

## *Editorial*

In this issue, we move away from our customary focus on the Muslim Middle East and Muslims in the West and turn toward Southeast Asia and China. Here, we find Muslim communities that seem not to be so entranced by what we in the West consider to be the most pressing issues: the Muslim world vs. the West and/or modernity, the Abrahamic faiths triologue, political and economic reform, the suitability of western-style democracy in Muslim countries, and the rise of Islamic “fundamentalism,” “terrorism,” “extremism,” or whatever similar term the media throws at us.

Excluding Indonesia and Malaysia, the overriding concerns of these Muslims appear to be different, for they are often viewed as unwanted or ignored minority communities. For example, Muslims living in Xinjiang, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines are confronted daily by hostile or indifferent regimes that want their natural resources and land. Thus, their main concerns are actual (as opposed to theoretical) justice, being allowed to remain “different” instead of being forced to assimilate, and passing on their religious and cultural identities in a hostile environment.

In interfaith terms, their intellectuals are involved in other discourses: Islam and Buddhism, Confucianism, communism, folk religion, cultural chauvinism, and others. To cite an example, one of my Cham Muslim friends from Vietnam translated the Qur’an into Vietnamese several years ago. According to him, the hardest part was translating such monotheistic concepts as God, sin, final judgment, good, and evil into a non-monotheistic language that has no words for such concepts. One of our articles (Peterson) deals with how Chinese Muslim scholars of the pre-modern era tried to solve this problem.

Several of our articles deal with China, whose rite of passage into modernity might have killed a lesser nation. Within the space of 100 years, it was ruled by a highly traditional empire engulfed in its own hubris, a nationalist republican regime beset by a virulent communist insurgency and Japanese invasion, and an extremely radical revolutionary communist regime. And now it is an economic dynamo, due to its “capitalism with Chinese characteristics.” But what do we know of its Muslims, other than that the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang continue to be restive and that the Bush administration has accepted Beijing’s claim that several of Xinjiang’s secessionist groups have links with the Taliban and al-Qaeda?

We lead off with Philipp Bruckmayr's "The Cham Muslims of Cambodia: From Forgotten Minority to Focal Point of Islamic Internationalism." He introduces us to this resilient community, descendants of the Hinduized (and much later partially Islamized) kingdom of Champa, the former ruler of much of present-day Vietnam's central region. He looks at them before and after the holocaust that engulfed them, their origin, what was important to them, and why the Khmer Rouge unleashed their wrath against them. Going one step further, he explains how this community is now rejoining the larger Islamic world that had forgotten about it centuries ago. Based on his fieldwork during the summer of 2005, Bruckmayr also informs us of the new challenges facing the Cham: the influx of alien interpretations of Islam, conflicts between rural and urban Muslims, the close relationship of the community's leaders with the ruling Cambodian People's Party, and Cambodia's new role in the "war on terror."

In our "Forum" section, Ba Trung Phu introduces us to the Cham Bani of Vietnam, who live in the traditional Cham heartland and follow the traditional ways. Having grown up in this culture, he offers an insider's view of their version of "pure" Islam. As honored guests of the community's leader, my friend (who grew up there) and I attended their *tarawih* prayers during Ramadan 1993. This was the first time they had allowed the "other" into their mosque since the village-wide split that had occurred after orthodox Sunni Islam arrived in the 1960s. I watched two imams, dressed in white and wearing solar-orb-type hats, recite the *adhan*, which seemed to take several minutes and contained few recognizably Arabic words. I saw the women, none of whom wore the hijab, and some of the men perform the full-body prostration that I have seen in Hindu and Buddhist temples. After they joined the other imams in the front to pray on the community's behalf in front of tall grayish-colored candles, we sat and talked with the betel-nut-chewing leader and slowly acquired an audience eager to learn about us.

Next, we present three articles on the complicated land of China. First is Kristian Petersen's "Reconstructing Islam: Muslim Education and Literature in Ming-Qing China." In his fascinating article, he traces the Muslim scholars' long-term (and largely one-sided) scholarly process to convince their non-Muslim colleagues to accept Islamic knowledge as a legitimate and recognized part of classical Chinese civilization. Their claim was based on two major assertions: Muhammad enjoyed the same stature as China's revered ancient sages, and Islam was the equivalent of their *dao* (path). Generations of Muslim scholars devoted themselves to this, fearing that Islam might one day vanish due to the Muslims' growing inability to read the original Arabic-

and Persian-language texts and because many children were being lost to the surrounding Chinese civilization. To solve this problem, they developed the *Han Kitab*, a corpus of indigenous Islamic literature written in Chinese during 1600-1750. Petersen details this process for us, as well as its ultimate fate.

