may be based on actual events, which are chronicled in an essay about Qing government policy towards Muslims by Li Xinghua.<sup>18</sup> If so, it portrays the extent to which the early Qing rulers, especially the Kangxi emperor, regarded the Muslims as an important political constituency. Moreover, the fact that the story is so widely disseminated among and oft repeated by Chinese Muslims reflects how important it was to their own sense of legitimacy. The edict has provided two important affirmations for the Muslims: that they are not a heterodox threat to Confucian orthodoxy and civil society, and that their existence in China is valid and valuable. That the Kangxi emperor would deign to visit the mosque and then proclaim the virtues of Islam was precisely the kind of official recognition that Chinese Muslims increasingly sought in order to confirm their legitimacy and secure a safe position within Chinese society, even as popular sentiment among many Han officials and laypeople remained less friendly.

The search for a safe niche within society by acculturated Chinese Muslims was necessary because they lived as a minority amidst a majority that did not perceive them as fully Chinese. Popular prejudices maintained an undercurrent of anti-Muslim bias that exists in China even today. The official views held by the various governments have tended to be more nuanced, but among Chinese officials there have always been suspicions of sedition on the part of ethnic minorities, and even more so on the part of non-Confucian (or today non-Communist) religious communities, whose unusual beliefs and customs have been thought to carry a threat to moral order and state authority.

The Kangxi Edict of 1694 is one of the clearest expressions of the early Qing official policy on Islam, which was tolerant yet insistent on civil order and state orthodoxy. This stern demand for order, tempered by paternalistic benevolence has been succinctly paraphrased: “‘They are our children’—but they had better obey the law!”<sup>19</sup> The edict shows that Chinese Muslims during this period were afforded considerable rights under the aegis of the emperor, who wisely discerned between unwarranted anti-Muslim prejudice and persecution by local

officials on the one hand, and genuine threats to state stability represented by disobedience on the other.

The Kangxi emperor's policy of distinguishing among constituencies and offering benevolence in exchange for obedience makes obvious political sense in a multicultural empire ruled by an ethnic minority dynasty. Thus, it became the model for Kangxi's immediate successors. His son, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722-1735), issued four edicts concerning Muslims from 1724-1730, and while they may not have been very flattering of Islam, which he said "offers nothing worthwhile," he still maintained that "there is no reason to forbid or drive [it] out."<sup>20</sup> In 1729, his edict averred that the "Hui people...are all children of our country" and "cannot be regarded as separate. As long as they peacefully keep their customs, they are not to be compared with traitors, lawbreakers or those seeking to delude and lead people astray."<sup>21</sup> A 1730 edict recognized the merits of good Muslim subjects: "There is no lack among them of loyal servants of the country," but it also warned that if "the Hui people indeed transgress, laws and statutes exist under which they will certainly be punished."<sup>22</sup>

The limits of imperial tolerance were tested under the Qianlong emperor (1736-1796), whose reign implemented a military occupation of Xinjiang and put down significant Muslim-led rebellions in the 1780s. In the midst of the rebellions, the emperor made a sweeping generalization about Muslims in an edict declaring, "These sort of people put violence before everything and have no loyalty to the state."<sup>23</sup> A 1781 edict took a more nuanced stance, returning to the Kangxi-era distinction between lawless and law-abiding subjects, describing the Muslims of the Chinese interior (as distinguished from those in Xinjiang) as "being really no different from the native [Han] inhabitants. There are good and bad among them."<sup>24</sup> A 1782 edict warned of overly constraining Chinese Muslims in the practice of their religion, and expressing sensitivity to the condition of "good" Muslim subjects: "If there is excessive inquisition and interference, then law abiding Hui people will be

deprived of peace of mind,” potentially leading to “immense trouble.”<sup>25</sup>

The Qianlong court, obviously aware of the need for a nuanced policy, recognized the differences among various Muslim groups. We should note that the Muslim rebellions against the Qing dynasty of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in northwestern China were largely based on local disputes, sometimes among Muslims (both Hui and Uighur) and sometimes between Muslims and non-Muslims. When Muslims rose up against imperial authority, it was often because they felt bullied by local officials who abused their authority to side with local non-Muslims in acts of anti-Islamic bias. Even in these latter conflicts, Muslims could often be found siding with the authorities against other Muslims. So we must not imagine a unified Islamic front against the regime, nor should we forget that most of the disputes at the heart of the rebellions were based on local economic and civil issues.

### **Muslims and the State in Post-Dynastic China**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the fall of the Qing dynasty and the restoration of Han rule, the Republic of China followed the Kangxi emperor’s policy of recognizing the importance of Muslim contribution to China when the government included the Hui (along with the Han, Manchurians, Mongolians and Tibetans) among the core peoples of the new republic. The People’s Republic’s ethnic policies are far more complex, and at their inception were largely based on categories and ideas borrowed from Stalin’s Soviet Union. The PRC Constitution, which articulates the equality of all of China’s nationalities, was also modeled after the 1936 Soviet Constitution. However, it contains one important difference directly related to ethnic policy: the Soviet Constitution (on paper, at least) gave republics the right of secession, whereas the PRC Constitution strictly forbids it. As Article 4 explicitly states:

The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the

relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.\*\*\*

The emphasis on obedience to the law and acquiescence to government authority is unequivocal.

Similarly, with regard to religion, the PRC Constitution guarantees religious freedom to its citizens. Just as in imperial times when "virtually all...Sino-Muslims...shared a strong sense of *belonging* in China and of the Qing state's legitimacy,"<sup>26</sup> most Hui today understand that their fortunes are inextricably bound to those of mainstream Han society. For the protection of their religious rights, they rely most on Article 36 of the Constitution:

No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state.

It has therefore behooved Chinese Muslims to make sure that their customs be perceived as "normal religious activities,"

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\*\*\* The question of secession is not applicable to the Hui, though it is especially germane to the situation of the Uighurs of Xinjiang, whose population (like the Tibetans) includes significant separatist factions seeking independence from the PRC. Many of these factions are secular, though some are religious, with connections to militant Islamist movements in neighboring countries, including Afghanistan. After September 11, 2001, the PRC government embraced the language of the "global war on terror" in order to justify cracking down on Uighur separatists, who are portrayed in the Chinese media as terrorists.

A number of Uighur Chinese citizens were taken into U.S. custody in Afghanistan and have been held at Guantanamo Bay. Today, the question of their fate, whether or not the U.S. can return them to Chinese jurisdiction, where they will almost certainly face capital punishment as traitors, continues to be debated.

a euphemism for toeing the party line, obeying the law and otherwise avoiding actions deemed threatening to national unity and state stability.

Since the Constitution was first ratified in 1954 and then updated in 1982, there has been very little change in the language outlining official PRC policy on religion. With specific regard to Islam and Muslims, the Communist government has proudly publicized gestures of tolerance and benevolence in a series of White Papers over the past two decades, including how many mosques are maintained in the country; how many government-trained imams are serving; and, especially, how many Chinese Muslims have been permitted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca each year.<sup>27</sup> Such statistics are certainly intended to promote good will among China's Muslim population, but also have value beyond China's borders. Celebration of Beijing's generosity to its Muslim citizens is also used to impress foreign Islamic nations, including regimes that supply oil necessary to China's economic growth, with the picture that the PRC treats its Muslims well and respects Islam.

Both the Constitution and White Papers dealing with matters of religion and minority rights affirm religious tolerance within a context of tight government control. Even when specific language intended to show the government's appreciation of each religious community's distinctiveness is invoked, it is overshadowed by platitudes asserting the duty of each community to subjugate its beliefs and practices to the interests of the state:

It is traditional for Chinese religious believers to love their country and religions. The Chinese government supports and encourages the religious circles to unite the religious believers to actively participate in the construction of the country. The various religions all advocate serving the society and promoting the people's well-being, such as...Islam's "praying to Allah to give great reward in this world and hereafter."<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

The laws and policy statements of the PRC follow the tradition of imperial edicts of the Ming and Qing dynasties in their praise of Islam and defense of Muslims from bigotry. However, as in late imperial China, the promise of tolerance and protection under the law comes at the price of submission, first to the state and then to Allah. Hong Yang, a Ningxia-based imam under the jurisdiction of the state-run, Communist Party-affiliated China Islamic Association describes the degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Chinese Muslims: “We’re only free to practice within the boundaries set by Chinese law and policy...But we don’t want to overstep those limits, as that might create conflict and instability for the whole society.” Of his own role, he adds, “If I can serve as a bridge between the government and the people, then that’s a good thing for everyone.”<sup>29</sup> Just as official statements from the PRC government echo imperial edicts, so too do the words of a Communist-sanctioned imam echo the tenor of the Confucianized *Han Kitab* authors in their attempt at rapprochement.

In light of the patterns we observe in both the historical and contemporary situation of Muslims in Chinese society, we see that the story of Chinese Islam cannot simply be told in the dichotomous language of conflict versus concord. To provide a fuller understanding of this binary, other binaries are helpful, such as the tension of an ethno-religious minority’s struggle between cultural assimilation and the maintenance of its distinct identity. And as we have seen, this struggle has been shaped by the dispensation of reward and punishment by autocratic regimes, past and present. The “conflict or concord” binary, while genuine, has largely been determined by the top-down transaction of benevolence in exchange for obedience. In the ongoing relationship of Chinese Muslims to state authority, concord prevails when socio-political interests overlap, and conflict erupts when they do not.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Ma, Kuangyuan. *Huizu wenhua lunji*. Kunming: Chinese Literary Union, 1998, p. 53.
- <sup>2</sup>Liu, Zhi. *Tianfang dianli zeyao jie*. Reprint, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Muslim Propagation Society, 1971, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup>Ma Kuangyuan, *Huizu wenhua lunji*, p. 53; translated in Broomhall, Marshall. *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*. London: Darf, 1987, pp. 63-4.
- <sup>4</sup>Leslie, Donald. *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800*. Canberra: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986, p. 119, *op. cit.*
- <sup>5</sup>Spence, Jonathan D. *Emperor of China: Self Portrait of K'ang-Hsi*. New York: Knopf, 1974, p. 123.
- <sup>6</sup>Crossley, Pamela Kyle. *The Manchus*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997, pp. 98, 100, 107.
- <sup>7</sup>Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p. 122.
- <sup>8</sup>This preface was, therefore, written in the forty-eighth year of the reign of the Kangxi emperor, 1710.
- <sup>9</sup>Yang Peilu, "Yang Xu," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang Dianli*, p. a7.
- <sup>10</sup>Spence, *Emperor of China*, pp. 80-1.
- <sup>11</sup>This is obviously a general description of the practices of the Daoists and Buddhists.
- <sup>12</sup>This implies that they receive their wages from the court.
- <sup>13</sup>Literally, this sentence means that they know to recompense the source, a term usually applied to parents or the sovereign.
- <sup>14</sup>Wang, Xia, ed. *Beijing Niujie Libaisi*. Beijing: China Today Press, 1996, p.40.
- <sup>15</sup>Ben-Dor, Zvi. "The 'Dao of Muhammad': Scholarship, Education, and Chinese Muslim Literati Identity in Late Imperial China." Ph.D. Dissertation, UC Los Angeles, 2000. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2000. 9973172., p. 290.
- <sup>16</sup>This decree, dated June 16, 1407, and signed by the Emperor, appears on a stone tablet outside the Ashab mosque in Quanzhou (See Levathes, Louise. *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-33*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994., p. 148).

- <sup>17</sup> The edict is quoted in Liu, *Zhi Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu*. Beijing: Chinese Islamic Society Press, 1984., p. 358, and cited by Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p. 114.
- <sup>18</sup> See Li Xinghua, “*Qingdai Zhengfu dui Yisilanjiao*,” in Yang, Huaizhong, ed. *Qingdai Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Lunji* . Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 1981, pp. 1-8.
- <sup>19</sup> Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China*, p.122.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- <sup>26</sup> Lipman, Jonathan Neaman. *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1997, p. 132.
- <sup>27</sup> “Freedom of Religious Belief in China,” October 1997. (<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-5.htm>)
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (<http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-1.htm>)
- <sup>29</sup> Lim, Louisa, “Chinese Muslims Forge Isolated Path.” Ningxia: BBC, September 15, 2004. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3656180.stm>)

# **Histories of Central Asia:**

An SSRC Web Resource  
for Teaching

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In April 2009 the Eurasia Program of the Social Science Research Council will launch a website to help instructors who would like to include material about Central Asia in their classes. “On-line Histories of Central Asia” [<http://onlinehistories.ssrc.org/centralasia>] contains three sections: “The Built Environment” by Robert McChesney (New York University, emeritus), “Changes in Identity” by Shoshana Keller (Hamilton College), and “Islamic Cultural Movements” by Adeeb Khalid (Carleton College). Each section has embedded within it links to outside sites, images, and maps, and includes bibliographic resources. Teachers and students of Asian societies, and teachers of world history, Asian history, and Islamic history, are invited to use this site as a basis for lectures, discussions, classroom exercises, and research assistance.

## **Site content**

McChesney discusses buildings, building materials, and the ways that Central Asians have arranged them to create a living environment. The section considers the design of villages, towns, and nomadic camps as well as the architecture of gardens, shrines, mosques, and homes. McChesney examines Central Asians’ economic abilities to create and sustain their environment through the Mongol, Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods, and pays particular attention to the forcible creation of modern urban designs in Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan in the twentieth century.

Keller provides six sets of lecture materials that explore the concepts of mobility, identity, and mobile identity in Central Asian communities since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These sets provide

extensive information on both the “Russian” and “Chinese” sides of Central Asia, and the ways in which Turkic, Persian, Russian, Mongol, and Chinese cultures have interacted to shape peoples in the region.

Khalid writes on Islam and the enormous pressures that religious practice and knowledge have been subjected to in modern (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) Central Asia history. Based on his recent book *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), the section concerns Islamic practice and study prior to 1917, the Jadidist reform movement, and the impact of Communist rule on Central Asian Islam to the present day. Khalid includes extensive sections on the “official” and “unofficial” forms of Islam that existed throughout the Soviet period, with links to primary documents from the Soviet government and government-supervised Islamic institutions. He also provides brief biographies of key figures in recent Islamic thought, and bibliographies of Chinese and Japanese literature concerning Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia.

### **Mobile identities**

The dominant themes of Keller’s and Khalid’s sections are mobility and change, with an emphasis on the fact that these phenomena long pre-dated imperial domination by Russia and China. Personal and communal identities in pre-colonial Central Asia were derived from different bases than those familiar to Chinese and Japanese history.

The most basic level of mobility is the physical movement of peoples across the vast space of Central Eurasia. Nomadic tribes and their herds followed green grass through the seasons within fairly well-defined territories, but war or changing environmental conditions could push them to new locations. The intrusion of a nomadic group into strange territory dislocated relations among other nomadic and settled peoples in the region. Large-scale invasions set off a kind of domino effect, in which the newcomers triggered a cascade of secondary invasions that significantly changed where and how people lived and how they interacted with each other. Invader cascades were one

of the most important causes of changes in communal identity across Central Eurasia until modern empires established controlled borders. The Mongol invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century set the stage for the modern history of Central Asia.

The next level of mobility is that of the markers that Central Asian peoples used to identify themselves, primarily genealogy, language, and religion. As peoples moved physically into different territories, they could either emphasize their distinct identities by contrasting their genealogy and language with those of earlier inhabitants, or they could merge identities by “discovering” common ancestors and adopting vocabulary and modes of expression from other languages. The relationship between territoriality and identity in Central Eurasia had more in common with Middle Eastern than with European or East Asian practices. Rulers in Muslim lands did not derive their political identity and legitimation from territory. Instead, notables in the Middle East gained legitimate power from a patent to rule from the caliph, even if the notable in question was a Seljuk Turk who could forcibly demand a patent at sword-point. Under the Baghdad Caliphate (750–1258 CE), regional rulers were legitimate because they had permission to rule from the caliph. The caliph was legitimate because he was a successor to the Prophet Muhammad, not because he controlled Baghdad. As Beatrice Forbes Manz writes, “We find therefore that in Islamic imperial traditions, the most strongly expressed identities brought with them no specific territorial claims,” (Manz, 81).

In this context, people derived identities from the roles that they, both as individuals and as members of ethno-linguistic groups, played in society. For example, Iranians were cultured and sophisticated, but steppe nomads (Turks and/or Mongols) made the best fighters. Hindus from India and Jews were merchants, with the characteristics of worldliness and cunning associated with long-distance trade. Religion also provided social roles that defined communities, although when observed in common it could facilitate interactions between nomadic and settled peoples who spoke different languages. Common religion could not completely prevent raids and warfare, however.

Religious differences, such as between Islam and Buddhism in Kashgaria/Altishahar (now Xinjiang), prevented a merging of identities.

Socially-derived identities were also quite fluid. Arminius Vambery, a Hungarian who traveled in the early 1860s throughout Central Asia in the guise of a Sufi mendicant, reported that Kyrgyz or Qipchaq nomads who moved permanently into towns routinely started calling themselves “Uzbeks” or “Sarts” (a broad term for town-dwellers). This change in name implied more of a political than an ethnic transition, as townsmen were under much closer administrative control than were the nomads (Vambery, 431–432; Geiss, 157).

### **Identities in the Khanates**

On the eve of the Russian conquest in 1865, western Central Asia was divided into three khanates: Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. Bukhara was ruled by a dynasty of Uzbek emirs of the Manghit tribe (1756–1920). They tried to establish a basis for legitimacy in Islam: several emirs were active in the Naqshbandi Sufi order and gave prominent ceremonial and real power to clergy. Islam was only partially effective in solidifying the political order, however. The Manghit emirs struggled to establish centralized control, but the stronger Turkic or Iranian tribes could arrange to be governed by one of their own members. Villages were governed by elected *oqsoqollar* (literally, “white beards”), who represented local interests against those of centrally-appointed officials. The Manghit emirs faced frequent disobedience or rebellion by local communities. The emirate was a political entity bound by forced obedience, not by any sense of common community based on ethnic or even religious ties. In border regions where Uzbek clans still practiced a semi-nomadic way of life, tribal law was accorded as much respect as was Islamic law. Identity remained based on local family and customs. There was no “Bukharan,” much less “Uzbek” national identity.

Khiva was less successful than Bukhara in imposing centralized administrative control, even though the khanate occupied a smaller geographic area. The ruling Qongrat Dynasty

(late eighteenth century–1920) was Uzbek, but did not automatically command the support of other Uzbek tribes in the area. Most people outside the cities were Turkmen of the Yomut or Teke tribal confederacies, Kara-kalpaks, or Kazaks. The khans of Khiva could not appoint their own officials to govern the tribes, but had to accept locally-elected leaders. Tribal warriors could be helpful allies, but they were not reliably obedient to the khans. While all the nomadic tribes considered themselves Muslim, and the khans appointed Islamic judges to preside over disputes, neither the khans nor the clergy had the power to force nomads to submit to anything other than tribal customary law. This severely limited rulers' abilities to shape communal or personal identities.

Mongol lineage traditions still played a role in distinguishing communal identities within the Kokand khanate. The ruling Ming tribe (1710–1876, not to be confused with the Han Chinese Ming Dynasty) was Uzbek on the basis of their descent from the fifteenth century horde whose leader claimed descent from Shiban, son of Jochi son of Chingis Khan. This genealogical tradition distinguished Ming Uzbeks from the older population of Turkic-speakers (usually called "Türks") in the Ferghana Valley, whose ancestors had lived there since at least the time of the Chaghatid khans in the thirteenth century. The Ming also had to contend with another Uzbek confederation called the Qipchaqs, who identified themselves on the basis of a different ancestral lineage, and who did not voluntarily recognize the Ming Uzbeks as their superiors.

### **Eastern Turkestan**

The region that today we call Xinjiang has rarely been a united polity, and so has been called a bewildering variety of names. The area south and east of the Tien Shan mountains was called Kashgaria (for a major trading town, Kashghar), and/or Altishahar ("six cities"). Most of the people there were settled farmers and townsmen who lived around oases. The northern section was Mogholistan under the rule of the Chaghatids, and then was referred to as Zungharia, for the

Zunghar Mongols (also called Oirats or Kalmyks) who were the dominant population. The Oirats, as well as Turkic Kazak and Kyrgyz tribes in the region, were nomadic pastoralists.

Kashgaria was ruled by *khojas*, dynasties of Naqshbandi Sufi sheikhs that originated in western Turkestan. The *khojas*' power was broken in the 1670s by a bloody dynastic rivalry that outside powers exploited. Tibet's Dalai Lama arranged for his ally the Oirat khan to invade Kashgaria, pacify it, and place the lama's chosen *khoja* on the throne. This takeover of Muslim areas by Buddhist powers appears to have been motivated by politics, not religion. Nonetheless, being dominated by Buddhists would most likely have had the effect of strengthening an Islamic identity among the Turkic peoples of Kashgaria. The Turkic oasis-dwellers paid tribute to their Mongol overlords until 1759, when the region was incorporated into Qing China.

For most of the Qing period the Chinese state had no policy to sinify the peoples of Xinjiang. Qing emperors controlled the region through military governors, keeping it administratively distinct from the rest of China. The garrison personnel were themselves widely diverse, including Oirats, Manchu bannermen, and Chinese Muslims (called Hui or Dungans) as well as Han Chinese. The state was more interested in extracting as much grain, silver, and cotton cloth as possible than in changing Turkic cultures. Economic and military control did entail the settlement of increasing numbers of Han Chinese in Xinjiang, but this was a slow process.

### **The Communists create nations**

In 1917 the Bolshevik leaders were unshakeably convinced that their revolution was the start of the world-wide proletarian revolution that would destroy capitalism and usher in an era of justice and equality for all. Lenin believed that Marx's laws of the historical development of society were proven, ironclad science. Therefore, including the "backward" non-Russian peoples in the revolution was simply to pull them into the larger and unstoppable flow of History.

Once his government had more-or-less achieved control over Central Asia, in 1920, Lenin began the long process of turning the peoples there into European-style nations. He ordered that an ethnographic map be drawn up, with suggested subsections marked “Uzbekiia, Kirgiziia, and Turkmeniia,” which tells us that Bolshevik leaders intended to fit Central Asians into European ethnographic categories. In 1924 the old geopolitical lines of Central Asia were swept away, and the region was re-organized on a new basis: the nation as defined by Stalin. The Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were proclaimed in October 1924. Tajikistan was split off from Uzbekistan to become its own SSR in 1929, and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan became SSRs in 1936.

The creation of new states, each with its own government structure, Communist Party, and patrolled borders, was just the beginning of a profound recreation of Central Asian identities. Even the basic step of calling a language “Uzbek” or “Kyrgyz” meant defining the boundaries of languages that shaded off into many local dialects, a process that most Central Asians found incomprehensible. Equally incomprehensible, especially to nomads, was the idea that territory was a definitive component of identity. Borders may have stopped people from traveling freely, but borders alone could not create new individual or communal identities.

The Soviets built schools and trained teachers, wrote textbooks, defined separate languages, alphabets, and histories for each nation, created distinct “folk” music and dance traditions, and promoted national literatures and opera in the Western mold. Many of the people who did the real groundwork on these projects were Central Asians who welcomed the chance to develop and modernize their societies, even if they did not always accept communist ideology. The creation of Central Asian cultural institutions, however artificial, was not a matter of Russians imposing their will on resentful and helpless natives.

Meanwhile, the natural and man-made disasters that befell Xinjiang in the 1920s and 1930s were almost unfathomably complex. Local governments were dominated by Han Chinese

warlords. Some of these Han warlords imposed heavy taxes on Hui, Turkic, and Mongol communities, took land from them, and instituted an ethnically-based oppression that the Qing had been wise enough to avoid. This led to armed resistance and the rise of Turkic and Hui warlords who seized their own fiefdoms.

In 1933–34 and again in 1944–49, Turkic nationalists set up independent republics, based respectively in Kashghar and in Ghulja in the Yili River valley. Although short-lived, these governments were crucial for the development of Uyghur nationalism. The symbolic language of the first republic especially suggests that its leaders were concerned with creating a European-style national identity: they designed a flag, a constitution, and a national anthem about “the homeland of our Turk people.” Politicians paid their respects to Allah, but did not say anything about restoring the traditional rule of the *khojas*. Japanese historian Shinmen Yasushi points out that many of the leaders of the first republic were from merchant and clerical families who had been active in bringing Jadid education to Xinjiang. Since Jadidism was a modernizing school of thought, it is not so surprising that the republic was based more on Western national models than on pre-Qing political traditions (Millward, pp. 201–206; Rudelson, p. 6).

Ironically, a critical building block for founding the modern Uyghur national identity was provided, not by the Turkic republics, but by one of the loathed Han Chinese warlords. The ethnonym “Uyghur” had not been in use for 500 years. In the 1910s and 1920s a few intellectuals in the region started calling themselves “Uyghur,” but the ethnonym only came into widespread use during the rule of Sheng Shicai (1930–1944), one of many Chinese military officers who found themselves in charge of bits of a broken China in the 1930s. Sheng was unusually sympathetic to the grievances of Turks against Han abuses. He made a point of employing non-Han in his government and promoted the study of Turkic and Mongol languages. Sheng also borrowed from Soviet nationality policies to recognize fourteen ethnic groups in Xinjiang, including the

Uyghur, Taranchi (Turkic settled people in northern parts of the province), Kazak, Kyrgyz, and Hui/Dungan. By creating a bureaucratic category that came with real political and economic benefits, Sheng did as much as any intellectual group to solidify a Uyghur identity.

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, it rejected the Soviet federal system of dealing with nationalities in favor of a unitary structure. The Chinese also divided political power among all the nationalities of a given region rather than allow a majority nationality control over local power structures. Xinjiang was re-named the "Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region" in 1955 in recognition of the Uyghur majority (which was increased by re-categorizing the Taranchi as Uyghurs), but power was shared among the fourteen nationalities that had been categorized by Sheng Shicai in the 1930s, including Han Chinese. Neither did the PRC engage in a systematic program of nation-building, as the Soviets had.

Soviet rule destroyed and re-built the political order of Central Asia, and much of the social order as well. The common experience of Marxism-Leninism gave a new basis of unity to Central Asians: Russian is still the *lingua franca* of the university-educated, and people from Astana to Termez shared cultural phenomena from TV shows and after-school clubs to memories of intense suffering under Stalin. These experiences have also left today's Central Asian republics "a world apart" from other Muslim states in terms of religious culture (Khalid, 190). In today's PRC, it appears that Deng Xiaoping's easing of Maoist abuses and opening the region to the outside world exacerbated, rather than alleviated, the resentments that originated in earlier decades. Capitalist expansion has made everyone wealthier, but it has been accompanied by large increases in the Han population. As of 2000 the Han reached population parity with the Uyghurs, depending on how one reads the data. Increased wealth and restoration of stability allowed for a new generation of Uyghurs to grow up who are fully

modernized, comfortable in Chinese, and acutely aware of the dangers of assimilation into the dominant culture.

The creation of modern national identities is a dialectical process. It requires not only internal changes within a discreet group of people, but external and opposing forces for those people to define themselves against. The peoples of Central Eurasia were pushed through unusual variants of the modernizing process that left them in a distinctive position *vis-à-vis* other Asian cultures. Incorporating their experiences into larger studies of Asian civilizations, as the “On-line Histories of Central Asia” aims to help with, will broaden our and our students’ understanding of their richness.

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### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” J. V. Stalin. “Marxism and the National Question, “ in *Works*, vol. 2. Moscow, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953, p. 307.

# **The Dialectics of Islamophobia and Radicalism in Indonesia**

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The world economic crises in 1998 and the subsequent political terrorism on September 11, 2001 vastly impacted the social, political, and cultural landscapes of Islam in Indonesia. The earlier political changes from the authoritarian New Order to the reformation era in 1998 had sparked not only democracy, but also the arrival of Islam as a political power that promised an instant solution to social, cultural, political, and economic decadence. Islamist movements, however, gained momentum after 9/11. Islamists interpreted “war on terror” and the use of terms like “Islamofascism” as a threat against Islam and Muslims. In response, they mobilized what the United State perceived as anti-Americanism. This anti-Americanism is, of course, concretely fueled by the Islamist views of US foreign policy and Western domination. But the Islamist perception of American Islamophobia plays a role as well.

## **Islamophobia Ethos and the Politics of Fear**

Gottschalk and Greenberg define Islamophobia as “a *social* anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures that is largely unexamined by, yet deeply ingrained in, Americans.”<sup>2</sup> This anxiety exists in the political cartoon, in the popular media, and in the opinions of political and religious leaders, policy makers, and Islamophobes.<sup>3</sup> Islamophobia imagines Islam as a threat to the political, cultural, and religious core of American identity, “the political principles of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, the rule of law, and private property

embodied in the American creed.”<sup>4</sup> As Huntington argues, the cultural core that nurtures these values has been taken as White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and the homogeneity of race, religion and ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

After 9/11 the Bush administration evoked the memory of the crusades, and its policies like the Patriot Act, the banning of Islamic organizations, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the institution of Guantanamo Bay all seemed particularly directed against Muslims. Similarly, vigilance toward Muslim visitors and Muslim residents increased.

Immediately following 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims and those of the Middle Eastern ancestry jumped by 1600 percent. Although no longer so dramatic or frequent, Muslims continue to be the object of derision and attack.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, Islamophobia, in Sway’s perspective, includes

violence against Muslims in the form of physical assaults, verbal abuse, and the vandalizing of property, especially of Islamic institutions including mosques, Islamic schools, and Muslim cemeteries. Islamophobia also includes discrimination in employment where Muslims are faced with unequal opportunities; discrimination in the provision of health services; exclusion from managerial positions and jobs of high responsibility; and exclusion from political and governmental posts. Ultimately, Islamophobia also comprises prejudice in the media, literature, and everyday conversation.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper, the term Islamophobia refers to derogatory assumptions, theories, practices and policies toward Islam and Muslims as understood by the Islamists in Indonesia. Islamophobia has been fueled in particular by theorists, such as Fukuyama and Huntington, who predict that Islam will be the next archenemy of the West.<sup>8</sup> The vilification of Islam along with the US policies in carrying out the “War on Terror,”

(including the use of military measures against any person, group, or country that is suspected of harboring terrorists and terrorism) are interpreted by Islamists as a war against Islam and Muslims. Although the United States' political strategy in the War on Terror is to tackle the growing threat of terrorism, the radical Islamists in Indonesia utilize the rhetoric of self-defense to stand up for Islam in the face of the Western threat and to promote Islam as the solution to all the social and cultural decadence caused by the post-colonial legacy.