Haiyun Ma's "Patriotic and Pious Muslim Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century China: The Case of Ma Jian" follows the career of a Chinese Muslim intellectual who sought to secure a respected place for Muslims and Islamic knowledge under the Republicans (1911-49) and the Communists (1949- ). After a brief account of Ma Jian's early years, he analyzes this scholar's attempts to convince both regimes that allowing Muslim children to acquire Islamic knowledge in the state-controlled education system would benefit the people and the nation. Although unsuccessful in this and in his quest to reform the existing mosque-centered education system that isolated the Muslims from the surrounding Chinese society, Ma Jian left behind a valuable legacy of translations from Arabic (including the Qur'an), made Arabic and Islamic sciences for the first time a respectable part of Beijing University's curricula, and trained a new generation of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to carry on his vision of solidifying China's ties with the Muslim world.

Our final article, Ross Cuthbert's "Beijing Rides the Bandwagon: A Critical Analysis of Islam and Separatism in Xinjiang," examines how Beijing, in the aftermath of 9/11, persuaded the Bush administration that indigenous Uyghur Muslim opposition to repressive official policies was due to the restive indigenous population's supposed "Islamist" orientation and "links" with the Taliban or al-Qaeda. Cuthbert does all of us a service by discrediting Beijing's foundational document for this claim: "East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity." He informs us of why Beijing holds on to this restive province, how it views the many separatist groups, the problems associated with translating Chinese into English, and the context in which the report was released. The article ends with an assessment of Uyghur-Han relationships and existing realities on the ground in Xinjiang.

This ties in well with Rebiya Kadeer's "Forum" article on living as an economically successful and outspoken Uyghur woman in Xinjiang. Once considered one of China's ten richest people, everything changed when she began to speak about her people's plight at the national level. Unfortunately, this brave woman cannot match the "superstar" status of neighboring Tibet's Dalai Lama; nor does "Xinjiang" conjure up Tibet's long-standing romanticized "mystical" and "exotic" image. As a result, it will be an uphill battle to raise the concern of western politicians and the general public.

Our other "Forum" article deals with the need for a Muslim-Buddhist interfaith dialogue. Chaiwat Satha-Anand's "A Rumor of Anger: Understand-

ing Muslims' Voices in the context of 'Pure War'" discusses how southern Thailand's Muslim community views its place within the surrounding sea of Buddhist Thailand as well as its relationship with a not-always-sympathetic government located in far-away Bangkok. The author pays special attention to the issues of cultural insensitivity and rumor in maintaining the Muslims' sense of alienation. Given the increased level of violence and tension during the last several years, this article is an eye-opener.

While this issue was being put together, an important event took place: On 15 April 2006, North American Muslim leaders finally met with the Dalai Lama, who had requested such a meeting ten years ago. "What was so unusual about that?" it might be asked. Well, most Muslims do not consider Buddhism to be a valid religion, for Buddhists have no concept of God, sin, or the Day of Judgment; believe in reincarnation, the value of monks and monasteries, and "worship" statues; and, perhaps most importantly, claim that since God (in the monotheistic understanding of the term) does not exist, each person must find his/her own way to enlightenment by choosing a suitable path, as opposed to listening to the religious community's leaders.

The fact that they had to ask the fourteenth incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (The Buddha of Compassion) for advice on how to improve Islam's image in the West proves that their strategies have reached a dead end and that new insight – and perhaps new blood – is badly needed. Maybe by taking this step they have finally realized that there is more to a genuine interfaith dialogue and an exchange of worldviews than just talking with fellow monotheists. In fact, there is a whole world of atheists, communists, secular humanists, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists, and followers of traditional indigenous religions with whom Muslims should be talking. Let's include them in our discussions of how to remain spiritual beings in this increasingly materialistic and consumer-driven culture that leaves many of us so frustrated at the end of the day.

We have put a lot of effort into this issue in the hope of broadening our readers' horizons. It is our desire that Muslims in the West leave their comfortable cocoon of fellow monotheists and ethnic cliques and venture forth into what is "uncharted territory" for so many of us. If we do not expose ourselves to new ideas and new possibilities, we will stagnate and, maybe one day, disappear. The meeting with the Dalai Lama is a step in the right direction. May there be many more – and soon!

Jay Willoughby  
Special Issue Guest Editor