### **Radical Islamism in Indonesia: Political Responses**

As part of the War on Terror, the US named several Indonesian pesantren,<sup>9</sup> mass organizations, and controversial figures such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir as terrorist threats. Islamist groups like Front Pembela Islam (Front of the Defenders of Islam, FDI),<sup>10</sup> Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesian Holy Warrior Assembly),<sup>11</sup> and Hizbut Tahrir (Party of Liberation)<sup>11</sup> responded to this labeling as an intervention in Indonesian home affairs. The Islamists consequently displayed their anger at the United States' foreign policies in Afghanistan and Iraq through a wave of anti-American demonstrations in major cities, including Jakarta, Makasar, Medan, and Solo.<sup>12</sup> These Islamist groups perceive America as a threat to Islam and to Muslim freedom.

Diverse forms of modern religious revivalism in Indonesia stretch back to the early twentieth century. Among those that continue to have influence are the Muhammadiyah (the Way of Muhammad),<sup>13</sup> the Nahdatul Ulama (the Awakening of Religious Scholars),<sup>14</sup> and the Persatuan Islam (the Unity of Islam).<sup>15</sup> While these organizations vary in propagating the purity of Islam and its pedagogical method, they have gradually become the backbone of moderate Muslims. The Nahdatul Ulama, whose members form the majority of Indonesian Muslims, is much more flexible than the other two organizations in that it appropriates Islam to the existing cultures, just as the Qur'an took into consideration the culture of the Arabian society.

Although *Persatuan Islam* is well-known for being more vigorously observant, it is not inclined to political action. Political Islam has its roots in the twentieth-century post-colonial history of Darul Islam. Led by Kartosuwariyo, Darul Islam rebelled against Sukarno's government after the Renville agreement in 1948. He had earlier safeguarded West Java from the Dutch colonial power before the Indonesian National Military (TNI) finally took control of that region. Indonesia's first post-colonial leader, Sukarno, failed to recognize the significant contribution that Kartosuwiryo and his troops (*Hizbullah*) had made in liberating West Java from the Dutch.<sup>16</sup> As Kartosuwiryo felt betrayed by Sukarno, he drew upon popular support from those who desired an Islamic state in West Java and Indonesia and declared an Indonesian Islamic State in 1949. In 1962, Kartosuwiryo was captured and the Darul Islam movement was banned.

Thirty years of Suharto (1967-1998) marginalized Islam and Muslims in Indonesian politics. The Suharto regime considered Islam as a threat to national stability and supported a policy of *Pancasila*—the five principles of Indonesia: (1) unity of God, (2) humanitarianism, (3) Indonesian unity, (4) system of representation, and (5) justice for all—as the permanent ideology of the state, political parties, and socio-religious organization.. Along with the homogenization of the ideology, Suharto and his authoritarian government militarized the state and governmental posts from 1967-1998. Nonetheless, politically oriented Muslim activists kept the spirit of political Islam intact, and Islam became an ideology for opposition to an authoritarian regime.<sup>17</sup> Many of these organizations operated first as underground movements because the Indonesian government in the Suharto's era did not tolerate any organization with Islam as its ideology. Some Muslim revolutionaries were captured, imprisoned, and even killed. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, however, gave hope to millions of Indonesians that Islam could become the foundation of the state.

Politically-oriented Islamic revivalism today finds support among the members of revolutionary Islamist movements such as Jama'ah Tabligh (1974), Darul Arqom (1980s), and Hizb al-Tahrir (1978). These organizations fervently demand the implementation of Islam at personal, familial, societal, and political levels. Even though the politicization of Islam is driven only by a small segment of Indonesian society, this small fraction feeds the Western imagination of Islam as anti-modernization, anti-human rights, anti-democracy, and anti-globalization and as the enemy of the West.

Political Islam views radicalism in a positive light and supports it as an important aspect of Islam. For example, Ja'far Umar Thalib—who founded the Islamist group called “Communication Forum of Ahlus Sunah Wal Jama'ah” in 1999 and who has often been viewed to offer radical views of Islam—suggests that radicalism could be positive or negative. Radicalism is considered positive when it means reform (*islâh*) or renewal (*tajdîd*); and negative when it refers to ideas and practices beyond the allowable limit (*ghulw* or *ifrât*).<sup>18</sup> In other words, radicalism as reform and renewal is a key element of Islam, but in excess it contradicts the doctrine that Islam is a middle path. Wadjdi blames the Western media for equating Islam as political ideology with radicalism, fundamentalism, and militancy.<sup>19</sup>

Radical movements in Indonesia are not monolithic, and they have various and significant impacts on society. The impact of radical movements on the daily lives of Indonesians is, indeed, unprecedented, as reflected in the increasing interest in Islamic symbols, such as Muslim/Arabic names, religious rituals, and dress codes—especially for women. According to three consecutive surveys held in the years 2001, 2002, and 2004, conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society in Indonesia at the State Islamic University in Jakarta, most Indonesian Muslims report that they observe rituals such as praying and fasting regularly. The discourse on the implementation of Islamic Shari'ah is not taboo anymore. The

growing interest in Islamization also occurs at the structural level. Muslims believe that Islamic Shari'ah is the ideal legal system to be implemented. The number of supporters of this view has grown from 61.4% in 2001, to 70.6% in 2002 and to 75.5% in 2004. A much smaller percentage agrees on the amputation of one's hand as a form of punishment for thieves (2001:28,9%, 2002:33,5%, and 2004: 39,9%).<sup>20</sup> The increasing support of the implementation of Islamic Shari'ah and its elements seems, however, less surprising when we consider the context of a corrupt legal system that ignores social justice.

At another level, the government's delegation of power to its provincial counter-parts has also had significant implications for the spread of Islamic influence. The implementation of Islamic Law in the province of Aceh, for instance, reflects the indigenous desire of the Acehnese to be distinct from the rest of the Indonesian archipelago, since the province considers itself the "Porch of Mecca (Serambi Mekah)." Aceh has also striven for the implementation of Islamic Shari'ah for more than 50 years. For this reason, the special treatment of Aceh is a negotiating point for the Central government for resolving the military conflict that has been going on for more than 20 years.

With this decentralization, many local municipalities in West Java, including Cianjur, Garut, Tasikmalaya and Indramayu, have also expressed interest in the application of Shari'ah. They endorse women's veiling, police raids on nightclubs, a more restrictive social role for women, religious education for Muslim youth to supplement public secular schools, and the increased uses of Arabic names and symbols. However, it is not quite clear what they mean by Shari'ah. They seem to assume that Shari'ah deals with the ritual aspects of Islam in public life. When it comes to Shari'ah, the Islamists have no uniform voice. Referencing the results of a survey conducted at the State Islamic University in Bandung, Afif Muhammad, Director of the Graduate Studies Program, explains that Shari'ah for the Muslim majority connotes *fiqh* (the understanding of Islamic

jurisprudence), not the overall system of life based on the Qur'an and hadith.<sup>21</sup>

On the basis of the growing interest in the implementation of Islam at the personal and social levels, can we say that radicalism has become epidemic? Based on the same survey done by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society in Indonesia, it is shown that by 2004 the coalition of Islamic-oriented parties (Partai Keadilan [Justice Party], Partai Bulan Bintang [Moon and Star Party], and Partai Persatuan Pembangunan [Unity and Development Party]) received only 19.7% of popular support compared to the nationalist-oriented parties, such as Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party), Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party), Golongan Karya (The Party of the Functional Groups), and Partai Democracy Indonesia Perjuangan (The Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) which together received 60.5%. The majority of Muslims in Indonesia seems to support the secular government and political pluralism.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the 2009 election showed strong support for secular political parties, such as the Democrat Party (Partai Demokrat) and Partai Democracy Indonesia Perjuangan (The Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle). While all Muslims converge with radical Islamists in honoring a return to Islam's primary sources, the Qur'an and the Hadith, as the foundation of Muslim life, most diverge from radical political Islamism.

### **Anti-Americanism: Islamist Ideological Response?**

The outrageous mistreatment of prisoners in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay in particular led Muslims to believe that the War on Terror was a war on Islam and Muslims. Any Muslim has seemed to be a potential suspect. In Indonesia, Islamic institutions, which are the heart of Muslim education—such as the Pesantren of al-Mukmin, established by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and the Learning Center of al-Ishlah in Surakarta—have been accused of promoting terrorism. Yet, like many other Muslim nations, Indonesia became a crossfire zone for terrorism committed in the name of Islam. On October 12, 2002, two

bombs devastated Bali; on August 5, 2003, Jakarta's Marriott Hotel was set ablaze; on September 9, 2004, the embassy of Australia was bombed; and on October 1, 2005, Bali was devastated by another bomb. Victims included both foreigners visiting Indonesia and innocent Muslims. The terrorists no doubt targeted both Americans/Westerners *and* those who acted like them.

Anti-Americanism refers to "perceptions and attitudes of individuals or groups that display dislike, hatred, or intolerance to America." In the United States, as T.P. Thornton suggests, "The terms 'anti-Americanism' and 'terrorism' are nearly synonymous"<sup>23</sup> in that the US tends to equate anti-Americanism with terror—or with the potential employ terror against United States' interests."<sup>24</sup> Thornton argues that "the high visibility of the United States and its perceived association with injustice make it a particularly attractive target."<sup>25</sup> This is precisely what Ismail Yusanto, the leader of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, believes. He admits that he hates the United States and that his hatred is triggered by American attitudes and behaviors that do not mirror just, humanistic, and democratic values. He adds that the United States' behaviors hurt Muslims and innocent people.<sup>26</sup> Anti-Americanism is rooted in the experience of Muslims' encounter with the War on Terror and with a foreign policy that targets Islam and Muslims.

Despite the fears and declarations of many in the West, anti-Americanism is not always violent, even if it is widespread. As Louis Cantori says, "Anti-Americanism among Muslims in the world, like its political extreme of terrorism, originates as a reaction to American foreign policy. It does not originate in the deep reservoirs of evil, hatred, and irrationality attributed to it by American policymakers."<sup>27</sup> What has triggered anti-American sentiments has been the perception the Islamists have derived from United States activities that America stands as an enemy of Muslims or Islam. Laskar Jihad, for example, perceives "the United States as Zionist," and "Zionism is the enemy of Islam."<sup>28</sup> This kind of anti-American sentiment is not unique to Indonesia; leaders in many Islamic countries or those with large

Muslim populations argue that America's perception "...as an ardent advocate of the Zionist project is ...the principal theme in the analysis of Muslim anti-Americanism."<sup>29</sup>

The equation of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism should not come as a surprise since Islamists, like Laskar Jihad and Hizbut Tahrir, perceive both the United States and Israel as the enemy of Islam.<sup>30</sup> The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a control issue for radical Islamists. They generally perceive the US support for Israel to be without any reservation. Farid Wadjudi, a member of Hizbut Tahrir, argues that "when Islamists defending the Palestinian land from the Israeli occupation are accused as terrorists, the Zionist Israeli treatment of Palestine is seen as defending its independence."<sup>31</sup>

Wadjudi is also critical of the War on Terror because of its indiscriminate violence. He argues that even though the US tells the world that the War on Terror is not the war on Islam, proof to the contrary is evident in the casualties of the war. He believes that the real purpose of the War on Terror is to undermine Muslim resistance to capitalist colonization.<sup>32</sup>

America's Islamophobia generates anti-American sentiments among many Muslim populations, including that of Indonesia. The findings of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society, whose national survey interviewed over 1,200 respondents across 25 provinces, show that anti-American Muslim behavior includes: 1) demonstrations against United States' foreign policies that are perceived to hurt Muslims; 2) demonstrations against United States' foreign policies that support Israel's aggression toward Palestine; 3) demonstrations against the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq; 4) boycotts of American goods and service; 5) demonstrations against United States' interference in the domestic affairs of Indonesia; 6) convincing others that the United States is a threat to the Ummah (community); and 7) pressures to terminate diplomatic relationships with the US.<sup>33</sup> The percentage of those participating in these activities ranges from 1.5 to 2.1% except for point six entailing speech at 8.8%. This survey shows that

active anti-Americanism is extremely low and occurs in the capital cities.

The survey also suggests that American-Indonesian relations at the state level are good in a general sense.<sup>34</sup> The survey found that only two out of ten adult Indonesians mentioned America as the country they hate most. Muslims are generally moderate and tolerant in their outlook towards others. According to a survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society in 2001, 2002, and 2004, Muslims have a higher degree of tolerance towards people of other faiths than do the minority communities with which they live. In 2004, 44% of Muslims responded that they had no objection to Christians teaching at public schools where Muslim children attend. 44% of Muslim Indonesians surveyed stated that Christians should be able to build a church wherever they want. While the survey also revealed that very few dislike Jews (7%) and Christians (6.5%), they had far less tolerance for communists (57.6%). The survey also suggests that Muslims value political participation. In the first election, 71.6% of Muslims surveyed stated that they believed that democracy is the best system to promote good governance and civil society. Muslims expressed less dissatisfaction with the national-oriented party (19.7%) than they did with the Islamic party (60.5%).

## **Conclusion**

I am confident that radical Islamists in Indonesia will not gain momentum. Most Muslims support moderate Islam, as promoted by organizations like the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah. They typically present their interpretation of Islam as cultural or indigenous in contrast to Arab Islam (as noted by Metcalf in the introduction above). If such organizations flourish, Indonesia could become an emblem of a peaceful, predominantly Muslim nation. Even so, United States' foreign policy and the War on Terror as the perceived threat to Islam continue, to a certain degree, to fuel Islamist radical propaganda of America as the enemy of Islam and Muslims. Hizbut Tahrir's

demonstrations during Obama's inauguration<sup>35</sup> and the visit by Hillary Clinton<sup>36</sup> show that radical Islamists still oppose United States' foreign policy and the War on Terror, even though the current administration is willing to enter into dialogue with the Muslim world respectfully. In this sense, Islamophobia and anti-Americanism are dialectically intertwined because each proponent defines the other. As the United States' foreign policy is interested in "the desirability of democracy in the Muslim world,"<sup>37</sup> examinations of the genealogical contexts of the terms, the political motives, and the social conditions in which terms collide are important steps in an attempt to understand the fear of Islam on one side and anti-Americanism on the other.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The author wishes to extend special thanks to Lisa Trivedi and Barbara Metcalf for reading the drafts of the paper and providing valuable insights and meticulous suggestions.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: making Muslims the enemy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 5.

<sup>3</sup>See Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008) and Mohamed Nimer, ed *Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies* (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>See Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 2005).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>6</sup>CBS News, "Muslims Hard Hit by Hate Crimes: FBI Says Anti-Islamic Violence Surges 1,600 Percent," Washington, Nov. 25, 2002 (Accessed June 26, 2007).

<sup>7</sup>See Mustafa Abu Sway, "Islamophobia: Meaning, Manifestation, Causes" in Hillel Schenker and Ziad Abu-Zayyad, eds., *Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Amjad-Ali, *Islamophobia or Restorative Justice*:

*Tearing the Veil of Ignorance*, Johannesburg, South Africa: Ditshwanela CAR2AS, 2006, pp. 2-4. See also Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest*, 16 (Summer, 1989): 4-18; and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72:3 (Summer, 1993): 22-28.

<sup>9</sup>Pesantren is a formal and informal educational system that teaches Islamic sciences.

<sup>10</sup>Front Pembela Islam was founded by Muhammad Rizieq Syihab (b. 1965), a Hadrami descent who is believed to have descended from the Prophet. The goal of the organization was to enjoin virtue and eliminate vice at the personal, social, and political level. See Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2006), pp. 14-15.

<sup>11</sup>Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Indonesian Holy Warrior Assembly) sprung up out of the first national congress of mujahidin (warriors of God) in Yogyakarta in 2000. The assembly elected Abu Bakr Ba'asyir as their Amirul Mujahidin (the leader of the warriors). The main goal of the organization has been to establish an Islamic state and to implement Islamic shari'ah in Indonesia. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>12</sup>See, Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2006), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup>Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 by a male activist, Ahmad Dahlan. The Muhammadiyah aims at purifying Muslims' theological belief (*aqidah*) from takhayul (mythical beliefs), *bid'ah* (heretic innovation) and *khurafat* (superstition). For more discussion on Muhammadiyah movement, see, James Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, (Menlo

- Park, California: The Benyamin/Cumming Publishing Company, 1978).
- <sup>14</sup>Persatuan Islam was established 1923 by a group of merchants in Bandung, West Java. Persatuan Islam Isteri sets a goal to purify Muslims from myths and heretical innovation. See, Howard M. Federspiel, "Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia," Doctoral Dissertation. Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1970.
- <sup>15</sup>The formation of Nahdlatul Ulama was a response to rigorous attempt to purify religion from indigenous belief by two modernist movements, Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam. The Nahdlatul Ulama usually belong to the unity of traditionalist 'ulam' and their followers from the *Shafi'i* school of law. See, M. Nakamura, "Nahdatul Ulama" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 217-222.
- <sup>16</sup>During the colonial era that ended in August 1945, Muslims had struggled against the Dutch and Japanese colonials.
- <sup>17</sup>Alfadal, et.al. *Islam and Radicalism in Indonesia* (Jakarta: LIPI Press, 2005), 112.
- <sup>18</sup>Ja'far Umar Thalib, "Radicalisme and Islami Phobia," in *Islam dan Terrorism : Dari Minyak Hingga Hegemoni Amerika*, ed. Z.A. Maulani, dkk. (Yogyakarta: UCY Press, 2003), 109.
- <sup>19</sup>Farid Wajdji, *Kebencian Barat Terhadap Gerakan Islam* (Jakarta: Wahyu Press, 2003), p. 9.
- <sup>20</sup>For more complete statistical data about the increase of formal practices of Islam, see Saiful Mujani, Jajat Burhanuddin, et al., *Benturan Peradaban: Sikap and Perilaku Islamis Indonesia terhadap Amerika Serikat* (Jakarta: PPIM-UIN and Freedom Institute, 2005).
- <sup>21</sup>Personal Interview with Dr. Afif Muhammad, Director of Graduate Studies, date February 3, 2006.
- <sup>22</sup>Jamhari and Jajang Jahroni, *Gerakan Salafi Radikal di Indonesia* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindoPersada, 2004), 231.

- <sup>23</sup>Thomas Perry Thornton, "Anti-Americanism: Origin and Context," Preface, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (May 1988, Volume 497, p. 16
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>Saiful Mujani, Jajat Burhanuddin, et al., *Benturan Peradaban: Sikap and Perilaku Islamis Indonesia terhadap Amerika Serikat* (Jakarta: PPIM-UIN and Freedom Institute, 2005), 22.
- <sup>27</sup>Louis Cantori, "American Imperialism feeds Anti-Americanism," in Mohamed Nimer, ed *Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies* (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2007), 67.
- <sup>28</sup>Zainuddin Fananie, Atiqa Sabardila, Dwi Purnanto, *Radikalisme Keagamaan & Perubahan Sosial* (Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University Press, 2002), 110.
- <sup>29</sup>Inayatul Islam, "Anti-Americanism in the Muslim World: A Sceptic Guide," in Brendon O'Connnor and Martin Griffiths, eds, *The Rise of Anti-Americanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 68.
- <sup>30</sup>Abu Zaid, *Da'wah dan Jihad: Sebuah Gerakan Islam: Bukan Teroris* (Jakarta: Wahyu Press, 2003), 67.
- <sup>31</sup>Farid Wajdji, *Kebencian Barat Terhadap Gerakan Islam* (Jakarta: Wahyu Press, 2003), 17.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., 16.
- <sup>33</sup>Saiful Mujani, Jajat Burhanuddin, et al., *Benturan Peradaban: Sikap and Perilaku Islamis Indonesia terhadap Amerika Serikat* (Jakarta: PPIM-UIN and Freedom Institute, 2005), 38.
- <sup>34</sup>I obtained the executive summary of a collaborative research between Freedom Institute, Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat and Jaringan Islam Indonesia on "Who hates America" from one of the authors of *Benturan Peradaban: Sikap and Perilaku Islamis Indonesia terhadap Amerika Serikat* (Jakarta: PPIM-UIN and Freedom Institute, 2005), Mr. Jajang Jahroni.

<sup>35</sup>“Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia Akan Demo Obama Di Kedubes AS,” *Suara Merdeka*, 1/30/2009 (accessed February 20, 2009).

<sup>36</sup>“Hizbut Tahrir Demo Tolak Kedatangan Hillary,” *Antara*, 16/02/09 (accessed February 20, 2009).

<sup>37</sup>Cantori, “American Imperialism feeds Anti-Americanism,” 69.

# **Lying with the Enemy: Militant Islam in the Global Arena**

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Osama bin Laden's rhetoric has consistently voiced a desire for global equality between Muslims and Christians, or between the Islamic world and the West. Having accused America of hypocrisy as far as its advancement of this equality is concerned, Bin Laden turns his attention to the only form in which he thinks such equality is now possible: the equality of death. This is why he has repeatedly emphasized the need for an equivalence of terror between the Muslim world and America, as if this were the only form in which the two might come together and even communicate one with the other. For Al-Qaeda, terror is the only form in which global freedom and equality are now available. Terror therefore functions as the dark side of America's own democracy, as inseparable from it as an evil twin. So in the aftermath of the 2005 Madrid bombings, Bin Laden issued a statement in which he defined terrorism as an effort to universalize security as a human right, if only by refusing to accept its monopolization by the West. For equality demanded that security should be enjoyed by all or by none:

It is well known that security is a vital necessity for every human being. We will not let you monopolize it for yourselves [...]<sup>1</sup>

In adopting this stance, Bin Laden has done nothing more than recognize the unity of a globe in which no man can be separated from any other, each one being held responsible for his fellows, with whose suffering he must identify. Such is the humanitarian logic that characterizes global movements like environmentalism and pacifism as well. But this unity is made manifest by violence, which builds a bridge between enemies by demonstrating that all men are equal if in death alone. It is

as if this macabre equivalence has replaced the equality that is supposed to exist between men and unite them as part of a single humanity. The militant's violence, then, ironically links the world's people together in a web of mutual obligation and responsibility. It is this web of universal complicity, after all, that allows American or British civilians to be killed in recompense for the killing of Muslims in Iraq.

The worldwide web of war spun by Al-Qaeda exists as a kind of spectre of our global inter-relatedness, one that has as yet no specific political form of its own. And the militant's obsessive demands for equal treatment within this world, even if it be only in the form of a reciprocity of violence, represents the dark side of humanity's global brotherhood, whose reality is the product of our increasingly inter-connected universe. But this means that the same web of responsibilities and obligations linking the holy war to its enemies, also links them together as a community, even as a community of brothers. For are not Al-Qaeda's victims said to be merely the counterparts of innocent Muslims killed elsewhere? They are therefore in some perverse way brothers once removed, made even more like brothers by dying alongside suicide bombers and mingling blood.

In the global perspective adopted by militant Islam, the peoples of the world are bound together in a web of mutual relations and complicities. For the moment this intimacy expresses itself in the most murderous way, though even here it represents what I have referred to as the dark side of another, more benign kind of relationship, like that of universal brotherhood. Indeed Al-Qaeda's actions and rhetoric continuously invoke the spectre of a global community that has as yet no formal existence of its own. And this is what allows its war to draw upon the forms and even the vocabulary of other global movements such as environmental and pacifist ones, all of which are concerned with the fate of humanity as a whole. In his more ironical moments, Osama bin Laden takes this language of global community so far as to put Al-Qaeda and its American enemy on the same side of their mutual war, saying in a 2004 video that the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq

for power and profits contributed to the terror network's own aims:

To some analysts and diplomats, it seems as if we and the White House are on the same team shooting at the United States' own goal, despite our different intentions.<sup>2</sup>

It truly shows that al-Qaeda has made gains, but on the other hand it also shows that the Bush administration has likewise profited.<sup>3</sup>

Islamic militants exhibit a perverse humanity by addressing their victims in the language of intimacy, reciprocity and equivalence.

That this expression is not a merely rhetorical gesture becomes evident when we consider that such militancy, unlike all previous forms of terrorist or insurgent action, refuses to set up an alternative utopia for itself, something that even anarchists are prone to do. Unlike the members of religious cults or fringe political groups, few of Al-Qaeda's killers display signs of entering some closed ideological world by cutting themselves off from their families or everyday life. This suggests that the Islam they seek to defend is not conceived as an ideology at all because it does not provide a complete or alternative vision of the world into which the would-be bomber can retreat as into a fortress. Thus Bin Laden defines his own militancy merely as the obverse of the violence he attributes to the West, his refusal to claim autonomy for jihad making for a curious identity between Muslims and their enemies:

Since we have reacted in kind, your description of us as terrorists and of our actions as terrorism necessarily means that you and your actions must be defined likewise.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from strictly operational agreements, there is little unity of doctrine even between an Osama bin Laden and his lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, while the religion they follow

possesses no established tradition, being made up of fragments snatched from differing Islamic authorities. There are at most very general patterns of thought that are neither codified nor propagated in any systematic way. Instead of being recruited to a well-defined movement, the jihad's disparate soldiers franchise Al-Qaeda's expertise and brand name for a variety of equally disparate causes that exist comfortably within the structures of everyday life. Rather than offering an alternative to the world as it exists, these militants would transform it by a kind of internal convulsion, bringing forth its latent humanity by their acts of sacrifice.

Earlier movements of resistance or terror had advanced critiques of existing conditions, such as capitalism or imperialism, and offered alternatives to them. This was the case with communists and anarchists as well as of nationalists and fundamentalists. Like the more pacific global movements that are its peers, Al-Qaeda offers no real criticism of existing conditions (apart from inveighing against them) and possesses no alternative to take their place. Deprived of the political and ideological unity available to regional or national movements, these latter-day militants live scattered among their enemies, whom they accuse only of heedlessness and hypocrisy. So Americans are accused of believing in the wrong religion or ideology, of being heedless and hypocritical about the beliefs they do hold. Global movements like Al-Qaeda's want not an alternative to America so much as the fulfilment of America's promise of freedom for all. Indeed by dying alongside their victims, Islam's militants demonstrate that they exist in the same world as these latter, and as members of the same humanity.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

## **TEACHING ABOUT ASIA**

### **Teaching Modern Southeast Asia**

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Teaching about Southeast Asia to undergraduates at an American liberal arts college presents several challenges. At my institution, it is the only course on the region in the curriculum; thus no preparation, and no follow-up. I have therefore struggled with the approach that I should take—pulled between a wish for students to gain an empirical understanding of Southeast Asian life, and a desire to have them learn the concepts and theories of critical inquiry. Obviously I am still learning how to successfully accomplish such an ambitious undertaking.

The course that I have taught the past few years is called Modern Southeast Asia. I use a set of readings that combines theories about modernity with literary and academic works written about Southeast Asia over the past century. The course's exploration of modern Southeast Asia is thematic rather than geographic: I divide the syllabus into readings on colonialism, anti-colonial revolution, post-colonial nationalism, and neo-liberal globalization. I like this approach for several reasons. First, many St. Olaf students study abroad, and I frequently hear the comment that the Asia they find is "Westernized." Returning students struggle to understand their encounters with the bustling traffic of Bangkok, the tourists crowding hill tribe villages, and the monumentalized reminders of military struggle in Vietnam. By describing such things with a geographical term like "Westernization," students assume that all change is exogenous to the region. Hence the emphasis on Southeast Asia's modernity shows the way that these signs of change have been indigenous to the region for a long time. Secondly, rather than have students focus solely on how Southeast Asia is different from North

America, Japan, and Europe, they are pushed to think about how the region is connected to those places.

### **Colonialism**

Obviously such a course focuses deeply on the experience of colonialism. At our institution, colonialism tends to fall through the cracks of the curriculum. It is not quite Asian or African, and yet it is not quite European. Therefore students tend to be amazed at how much colonialism has structured the modern world. Numerous readings help to make this case, but none more effectively than George Orwell's short story, "Shooting An Elephant" (based on his experience as a police officer in British Burma). Not only did colonialism shape the parameters of contemporary Southeast Asia, Orwell argues, it also shaped the parameters of contemporary North America and Europe as well. Orwell writes that the colonizer "wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it" (Orwell, 1931:6). Indeed in Frantz Fanon's powerful phrase, "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World" (Fanon, 1961:102). Such claims show how Southeast Asians have been active agents in building the modern world, in locales near and far, and not just passive recipients of outside influences.

The work of Ann Stoler (2002) and Jean Taylor (1983) on the Dutch East Indies help to flesh out these ideas for students. They detail the subtle and not so subtle relationships of power developed in colonial conditions. But they also give students the complicated message that there was nothing inevitable about colonial divisions. Europeans could be gently absorbed, under the right circumstances, into Southeast Asian societies (Anderson, 1991:189). The ethnic and regional affiliation of my two best friends in Malaysia, brothers named Santa Maria (who consider themselves pure-blood Eurasians!), emphasizes the porous possibilities between East and West that effectively belie Kipling's dreams of eternal separation. It took a long time, and a lot of political and intellectual work, for Europeans to become White, and Southeast Asians to become Natives.

The development of the color bar and modern racial thinking in Southeast Asia thus appears to students as a strikingly odd

phenomenon. I use a collection of colonial memoirs to help them see the perversity of European colonial life in Southeast Asia (Saunders, 1998). Perhaps my favorite issue to highlight in the course is the excruciating boredom that most Europeans felt in their compulsion to live in Asia as White people. If boredom is a peculiarly modern emotion, it seems to appear as an antidote to feelings of risk and vulnerability. The more Europeans separated themselves from Southeast Asians, the more bored they felt. The vicious racism of late-colonial life thus becomes more understandable as a product of an anxious ennui. Louis Couperus, an artful chronicler of Dutch colonial life, shows in his novel *The Hidden Force* the creation of a modernity where people did not fit in anywhere. His family moved from Java to Holland when Couperus was 14 years old, but they remained socially apart from greater Dutch society. Couperus says that when he first returned to The Hague he “thought that Holland was terrible,” and even in his later years he felt “like a tourist, like a foreigner who speaks Dutch remarkably well” (Couperus, 1985:5). Students reading *The Hidden Force* see that the more natural the modern categories appeared, the more awkward people felt inhabiting them.

### **Southeast Asian Experience of Modernity**

Learning all of these aspects of colonialism are preparation for reading Indonesian author Pramoedya Anata Toer’s magnificent novel, *This Earth of Mankind*. I have not found a better text to help students think about the Southeast Asian experience of modernity. The protagonist, Minke, has to come to terms with the maelstrom of change in which he finds himself amidst. At the opening of the book he exclaims,

Modern! How quickly that word had surged forward and multiplied itself like bacteria throughout the world. (At least, that is what people were saying.) So allow me also to use this word, though I still don’t fully understand its meaning (Pramoedya, 1980:18).

The passage is particularly lovely because it is a sentiment shared by my students, who often struggle to get their tongues around a fancy term like “modernity.” In class I like to play Southeast Asian pop music, and reflect on recorded music as both an artistic mode and a medium of popular expression in ways familiar and unfamiliar to my students. After all, the insistent beat of pop music is the aural backdrop for contemporary Southeast Asian societies in motorized motion. Indeed, Minke notes that the powerful old Javanese verse forms do not work for him because “[T]he rhythm of my life writhes so wildly it could never be forced into the poetry of my ancestors” (Pramoedya, 1980:297).

A novel, of course, is an apt vehicle for discussing the forms of modernity. Benedict Anderson writes of modernity in Java as the creation of a new space for fantasy and the opportunity to experience new kinds of possible selves, even to conceive of one’s self as an individual (1990). The novel as a modern genre itself reflects Pramoedya’s own creative possibilities for imagination and expression. Pramoedya describes Minke as a keen observer, whose observations include awareness of the analytic eye of others. Toward the end of the book Minke notes uncomfortably, “Mama was being analyzed as if she were a character in a novel and Magda Peters was elucidating her personality in front of class” (Pramoedya, 1980:232). If colonialism worked through a set of related modalities, including surveillance, surveying, and counting, Minke vividly feels the objectification of culture characteristic of modern life. Understanding one’s society through estrangement thus uncannily mimics our experience of studying the characters in his novel, and of studying Southeast Asia from a conceptual and geographical distance.

Such an estrangement and process of objectification comes through most clearly in reading a translated version of Pramoedya’s original Indonesian. In *This Earth of Mankind*, Pramoedya depicts a confusing, dynamic modern relationship to language. Many of my more monolingual students find it entirely possible to conceive the world in terms isomorphic with

English. The struggle over language described in *This Earth of Mankind* thus open up a bigger understanding of how most of the world experiences the polyglot slipperiness of translation. The social life of languages—in hierarchy, in exclusion, and especially in connection—becomes much more apparent. The novel’s characters constantly have to struggle with which language they wish to use and which language they can use. In one passage Minke notes that in talking with his friend Jean Marais, “He didn’t know Dutch. That was the difficulty. His Malay was limited. My French was hopeless . . . but he was my oldest friend, my companion in business” (Pramoedya, 1980:55). Students encounter a multilingual Southeast Asia and begin to glimpse the implications of such an experience. My bilingual students, for whom this is nothing new, gain a sense of how language works as an index of power, and how their complicated experience of language is not the exception but rather the modern rule. Translation offers a wonderful mode for understanding contemporary Southeast Asia.

Students always wonder why Suharto’s New Order government (which ruled Indonesia from 1966-1998) would ban *This Earth of Mankind*. The history of Pramoedya’s cantankerous persona, his views about the nationalist contributions of Indonesians of Chinese descent, and the legacies of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) are a challenge to narrate. But there does seem to be a communicable point about the profound threat in Pramoedya’s take on translation and identity. Through his wonderfully enacted characters, Pramoedya brilliantly challenges the colonial and post-colonial state’s obsession with racial division. Nyai Ontosoroh, Annelies, Jean Marais, and Minke himself replace identity concerns with a focus on affiliation. If identity answers the questions, “who are you?” affiliation instead asks, “whom do you want to become?” In a key passage, Minke sighs that

what I was feeling then, such very depressed feelings,  
my ancestors called *nelangsa*—feeling completely  
alone, still living among one’s fellows but no longer the

same; the heat of the sun is borne by all, but the heat in one's heart is borne alone. The only way to obtain relief was communion with the hearts of those of a similar fate, similar values, similar ties, with the same burdens: Nyai Ontosoroh, Annelies, Jean Marais, Darsam (Pramoedya, 1980:289).

These diverse misfits unite together in a common political project. Perhaps Pramoedya's left-wing internationalism seems to be of another time, given our many contemporary misgivings about globalization. Nevertheless a key implication of *This Earth of Mankind* is that "Indonesian" is not a category for the exclusive management of the state, or the fixed product of an eternal essence. Nationalism in Pramoedya's eyes is a representation of desire to exceed boundaries rather than police them. Students are left to ponder how a man exiled to a prison camp could hold on to such a fantasy, and how it might connect to what they want to become.

### **War and Resistance**

The rest of the course uses the lessons from Pramoedya to think about more recent developments in Southeast Asia. We read about the Japanese occupation, through texts by Benedict Anderson and Goto Kenichi (Anderson 1966, Goto 2003). These works show how Southeast Asians struggled to interpret the interests and possibilities created by a new set of colonial rulers. Did the occupation promise eventual liberation, or merely a new form of exploitation? Such works also reveal the revolutionary energy created by world war. Nothing quite shows the newly mobilized populations like newsreel footage of Indonesians marching in Japanese-sponsored militias. Such images foreshadow the newly militant societies that the Dutch, British, French, and Americans would find when they returned to Southeast Asia after the war's apparent end.

Amid the ferment of Southeast Asia's war-time mobilization, the best path to achieve independence was still not clear to nationalist leaders. David Marr's article on Vietnam in 1945

reveals the search for the revolutionary moment presented by the Pacific War, building off the years of strategizing done by Southeast Asians circulating through Tokyo, Paris, and Moscow (Marr 1980, Duiker 1981). Aung San Suu Kyi's reminiscences about her father and the father of Burma's independence, Aung San, depict the conflicting options he and his comrades faced (Suu Kyi, 1991). She details the debates between those who leaned toward the Japanese and those who worked with the Allies, along with the ethnic and ideological tensions inside Burma's diverse colonial borders. David Chandler's profile of Cambodia's Pol Pot makes students aware that extraordinary wartime circumstances created openings for future disaster along with independence (Chandler, 1992). The syllabus prepares students for such developments by reading Vicente Rafael's analysis of late nineteenth-century nationalism in the Philippines, the movement that predates the other nationalist movements in the region. Rafael notes how the Rizal and his fellow *Ilustrados* created a sense of Filipino nationalism haunted by the ghosts of its creation (Rafael, 1995). The identity issues, questions about language, and modern confusions depicted by Pramoedaya remained specters throughout the twentieth century's unfolding of Southeast Asian nationalism.

Perhaps most complicated for students to understand is the Vietnamese revolution. Along with more conventional sources (Gilbert, 2002), I help students glimpse Vietnam's experience through a series of short stories by Le Minh Khue (1997). In her story "The Distant Stars," (originally published in 1971) three young women defuse bombs along the Ho Chi Minh trail by day and discuss their plans for the future by night. They imagine careers as doctors, engineers, or architects, with plenty of time for volleyball. The narrator says, "We would say to each other, 'from now until we're old, we'll have romance but we'll never marry. Marriage would mean too much work. Diapers. Blankets. Mosquito nets. Sawdust. Fish sauce'" (Khue, 1997:5). If, in David Marr's analysis, French colonialism put Vietnamese tradition on trial (1981), the teenagers find the revolution to be a heady space for imagining divergent possible

selves as a resolution to that trial. In contrast, one of her post-war stories, “The River,” (originally published in 1986) shows the melancholy reality of urban bureaucratic life. The protagonist’s nostalgia for rural life becomes manifested in snippets of French songs and creaking machinery. Both stories show an insistent longing for a sense of home, whether in the future or in the past. Their concerns are Pramoedaya’s: Who are we? Whom do we want to become?

Two readings about memory show students the challenges of narrating the violence and division of Southeast Asia’s modern history. Christina Schwenkel examines how Vietnam’s old battlefields have been reconfigured as tourist attractions (2006). As such, the stories of heroic resistance to Western imperialists strain against the need to attract Westerners and their money. Schwenkel also analyzes the divergent generational understandings that younger Vietnamese have for the struggles that preceded their birth. Thongchai Winichakul’s haunting, halting narrative of the 1976 massacre of students at Thammasat University in Bangkok shows how hard it is for anyone in Thailand to remember those painful events (2002). Since the massacre implicated the bedrock institutions of the country – the military, Buddhism, and the monarchy – it was easier to forget the violence than address the scope of the tragedy. Furthermore, as Thailand becomes middle-class, the attractions of the stock market and real estate block memories of past struggle and sacrifice. Such shifts produce a profound ambivalence about the traumas that preceded (and brought about) Thailand’s consumer society.

### **Global Capitalism and Southeast Asia**

The last part of the course thus examines the transformative power of capitalism in Southeast Asia. In some ways this would appear to be the most familiar to students in North America who themselves live amidst a society of advertising, markets for everything, and electronic communication. Yet by reading Ara Wilson’s ethnography of Thailand’s post-war merchant class, they see familiar things made strange (2004). Her analysis

of “intimate economies” shows how developments like the growth of shopping malls, the commodification of sex, and the popularity of direct marketing have reconfigured domestic life in Bangkok. The revolutionary power of the market borrows on old understandings, like the social obligations of kin and community, and puts them to new uses, as in selling Avon. Indeed Kasian Tejapira’s work on “the postmodernization of Thainess” shows how the market turns national forms of affiliation into new forms of anxiety (2002). As he sees it, the shift to a society of consumers in Thailand makes “Thai” the object of commodification. “Thainess” becomes a floating sign of the marketplace, radiating out through advertising. Kasian speaks of a world of “identity commodities,” with the consumption of consumer products “not for their intrinsic use value or socio-economic exchange value, but for their cultural value as signs of desired identity” (Kasian, 2002:208). His wonderful essay about what we might otherwise call globalization connects to a long history of cosmopolitanism in the region, and the wide range of connections between Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Globalization is hardly something new in a region where people, products, ideas, religions, and languages have been exchanged for a long time. As Pramoedya writes in the epigraph to *This Earth of Mankind*, “this narrow path has been trod many a time already ...”

### **A World of Homogeneity or at Difference**

Given this focus, what gets lost in translation in such a course? Well, as A.L. Becker reminds us, many things. Everything. Modernity can seem like a unitary, homogenizing force, steamrolling over Southeast Asian societies. It is a challenge not to flatten the variability of Southeast Asian society in the limited space of a single semester, especially for an anthropologist charged by the College’s curriculum to teach students about cultural difference. Indeed, a sustained focus on modernity makes it harder for students to see in a sustained way what is different about Southeast Asian life. So students looking for an encounter with radical difference can leave the

course disappointed. Becker shows in his lovely essay about silence across languages (1992) the many things that are communicated silently because of their familiarity. When I teach about Southeast Asia during January afternoons in rural Minnesota, I hear a lot of silences. As Becker also points out, our experience is based on prior texts. I aim for students to explore Modern Southeast Asia so that they may make better sense of their own modern lives, and gain a new register for hearing the experience of other modern encounters and points of reference.

When I teach the course, I think of the teachers who years ago helped translate Southeast Asia for me. Professor Becker made me wonderfully aware of what happens when we translate from one cultural order to another. So too, Nancy Florida, whose knowledge of and critical appreciation for Javanese manuscripts shows where people of Pramoedya's age were writing from and writing against (1995). She pointed out to me, through months of careful reading of Pramoedya's work in Indonesian, endless points that I missed. I attempt to do the same for my students, in trying to highlight the absences and limits of our ways of seeing and mode of hearing. Since anthropology is itself a product of high modernism, questioning what it means to be modern and exploring alternate modernities is thus also a way to think about what escapes our senses and sensibility.

Our postmodern present, if it is indeed best labeled that, shapes the questions we bring to the past. During the Vietnam War, those days when the study of Southeast Asia in the United States was at its apogee, students brought considerable passion and energy to learning about the region. At the University of Michigan, where I once studied, senior faculty still remember courses in Southeast Asian Civilization enrolling 300-plus students. The questions about what Vietnamese peasants want or whether Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist or a communist no longer consume my students. To the degree that they have a relationship to Southeast Asia, it is through immigration and the large immigrant communities across the United States. Less obvious to students is their connection through commodities –

the innumerable products from Malaysia, Thailand, and elsewhere that flood American markets. Their Southeast Asia has email and the Web.

The stories that academics organize might help to locate this Southeast Asia. I highlight the concept of modernity, because it helps students to address why Singapore now has a higher per-capita income than Britain, or why the Hmong community has become so deeply integrated into American life so quickly. It helps students to question their attraction to the traditional, the rural, or the exotic, allowing them to better appreciate and understand the cosmopolitan complexity of Bangkok or Hanoi or Manila. After all, what's more modern: Northfield, Minnesota, or Jakarta, Indonesia? Rather than highlighting cultural differences, it allows them to make historical connections between East and West, and think beyond easy binaries.

The modern specters in Southeast Asia leave students with a set of questions about contemporary politics in the region: Why is it so hard to articulate a concept of Malaysia? Is Thailand necessarily Thai? What place does global capitalism have in the post-colonial order? The dreams and exclusions of Pramoedya's novel, along with the other works that we read, highlight a peculiar national and regional path, and point to the ghosts that remain in class differences, ethnic problems, authoritarian rule, and the utopian dreams of revolutions, both political and industrial. Even studying about Southeast Asia in geographically distant North America, we can recognize familiar dilemmas.

Rudolf Mrazek, who always referred to himself to his students as the professor with an accent, believed in getting lost in translation. His writing about Indonesian nationalists and Dutch engineers alike shows a love for people caught in between. When Southeast Asia was rendered with clear boundaries, he always felt disappointed. A book came out a few years ago about the Indonesian nationalist leader Tan Malaka, and the English translations were very good. In Mrazek's mind, the translations were too good. The smooth flowing English meant that

My American students will, thus, have another barrier less to climb, and this is bad in itself. Moreover, I strongly believe that something should have been tried—by way of translation or in notes at least—to let a non-Indonesian reader feel precisely how important, in that time and place, the interaction between Indonesian and Dutch languages had been. Throughout the late colonial period, and throughout the war and revolution, on their way to what they believed was modernity, progress, and freedom, Indonesian intellectuals never passed easily over Dutch words, Dutch idioms and grammar. Several generations of Indonesian public figures, and Tan Malaka most probably among them, have struggled to speak and write Indonesian in spite of thinking in Dutch. This awkwardness was an essential part of the texts they left; to a very large extent, this was their culture (Mrazek 1992:68).

Studying modern Southeast Asia proves to be an awkward experience. How confident can we be about similarities and differences, or about flattening or deepening? Edward Said once wrote, “cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality” (Said, 1994:347). As Southeast Asia and North America grow ever more together, and ever more apart, studying the history of these awkward modern relationships might become even more vital.

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# **Imaging Japanese Religion in the Classroom: Mandala, Manga, Pizza, and Gardens<sup>1</sup>**

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How does my research influence my pedagogy? As a teacher of Japanese religions at a small liberal arts college, I realized long ago that I wasn't teaching in grad school. Few of my students can speak or read Japanese or have ever traveled to Japan. So, chances are I'm not going to be teaching a small seminar on pre-modern Buddhist pilgrimage focusing on original texts in the classical vernacular. Yet, in teaching undergraduates, I keep Shunryu Suzuki's comment in mind: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."<sup>2</sup> The trick is how to trigger those possibilities. How do I open the door to a subject that is totally new and perhaps even strange? What do I find so fascinating in my own research that will also fascinate my students?

What first grabbed me about Japan was its rich visual culture. By "visual culture," I mean, as David MacDougall defines it, "any of the expressive systems of human society that communicate meanings partially or primarily by visual means."<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are all sorts of "expressive systems" that can draw our attention. When I first visited Japan, what caught my eye was the exotic. I was entranced by the plastic food on display in the windows of a Matsuzakaya Department restaurant in Tokyo, something I'd never seen in the small town where I grew up. I also remember my first Bullet train ride being amazed by the view of Mt. Fuji from the window—so much bigger than I had imagined from the travel brochures. Both are examples of what the anthropologist John Urry has called "the tourist gaze." Seeing the real Mt. Fuji and those delicious looking replicas of fresh sushi attracted me because I

was seduced by the various “strategies of desire” that lie at the heart of the modern tourism industry. Look at any Internet travel site on Japan and you will probably find images of Mount Fuji, geisha, sushi and the like prominently featured. I was immediately seduced by that *faux* sushi that looked so delicious I rushed through the doors to taste the real thing. Such objects of the tourist gaze are powerful because we readily project our own fantasies onto them, filling them with meaning and value.<sup>4</sup> To my eyes, my first Japanese meal was far more than just an odd-looking plate of raw fish,<sup>5</sup> and Mt. Fuji was not just another big mountain. As a tourist, I saw them as icons of Japaneseness—that exotic other that I had traveled so far to see (figure 1). In the end, the tourist gaze tells us more about ourselves, particularly our orientalist fantasies about Japan, than anything else.



Figure 1.

That being said, the tourist gaze does point to the richness of Japan’s visual culture. It is something that “entices beyond other forms of communication”—a point recently noted by anthropologist Joy Hendry in her study of Japanese gardens.<sup>6</sup> In my own research, I’ve realized that the iconographic (literally, “writing in images”) plays a vital role in Japanese religions.<sup>7</sup> In my work on pilgrimage, popular religious culture (especially *manga* or comic books), and Zen temple gardens, I focus on two key questions: First, in what ways do the Japanese use

visible cultural forms to communicate religiously? Second, what approaches are effective for interpreting the subtly spiritual dimensions of Japanese visual culture? Not coincidentally, these same questions also lie at the center of my teaching, especially in my “Religious Life of Japan” class, a general 200-level survey class from prehistory to the present.

Initially, questions like these leave my students cold. On the surface, they appear academic, seemingly having nothing to do with their own lives. Of course, this is untrue. My students have all seen religious images, and have probably asked themselves what they mean and why people use them. But before I can proceed teaching about Japanese visual culture, I need to start where they are: Students need to explore how they themselves see. In the chapter, “On the Lost Art of Seeing,” in his wonderful book, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, Robert Pogue Harrison observes that the “faculty of human vision is not neutral. It is subject to the laws of historicity as are our life-worlds, our institutions, and our mentality.”<sup>8</sup> Our history, culture, and lives shape the way we see the world. At the outset, I want them to realize how they share a “historicity” that shapes their vision, and, especially, their vision of religion. Such an immediacy of perspective is where we all begin, but what we must also transcend if we want to comprehend how the Japanese use visual culture to express themselves religiously. In terms of seeing the sacred, my students perceptivity may work fine in America, but fails miserably to see religiosity in Japan.

To achieve a broader perspective, students need to think about what they mean by “religion.” Usually the first thing that pops into their minds is the Bible. For something to be religious, there has to be a scripture. This assumption reveals a naïve view of religion that is conditioned by their own predominantly Jewish-Christian heritage. Of course, privileging texts over images owes its origin to the iconoclastic heritage of Western Protestantism, dating back to the sixteenth-century radicals of the Reformation like John Calvin. Religion, however, even within the Protestant tradition, let alone Japan, is more than simply

scriptures. All I have to do to prove this is to take them to view our college's chapel, a beautiful space with stained glass windows inspired by the Universalist faith. In my class on Japanese religion, my major goal is to examine what art historian David Freedberg has called "the power of images" in an East Asian context, to be sure, but also to get them to see the iconographic as a key feature of religion generally.<sup>9</sup> This goes a long way to correcting how I first studied religion in college. I still remember my first Japanese religions class, which was organized to cover the key "scriptures" of Dōgen, Shinran, Neo-Confucianism and Shinto throughout the semester. Such a "Great Books" approach has, at least by me, been relegated to the dustbin of old course files, since it has been attacked by many scholars as rooted in a Protestantized view of religion.

While using images in the classroom seems easy enough, particularly at a time of playing video games and surfing the Internet, I have learned that it is anything but. My pedagogical problems reveals how "historicity" conditions people's vision. Most students often seem more comfortable scrutinizing computer screens than the three-dimensional world surrounding them. This "wholesale desertion of the visible world," Harrison argues, has become today's dominant way of seeing. We are bombarded with images from mass media culture that makes us visual literate, but in a specific and limiting way. Living in an age of "mechanical reproduction," as Walter Benjamin has called it, we have learned to easily negotiate a world replete with flickering, transient images—photography, TV, contemporary cinema, and the Internet. Over familiarity with that world skews our ability to see another. Beyond the industrial, the mechanical, and the electronic is the natural world. Our classrooms often close the doors of perception to this world outside. And, as a consequence, do we miss something when we visit a Zen temple garden, a visual collaboration of the gardener's genius with the creative power of nature?

I have noticed that tourist's gaze done quickly on the Kyoto tour is usually mediated through the view screen of a digital camera. She or he may capture a few pictures, but misses

what Harrison calls “the appearance.” This appearance is a vision of boundless space and the depth of time that a temple garden gradually discloses to the patient viewer. Gardens that are hundreds of years old are “places of self-discovery.” They are sacred sites rich in history, rooted in the natural cycles of life, designed for meditation and contemplation that transcend the momentary and objectified photograph that is hastily snapped. Alan Sponberg has described the deeper view of appearance as an ecstatic form of visualization. In Mahayana Buddhism, this is specifically identified with meditational practices that are basically eidetic: “The practitioner seeks a state of enhanced sensation by throwing himself into an alternative reality rich in aesthetic and emotional detail.”<sup>10</sup> To comprehend temple gardens as sacred spaces, they require more than a quick glance to perceive what gives them their emotional and aesthetic richness.<sup>11</sup>

So, how do I make my students aware of such alternate modes of perception? How can they gain insight into what religious art historian David Morgan calls “the sacred gaze,” that is, the way visual culture is used to express and construct a people’s experience of spiritual realities? To learn new ways of seeing, I have to do more than, as one student caustically commented on Rate Your Professor.com, waste time by showing endless slides from research trips. It is easy to fall into such a trap in the hope of jazzing up lectures. A better strategy is to use images sparingly, avoiding simple show and tell presentations that my students call “art in the dark.”

By contrast, in class, I explore Japanese religion actively rather than passively. Images are objects of inquiry instead of eye-catching illustrations. In studying religious visual culture, I also show how to investigate “not only the image itself but also its role in narrative, perception. . . intellectual classification, and all manner of ritual practices. . . thereby understanding the image as part of the social construction of reality.”<sup>12</sup> Any class worth its salt enriches students’ understanding by contextualizing what they see. The image must be situated within a detailed study of the culture and history from which it comes. However, my

specific pedagogical conundrum is this: How do I do this? How can I utilize the images of Buddhist statues, pictures of temple gardens, Shinto shrines and festivals, and so on effectively—as part of the nuts and bolts of a class session?

Here I take inspiration from Roland Barthes. It was Barthes' "exploration of 'mythologies' in the 1950s that revealed a complex world of hidden sign systems" in images, broadening his analysis to include not only film, but also advertising and other forms of popular culture.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Japan, his classic study, *Empire of Signs* (1982), demonstrates his hermeneutical approach. For Barthes, the most ordinary of things reveal more than initially meets the eye. Take for example, that most pedestrian of Japanese foods—*sukiyaki*. Barthes's point is that *sukiyaki*, produced right before one's eyes at the table, communicates layers of significance by visual means. Despite or even because of its ordinariness, that simple fare can lead to a deeper understanding of that stew that is Japanese culture—at least for those who study it closely.<sup>14</sup>

Most of my students have never eaten *sukiyaki* so, besides my initial map tour, which is in itself an interesting exercise (how many of our students really know where Japan is located?), what do I do? In the first unit, I explore the question: "What do we mean by Japan and Japanese religion?" I have them read, for example, the historian Jackson Bailey's well-known essay, "Japan on the World Scene: Reflection on Uniqueness and Commonality." Bailey points out that it is easy to fall into one of two traps when studying Japan: "We tend either to talk about the uniqueness of Japanese culture and note how different the Japanese are from everyone else, or to look for the common heritage of all human beings and gloss over the peculiarities."<sup>15</sup> That is, we either see Japan as something completely different, the exotic other, or go to the opposite extreme, seeing it as the same old same old. Bailey's point is that the truth lies somewhere in the "muddy middle."

What better way to explore Bailey's point than by analyzing an image that is deeply familiar. I show students an advertisement from a Japanese pizza restaurant, one of the chains like Shakey's

and Domino's, that are ubiquitous in Japan these days (see figure 2, courtesy of Greg Tavares).<sup>16</sup> Yes, the ad displays something it calls pizza, but this "Japanese version" appears



Figure 2.

very different from what one might see on American TV. It is not easy for students to identify what kind of pizzas are being advertised in the picture. When I translate some of the types in the ad—for example, "Hot Dog Pizza," "Potato Gratin Pizza," and "Curry German Pizza" (with potatoes and bacon as toppings)—they are very surprised. I also cannot resist showing them one of my own favorites, Japanese Domino's new croissant crust pizza, which combines shrimp, sea urchin cream, paprika, smoked salmon, cream cheese, and basil into a mouthwatering gastronomic delight. While these ingredients (except for the sea urchin cream perhaps) are known to them, Japanese Domino's novel combination makes their pizza different in fascinating ways. It leads to interesting questions, such as, why does Domino's new croissant pizza have seafood as a major ingredient? It may be obvious to me, but the fact that Japan is an island country where the bounty of the sea (*umi no sachi*) remains an important part of the contemporary diet is news to my students. As toppings on this pizza, this basic fact appears right before their eyes. Moreover, the wide selection of pizza types and combinations (German, American, Italian and Japanese) also teaches something about Japan's long and complex history of cultural influences from abroad. Pizza perfectly illustrates Bailey's key point that we must take the

“muddy middle” when looking at Japanese culture. It’s “pizza” but it’s not my American style kind of pizza!

Needless to say, my pizza example also shows that “Japanese culture” as a homogeneous and integrated entity is a fiction. Masao Miyoshi has recently noted that “the overwhelming majority of Japanese place excessive importance on their collective identity, which is presented as ‘singular’ in the sense of single/homogeneous and unique/exceptional.”<sup>17</sup> And yet, this view of a singular Japanese culture is a “modern artifact” that emerged when Japan became a modern nation state. According to intellectual historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki, rather than there being anything called Japanese culture, there are multiple traditions that serve as the “raw material” combining in the ongoing process of reinterpreting, reinventing, and interweaving of ideas, practices, and institutions.<sup>18</sup> It is this changing construct of “Japan” throughout Japanese history that we must investigate. As we have seen, pizza is quite *apropos* as an example of this dynamic creative process of cultural creation. What kind of pizza will the Japanese serve up next?

How does this point relate specifically to the study of Japanese religious traditions—folk religion, Buddhism, “Shinto,” new religions, Christianity, and so on? Throughout the semester, I offer a sampling of the rich visual culture of these different traditions to highlight their complexity. In one unit, for example, I show this intricate intermixing of traditions by looking at Japanese Zen temple gardens. Students find this fascinating because they usually don’t think of gardens as religious. But in Japan they often are—at Tōfuku-ji, Myōshin-ji, Nanzen-ji, and the Daitoku-ji, etc.—gardens are an intrinsic part of the spiritual tableau of these temples. Why?

Of course, Zen temple gardens embody the Mahayana doctrine of the non-duality—samsara is nirvana, nirvana is samsara, this world is nothing other than the Buddha nature. They also emphasize a key theme that we find again and again in Japanese religions: that the natural world is also the realm of practice, or, in the words of the early great Zen teacher and gardener, Musō Soseki (1275-1351) in his *Dream Dialogues*, “One who distinguishes between the garden and practice cannot

be said to have found the true Way.” Much of this class unit focuses upon how gardens have evolved throughout Japanese history. The Zen vision of gardens differs from what you would see in the paradisiacal Pure Land gardens of the Heian period such as at the temple of Byôdô-in.<sup>19</sup> As François Berthier has recently observed,

The gardens of the Heian period reflected the vicissitudes of human life, whereas the Zen monks rejected transitory phenomena and worthless appearances. They stripped nature bare in order to reveal its substance’ their bare bones” gardens expressed universal essence . . . . By reducing nature to its smallest dimensions and bringing it back to its simplest expression one can extract the essence. And it is by seizing the essence of nature that the human being can discover his own “original nature.”<sup>20</sup>

So, by tracing the development of gardens from the Heian through the Muromachi periods, one can analyze the changing character of Japanese Buddhist visual culture. Moreover, the gardens of the Zen Gozan temples reveal the complex interweaving of traditions in Japanese religious life. To see them as only “Buddhist” misses the fact that they combine several levels of religious meaning. Appreciating such a garden means also being aware of the elaborate Chinese religious symbolism, like rock groups that suggest the paradise isles of the Immortals (Hôrai), for example, or the influence of early Shinto shrine design in the white gravel of the dry landscape (*karesansui*) that is also found in the *himorogi*, the area indicating the presence of the *kami*.

I also like to use images taken from my own research to teach students to think critically about religion. For example, I show some slides from my fieldwork of holy sites (*reijô*) of the bodhisattva Kannon along the Kantô Chichibu pilgrimage circuit. With its sacred geographies, icons, and souvenirs paraphernalia, how does Chichibu’s visual culture mold Japanese pilgrims’

spiritual experiences? When I observe pilgrims reciting the *Heart Sutra* before a temple, I note that the setting in which they pray is visually complex (figure 3). While the Kannon icon usually remains hidden (*hibutsu*) inside the hall, there is still plenty outside to see. Prominently placed above the pilgrims, for example, is a facsimile of a popular Meiji period work by the *ukiyo-e* artist Umedo Kunimasa, his *Hyakuban Kannon reigenki*. This illustration relates the miracles, sacred founders, and powers of the main image (*honzon*) at the Kannon temple. I like to show this photo of pilgrims worshipping before Umedo's picture to explore the ritual dynamics of Japanese pilgrimage.



Figure 3.

However, before I ask students what questions they have about this photo, we start off with a discussion of the posters they have in their dorm rooms. What do they put up? Where do they place them? Why have they put them up? What kind of image do they convey about who lives in the room, etc.? This inevitably generates some provocative discussion which leads into a discussion of the pilgrimage photo. Students invariably

raise some interesting questions: “Why is the painting placed before the pilgrims?” “What is this painting’s function?” “Do pilgrims look at it?” “What does it signify to them?” “How does it represent the temple’s origin story?” Umedo Kunimasa’s *Hyakuban Kannon reigenki* reveals that illustrations are not just decorative, but are an important form of religious communication. Students learn that, as part of the ritual field of worship in the Chichibu pilgrimage, such pictures are ubiquitous, making them a vital part of the pilgrim’s experience. Using my photo is effective for raising questions about religious ritual, visualization, myth, and miracles that the academic study of religion explores as a matter of course. More generally, it raises the issue about the role of images as a means of devotion, of disseminating information, and of gaining insight into reality.

My photo is also effective in another way. It warns students to proceed with caution. One must always be wary of interpretative traps. Here, one could easily fall into what Johannes Fabian calls the trap of “visualism,” that habit of thought, particularly among “eyeball” anthropologists, that knowing always occurs through “visualizing” another’s culture or society.”<sup>21</sup> This is a basic premise of the empirical approach: visual knowing “almost becomes synonymous for understanding” most anything. Yet, in my example from the Chichibu pilgrimage, students can realize that over-relying on what one can see in the front of the temple overlooks what lies hidden within. While icons are displayed in Japanese Buddhism, they are often not. In my photo, neither the pilgrims nor my students can see the main icon of the temple. It is a sequestered image, not “viewed” in the same way as, for example, statues of Shiva in Hinduism, which are readily available for devotee’s *dars’an* at Hindu temples, or that Buddhist statue my students have seen in a museum somewhere. Why is the Kannon icon hidden? Why have Chichibu pilgrims traveled such a long way only to pray before the closed doors of the temple hall? These are important questions to ask (that, by the way, have no easy answer).

One thing is clear: seeing is not necessarily believing, let alone fully understanding what is happening here.<sup>22</sup> Kannon

icons are frequently not visible as devotional objects of worship, nor are they present as visual resources for conveying Buddhist doctrines. A didactic functionalism, so basic in Hindu iconography, and also for the Christian tradition as well is absent here. As Diana Eck has observed, Hindu temple icons of Shiva and Vishnu typically provide a “visual theology” for their worshippers.<sup>23</sup> In the early Roman Catholic Church, Pope Gregory the Great decreed that images of Christ and the Virgin Mary were not for homage (*adorare*) but instruction. This was true even in the supposedly iconoclastic Presbyterianism of my childhood; I vividly remember the pictures of Jesus I colored in my Sunday school coloring book. These pictures usually illustrated the key moral virtues of the savior, virtues that my church hoped I would emulate in my own life.<sup>24</sup>

But at Chichibu temples, except on rare occasions, Kannon main images remain hidden inside their cabinets (*zushi*). What we can learn here is that religion is not all that meets the eye. As Dietrich Seckel has noted in his classic monograph, *Before and Beyond the Image*, the “Buddha stands beyond the outward manifestation of people, gods, and all pother things because he is transcendent (*lokottara*), gone beyond the world of phenomena limited to ordinary perception. . . .”<sup>25</sup> If buddhas and celestial bodhisattvas are beings who are non-being by virtue of attaining supreme enlightenment, then visualizing them is, at some level, a “falsification,” although the Mahayana tradition describes this as an expedient means (*hōben*)<sup>26</sup> Hidden images of buddhas and bodhisattvas may ritually symbolize this view by their absence. This example reveals the limitations of perception to grasp spiritual truths—both for pilgrims and the researchers who study them.

This is not to say that “visual theology” is absent in Japanese religions. In my Buddhism unit, I explore didacticism by looking at Buddhist mandalas used for *etoki* or visual sermons. What is a mandala? According to Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, it is a circle, disk, or sacred center that is marked off, a kind of cosmic ground or map that “lays out a sacred territory or realm in microcosm, showing the relations among the various powers

active in that realm and offering devotees a sacred precinct where enlightenment takes place.”<sup>27</sup> Mandala, such as the dual mandala (*ryôkai mandara*), are particularly important in the Shingon and Tendai schools of Buddhism for meditation and ritual practice. In the scholarly literature, they are often characterized as aids to visualization, a graphic means to identify and ultimately merge oneself spiritually with the Buddha represented symbolically in the mandala.

However, in popular Buddhist pilgrimage, they can also serve as handy visual aids for teaching Buddhist truths. Along the Chichibu route, many temples, which were founded by Shingon and Tendai holy men, are understood as mandalized spaces illustrating the Buddhist Dharma.<sup>28</sup> To explain what a mandala is and does, I like to show a painting from Chichibu’s temple number 32, Hôshôji, located in the mountains of Ogano Machi (figure 4). This painting reveals that the temple’s grounds are a



Figure 4.

giant mandala. It was drawn by a 19<sup>th</sup> century parishioner, Handa Kurajirô. It shows a cliff shaped like a boat upon which images of Dainichi Nyôrai and Kannon are enshrined, a depiction of how the sacred precincts appeared to Chichibu pilgrims at that time. What I ask my class is this: Given their knowledge of Buddhism, what key symbols and beliefs are displayed in this picture of the temple precincts? Students quickly observe that the boat or raft (*yana*) crossing the sea of suffering is one of

the time-honored metaphors for the Buddhist path. This is but one of several symbolic associations they can discover in Hôshôji's mandalized sacred geography. Students, like the Chichibu pilgrims of the past, can identify the key Mahâyâna doctrines of salvation. They can also gain a better understanding of the different ways mandala were used. Here, the picture is not a visual aid for ecstatic meditation for realizing that one is no other than the Buddha, but was used in sermons (*etoki*) for converting and educating pilgrims who visited the temple.

But how do you get students inside such a mandala? How do you get them to understand the model of the cosmos it reveals that was part of the worldview of pre-modern Japanese people? I have my students look at another example, the *Kanjin Jukkai mandara*, which the Kumano nuns in the 17<sup>th</sup> century used for lay preaching. The *Kanjin Jukkai mandara* portrays the ten worlds of existence including the *rokudô*, six realms of transmigration and, especially, the Blood Pool Hell for women. Fortunately, there are many resources presently available for teaching this mandala. A lavishly illustrated site designed by the Kumano Field Museum is on the Internet,<sup>29</sup> and there is also available a useful DVD, *Preaching from Pictures: A Japanese Mandala* by David W. Plath and Ronald Toby.<sup>30</sup> I assign a group of students to do special in-class presentations. They are responsible for a fifteen-minute presentation that explains the mandala's key symbols, how it was used by the Kumano nuns, and the key Buddhist teachings found in the painting. After this, I divide the class into five groups with each responsible for drawing a part of the *Jukkai mandara* only, in this case, using the campus in which they live, St. Lawrence University, as the scene for the painting. The students draw images of SLU's ideal of the Pure Land, the enlightened heart of the university, hell, the wheel of samsara, and the human realm. Figure 5 shows one of the images drawn by students, their vision of the wheel of life. In their drawing, the different realms of existence have been replaced by the various dormitories students live in from their first year until graduation. By drawing the wheel of life of their school, students have fun, but they also think about key



Figure 5.

Buddhist lessons—that life is a path, that life is transient, and so on. They also directly discover how mandala can be powerful modes of expression. As a final part of the project, I have them put up a Buddhist mandala exhibit, making posters that we display in the hall of the religion department so they can teach other students what they have learned.

So what is the value of teaching through images? In my Japanese religions survey class, students learn new ways of seeing that makes the more self-conscious of “the historicity” of vision. Are there different ways of seeing the world? My class also challenges them to think about religion: In what ways is it more than a collection of sacred writings? What does it mean to have a “sacred gaze”? Naturally, as a humanities course, my goal is always to encourage self-reflexivity—to reflect on what shapes their vision of the world and how what they have learned has changed their own ways of seeing. If I have achieved this, I’ve done my job.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Russell Kirkland, University of Georgia, and Stuart Young, St Lawrence University, for their useful feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970, 21.

- <sup>3</sup>David MacDougall, "The Visual in Anthropology," in *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, eds. Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 283. Or as Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy define it, it is those "processes that result in humans producing visible objects, reflexively constructing their visual environment and communicating by visual means" (21).
- <sup>4</sup>David Crouch and Nina Lübbren eds., *Visual Culture and Tourism* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 8. See also John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).
- <sup>5</sup>That sushi signifies Japaneseness despite its now global marketing as a fad food is entertainingly discussed in Trevor Corson's recent book, *The Zen of Fish* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).
- <sup>6</sup>Joy Hendry, "Pines, Ponds, and Pebbles: Gardens and Visual Culture," in *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, eds. Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 240.
- <sup>7</sup>See MacDougall, "The Visual in Anthropology," 283.
- <sup>8</sup>Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.115.
- <sup>9</sup>See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); see also David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- <sup>10</sup>Alan Sponberg, "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism," quoted in Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan, "Buddha's Bodies and the Iconographical Turn in Buddhism," in *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World* ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co, 1999), p.397.
- <sup>11</sup>Harrison, *Gardens*, p.118.
- <sup>12</sup>David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2005), p.30.

- <sup>13</sup>MacDougall, "The Visual," p.283.
- <sup>14</sup>Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 19.
- <sup>15</sup>Jackson Bailey, "Japan on the World Scene: Reflection on Uniqueness and Commonality." In Cogan, John J. and Schneider, Donald O., eds. *Perspectives on Japan: A Guide for Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983), p. 76.
- <sup>16</sup>For interesting posts on this matter, see James "Japanese Pizza," *Japan Probe*, December 1, 2007, which discusses the Pizza Hut's "Winter Double King." <http://www.japanprobe.com/?p=3281> and "Domino's Pizza Japan unveils Croissant Crust Pizzas!," *Japan Probe*, January 2, 2007. <http://www.japanprobe.com/?p=859>.
- <sup>17</sup>Masao Miyoshi, "Japan is not Interesting," in Japanese Studies Association of Australia, *Papers of the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia* (1997), p.17
- <sup>18</sup>See her *Reinventing Japan: Time Space and Nation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp.8-11.
- <sup>19</sup>Mimi Hall Yiengprukswan, "The Phoenix Hall at Uji and the Symmetries of Replication" *The Art Bulletin* 77 (December, 1995): 647-72..
- <sup>20</sup>François Berthier, *Reading Zen in the Rocks* ( Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,2000), pp.5-6.
- <sup>21</sup>Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.106.
- <sup>22</sup>Two recent books that attempt to explore the question of the hiddenness and secrecy of icons are Sarah Horton's *Living Buddhist Statues in Early Medieval and Modern Japan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (London: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>23</sup>Diana Eck, *Darsan, Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg,PA: Anima Books, 1981), p.30.
- <sup>24</sup>See Gregor Goesthals, *The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion, and the Making of Meaning* (Cambridge,MA:

- Cowley Publications, 1990), pp.23, and David Morgan's *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1998).
- <sup>25</sup>Dietrich Seckel, *Before and Beyond the Image*. Trans. Andreas Leisinger (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 2004), p.11.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.11.
- <sup>27</sup>Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu, HA: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p.2.
- <sup>28</sup>See Alan Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions* 21 ( February, 1982):195-221.
- <sup>29</sup>Kumano Field Museum [http://kumano-world.org/english/anfi\\_e/mainmenu.html](http://kumano-world.org/english/anfi_e/mainmenu.html).
- <sup>30</sup>This is produced by the Asian Educational Media Service, Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (2005).

## FOR OUR STUDENTS

*Editors' Note:* The following article was selected for publication in the *ASIANetwork Exchange* by Van Symons, Director of the ASIANetwork Student-Faculty Program funded by the Freeman Foundation, as an outstanding example of student scholarship. Christy Ivie traveled to China as a participant in the Program with a team of five students from Illinois Wesleyan University in the summer of 2007 to conduct research on city planning in the early years of the People's Republic (1949-1956). Having selected Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou as case study sites, the team investigated urban problems of the period relating to schools, health care facilities, sanitation, environmental degradation, and housing—the focus of Ms. Ivie's article. The team, mentored by IWU History professor, Thomas Lutze, carried out research in municipal archives, conducted interviews with former Directors of City Planning in each city, and interviewed elderly people in targeted neighborhoods about their experiences and memories of the time. The student researchers presented their findings at the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs in the fall of 2008.

### **Razing Shantytowns and Raising New Villages:**

Urban Housing in the  
PRC, 1949-56

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#### **Abstract**

Although the historical and economic conditions in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou varied greatly at the times they were liberated, all three cities went through periods of recovery and transition followed by larger-scale construction. The local

governments in all three cities immediately began efforts to improve the living conditions of working class people through city planning and housing initiatives, whether it was cleaning up slums, constructing new worker's dormitories, or surveying the population and repairing dangerous housing. While the extent to which each city received funding from the central government differed, it is clear that each city benefited significantly from improved city planning and improved housing conditions after liberation.

In the first half of the twentieth century, constant political turmoil and military destruction severely worsened housing conditions in China's cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. Feuds between powerful warlords ravaged the countryside before a civil war erupted between the Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao Zedong. Although the two parties formed a tenuous United Front to fight against the Japanese during latter years of the fourteen-year long Japanese occupation (1931-1945), the civil war broke out again in 1946 and ended ultimately with the victory of the Communists in 1949. Beijing, an important cultural and political center throughout China's long history, was restored as the national capital. Shanghai, known as a city of sin and adventure for foreigners, was reclaimed by the Chinese after being largely under foreign control since the end of the First Opium War (1842). Nearby Hangzhou, known for its past beauty and its silk production, however, enjoyed neither the political nor the economic significance of the other two. Yet all three cities were in poor condition when the founding of the People's Republic of China was declared from the rostrum of Tiananmen on October 1, 1949.

Once the PRC was established, the leadership focused on two main goals for urban China, improving the economy through an emphasis on industrialization and production, and improving the living conditions of the working people through social reform.<sup>1</sup> With both of these goals in mind, members of the Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou municipal governments, urban planning

specialists, and, later, Soviet advisors set to work to formulate new urban planning policies. However, the new government did more than plan the new urban China; in all these cities, immediate efforts were made to restore, repair, and/or build housing units in order to house the urban poor and improve the living conditions of the laboring masses.

### **The Beijing Housing Situation**

Due to the destruction and filth caused by the Sino-Japanese and civil wars, the period of 1949-1952 was one of recovery and restoration for Beijing. Eight infamous slum districts, including Longxuguo or “Dragon Beard Ditch,” housed the city’s poor in unsanitary, miserable conditions. In 1956 the famous playwright Lao Sheh (Lao She) celebrated the heroic clean-up of Dragon Beard Ditch in his play by the same name. Act I begins with a moving and accurate depiction of the conditions in the slum in 1948:

*The Ditch is full of muddy, slimy water, mixed with rubbish, rags, dead rats, dead cats, dead dogs, and now and then dead children...On the two banks, closely packed together, there live labourers, handicraft workers- the multifarious toiling poor...Their houses may tumble down at any moment; most of their yards have no lavatories, let alone kitchens...Everywhere there are swarms of fleas, clouds of mosquitoes, countless bed-bugs and black sheets of flies, all spreading disease. Whenever it rains, not only do the streets become pools of mud, but water from the Ditch overflows into the yards and houses, which are lower than the street level, and floods everything.”<sup>2</sup>*

All told, some 300,000 citizens of Beijing were either unemployed or under-employed and living in such slums or shantytowns,<sup>3</sup> in small self-made dwellings fabricated with wood and mud.<sup>4</sup> When Beijing was liberated in January of 1949, “two thirds of the houses were dilapidated.”<sup>5</sup>

The top priorities of the People's Government of Beijing were to provide jobs and shelter for the homeless, unemployed and underemployed; to stabilize the economy; and to clean up the eight infamous ditches. Overall, the Government aimed to transform Beijing from a city of consumption to a city of production, while also improving the living conditions of the city's most disadvantaged citizens. Besides cleaning up the slums, the Beijing Government employed many of the homeless and unemployed with construction, clean-up, repair and other city projects.<sup>6</sup> They moved the homeless into temporary shelters, such as temples, that had become public spaces.<sup>7</sup> The new Government also addressed the confusion among citizens regarding housing redistribution. Articles published in the *People's Daily* corrected inaccurate rumors that all housing would be confiscated and rent abolished; reassured owners that private property rights would be protected; and notified the people of a new registration system for all housing property owners.<sup>8</sup> The Government focused heavily on protecting private housing, enforcing reasonable rent, and encouraging landlords to repair their housing properties. However, the Government did confiscate for redistribution all housing property belonging to war criminals or collaborators with the former government<sup>9</sup> and later all unoccupied or abandoned housing.<sup>10</sup>

Many early housing needs for workers were met by the new state-owned enterprises. By June of 1949, even before the official founding of the People's Republic, for example, the Department of Railways in Beijing had taken steps to provide housing for its employees.<sup>11</sup> In July of 1950, the *People's Daily* reported that worker dormitories for the People's Printing Factory, too, were near completion. Workers and their families lived in the two and three-story buildings. Each apartment was equipped with two bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, and a small balcony. Even before completing these two buildings, the People's Printing Factory began construction on another five-story building that would hold 124 families. Nearby they also built a new cafeteria that served 500 people at one time.<sup>12</sup>

After this initial period of recovery and clean-up (1949-1952), the First Five Year Plan (FFYP) was developed. The FFYP “emphasized heavy industrial growth in urban locations, and at a regional scale it directed the major new industrial development projects away from the coastal cities into the inland areas.”<sup>13</sup> The new city plan for Beijing projected a period of twenty years of development that would encompass an area of 500km<sup>2</sup>, accommodating a population of four or five million people.<sup>14</sup> The city was designed such that most of the residential areas were concentrated on the Western side of the city. The residential areas were divided into large city blocks as opposed to the carelessly planned alleyways of the inner city.<sup>15</sup> This approach was based on the Soviet urban planning model of large, self-contained blocks or communities within cities. In 1955, Soviet advisors arrived in Beijing to study the urban planning situation for six months, and a new city plan was devised.

Although the advisor’s opinions were respected, Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong agreed that the Soviet model must be adjusted to fit the specific needs and conditions of Beijing.<sup>16</sup> The plan of 1955 centered on three main priorities for investment: the expansion of Beijing, the development of industries in the suburbs in outlying areas, and the structure of the inner city.<sup>17</sup> In that same year, the big block concept was abandoned for a newer concept of community, the small district (*xiaoqu*), which included 30-60 hectares of land and approximately 10,000-20,000 people. The main objective of the new neighborhoods was to provide all social and public services within each community, thereby relieving some of the population and traffic pressure on the inner city. As for housing, in Beijing and a few other large cities, the FFYP meant large-scale city development and construction. In fact, 9.1 million m<sup>2</sup> of housing was built between 1949 and 1957 in Beijing.<sup>18</sup> This construction was in addition to the massive efforts in the capital and other cities that were put into repairs in the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> Of this 9.1 million m<sup>2</sup> of housing, 1.57 million m<sup>2</sup> was built in the first three years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China during the same

time, all this in addition to another 1.37 million m<sup>2</sup> of factories, colleges and universities, hotels, hospitals, and other industrial or public service buildings that were built.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Situation in Shanghai**

Like Beijing, Shanghai was a major focus of urban planning development after the Communist Revolution. Because of its vital role as China's main industrial and commercial center (in 1947 Shanghai contributed 69.4% of China's total foreign trade<sup>21</sup>), it became a priority for the new government. Unlike Beijing, Shanghai had been a "semi-feudal and semi-colonial port city of finance, commerce, and manufacturing."<sup>22</sup> Until its liberation in May 1949, much of Shanghai had been governed by separate foreign concessions as a result of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which effectively ended the First Opium War and opened the city as a port for international trade. Within China, it was seen as a city of consumption, corruption, and debauchery, a destination for foreign imperialists and adventurers. It was reported by Stretton (1978) that "in 1937 twenty thousand corpses were said to have been removed from the pavements of Shanghai's European quarter alone."<sup>23</sup> The sharp divide between rich and poor, West and East within the city is evidenced in a first-hand account of the city written by Basil Davidson in 1953:

Apart from two or three luxury hotels...Shanghai has few buildings which are modern in the proper sense of the word. The famous Bund, where a wide road curves along the brink of Soochow Creek, has some large office buildings: behind them the drab and sordid confusion of an Asian slum begins at once, and seems never to end.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, although the history and context of this city were very different from that of Beijing, the capital city of the new People's Republic, Shanghai at the time of liberation also struggled with many of the same issues of clean-up and restoration as Beijing. In both cases, the new government faced the challenge of addressing the pressure on inner-city housing resources, and providing housing for the city's poor. In Shanghai,

from an urban planning perspective this task was even more daunting because of the lack of a comprehensive city plan prior to 1949.<sup>25</sup>

Foreign capitalists had built roads, buildings, and other facilities in their neighborhoods, and water and electricity systems were divided by concessions. In an effort to end this fragmentation, in 1946 a group of technocrats not affiliated with the Kuomintang government drafted a city plan that combined Western and Eastern influences. This plan was never utilized, however, and it was abandoned after the Kuomintang was removed from power. When Shanghai was liberated in May 1949, the technocrats gave the plan to the new city government as a gift, and many of them continued to work for the People's Government. Thus, when a new city plan was produced by city officials and Soviet advisors in 1950, it was heavily influenced by the plan of 1946.<sup>26</sup>

The priorities of the new government of Shanghai were similar to those of Beijing: to improve the living conditions of the laboring people, and to serve industry in order to develop Shanghai still more as a city of production.<sup>27</sup> In order to accomplish these goals and relieve traffic and population pressure in the inner city, the People's Government planned and built self-sufficient neighborhood units called "New Villages," which included not only housing but nearby public services, green spaces, entertainment halls, and cafeterias. In fact, during this time period the standard of living for workers living in these New Villages surpassed even that of some city officials.<sup>28</sup>

Two neighborhood units built in Shanghai in the early 1950's were Caoyang and Rihui New Villages. Caoyang was built in 1950-1951 with the help of Soviet advisors. Located in the northwest part of Shanghai, this New Village was 3.5km from the central Putuo area, an industrial area where the residents of Caoyang worked. It extended into the northwest suburbs of Shanghai, surrounded by farmland. According to an article in the Shanghai Municipal Archives, the service buildings in the area met the basic needs of the population, and the only planned

facility that was not built was a cinema.<sup>29</sup> Rihui New Village was built in the southern part of the city. Its location was selected because of its proximity to public transportation and public welfare facilities. Several medium and small-scale factories were located nearby. The city planners faced many challenges in building Rihui because, unlike Caoyang, it was built in the middle of an existing inner city neighborhood. Housing construction was difficult because the population was already so concentrated that demolishing and rebuilding housing units would have meant displacing a large number of people.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Rihui was not as successful as Caoyang, and it was reported in 1957 that the construction of a complete integrated village at Rihui had still not been finished.<sup>31</sup>

The housing design of the units built in Caoyang and Rihui between 1949 and 1956 varied. The standard design in the early part of this period was two story dormitory-style housing, in which several families shared a corridor and kitchen.<sup>32</sup> These were typically brick and wood structures, reinforced with steel beams. Later, apartment-style buildings were constructed, with two to three families per story, and each family occupying two or three rooms. These were two or three story structures made mostly from wood, with bamboo floors in the kitchen and bathrooms.<sup>33</sup>

In Caoyang New Village, for example, eight new Model Worker apartment buildings were built in 1950. In July of 1952, the first 48 families moved into the two story buildings. Although the neighborhood has changed greatly, several of these buildings still stand, next to a large park (also built in 1950) and outdoor exercise equipment in the middle of the bustling complex. When talking with the residents of these buildings, it becomes clear that the construction of this village dramatically improved their living conditions after liberation. One elderly woman with whom we spoke had lived as a squatter in the Zhabei District slum before moving into a Model Worker apartment in 1952. She and her husband worked in a nearby switch factory, and after liberation they began attending a night school for workers in order to learn how to read and write. They were able to do so

because when the 48 families moved in, the neighborhood was already equipped with nearby public markets, grocery stores, primary schools, cafeterias, and entertainment halls.<sup>34</sup> These facilities had been created at the same time as the housing units as part of the city planning goal of making each neighborhood self-sufficient. According to the two women interviewed, this experience was typical of those who moved into the new housing units at Caoyang. Many of the unemployed or self-employed (those who unloaded ships on the docks, for example) who lived in the slum districts or shantytowns, were given jobs at local factories, and were therefore eligible for worker housing.<sup>35</sup>

While similar efforts were made in Beijing and Shanghai immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic to improve housing conditions for the urban poor, these findings cannot be generalized to include all Chinese cities during this time period. Special attention was given to these cities by the new government precisely because they were the political/cultural center (Beijing) and the industrial/commercial center (Shanghai) of China. Hangzhou, a popular tourist destination and the capital of Zhejiang Province in eastern China makes an excellent comparative study to illustrate this point.

### **The Hangzhou Situation**

Unlike Beijing and Shanghai, Hangzhou did not receive investment funds from the central government after liberation in April 1949. While a few beautiful hotels and villas lined the banks of West Lake, most of the city's population lived in houses made of wood and mud.<sup>36</sup> These houses were generally small, one-room structures built by the inhabitants themselves, much like those in the slum districts of Beijing and Shanghai.

After liberation, Hangzhou's Ministry of Construction conducted a survey concerning housing and living conditions in order to assess the situation and decide where needs for improvement were most urgent.<sup>37</sup> Like Beijing, Hangzhou first went through a two-year period of recovery and transition. As for housing during this period, without investment from the central

government, the local government implemented a policy of “basic improvements for dangerous housing and minor-scale renovation and construction (*xiao da xiao jian*).”<sup>38</sup> In the fall of 1951, planning for city construction began, with one of the main objectives being to serve the working class people. After 1953, widespread construction began. However, economic constraints placed limits on what the new government could achieve, and information was not available at the time of our research as to how much construction or repair actually took place.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, although the historical and economic conditions in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou varied greatly at the times they were liberated, all three cities went through periods of recovery and transition followed by larger-scale construction. The local governments in all three cities immediately began efforts to improve the living conditions of working class people through city planning and housing initiatives, whether it was cleaning up slums, constructing new worker’s dormitories, or surveying the population and repairing dangerous housing. While the extent to which each city received funding from the central government differed, it is clear that each city benefited significantly from improved city planning and housing conditions after liberation.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Interviews with former Directors of City Planning in all three cities emphasized the slogan, “Increase production; Improve workers’ livelihoods.” Beijing, 7/2/2007; Shanghai, 7/9/2008; Hangzhou, 7/12/2008.

<sup>2</sup>Lao, Sheh (Lao She), *Dragon Beard Ditch*. Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1956.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Beijing Urban Planning Official 7/2/2007

<sup>4</sup>“Material About the Construction of Beijing Since Liberation” Volume 5, Part II p. 255 Translated by Zan Tao

<sup>5</sup>Wang, Ya Ping and Alan Murie, *Housing Policy and Practice in China*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc. 1999, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Beijing Urban Planning Official 7/2/2007

- <sup>7</sup>“Committee Established in Each of the Seven Districts of Beijing,” *The People’s Daily* , 6/8/1950 translated by Zan Tao 7/3/2007
- <sup>8</sup>“Note Regarding Housing in Beijing,” issued by the Military Administration Committee of Beijing, published in the *People’s Daily* 5/16-17/1949, translated by Zan Tao 6/29/2007
- <sup>9</sup>“Real Estate Ownership Contract to be Distributed,” *People’s Daily*, 8/15/1949, translated by Zan Tao 7/3/2007
- <sup>10</sup>“Beijing Government Publishes a Temporary Method Concerning Unoccupied Housing Property in the Urban Area of Beijing,” *People’s Daily* 3/22/1950, translated by Zan Tao 7/3/2007
- <sup>11</sup>“The Department of Railways Establishes an Institute for Housing Property Administration,” *People’s Daily* 6/5/1949, translated by Zan Tao 6/29/2007
- <sup>12</sup>“Beijing People’s Printing Factory Worker Dormitories Nears Completion,” *People’s Daily* 7/25/1950 translated by Zan Tao 7/3/2007
- <sup>13</sup>Wang and Murie, p. 57
- <sup>14</sup>“Collective Mediation in Housing Disputes Succeeds in Three Districts”
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup>Wang and Murie, p. 65
- <sup>19</sup>Richard Kirkby, “China” in *Housing Policies in the Socialist Third World*. London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990. p. 295.
- <sup>20</sup>“Material Concerning Construction in Beijing Since Liberation,” Vol. 5, Part I, p.6 Peking University Archives. Translated by Zan Tao
- <sup>21</sup>Sit, Victor F.S., Ed. *Chinese Cities: The Growth of Metropolis Since 1949*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1985, p. 101
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>23</sup>Stretton, Hugh. *Urban Planning in Rich and Poor Countries*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1978 p. 135
- <sup>24</sup>Davidson, Basil. *Daybreak in China*. (London: Jonathan Cape), 1953. p. 69
- <sup>25</sup>Lecture by former Shanghai city officials 7/9/2007
- <sup>26</sup>Lecture by Luan Laoshi at Tongji University 7/7/2007
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>Building Processes for Cao Yang and Rihui New Villages, 1951-1957, Article A54-2-158-82, translated by Ren Chao
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup>Housing Design in Caoyang and Rihui New Villages from Shanghai Municipal Archives, translated by Ren Chao
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>Interview with two elderly residents of Caoyang New Village, Shanghai, 7/8/2007
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup>Interview with , Sun Dongjia, former Director of City Planning in Hangzhou. Hangzhou Planning Bureau 7/12/2007
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid.

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