

The *Shahid* Conception in the Islamic History of China Empire

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Abstract

There is very little scholarly work about the *shahid* (martyr) conception in the Islamic history of China both in the Chinese and the Western academic circles. This paper has employed Chinese historical materials, private publication as well as the official records to analyze the substantial notion of *shahid* in the historical procession of the imperial dynasties, and its social interaction between the Muslim minorities and Chinese society. It concludes that the martyr perception is one of the fundamental parts of the Islamic doctrine for Muslim communities in China, which often face hostile surroundings. The conception of *shahid* has played a crucial role as a spiritual power to protect Chinese Muslim communities from the pressure being assimilated to, or contained in, the non-Islamic culture in the context of political turmoil.

Keywords: *shahid*, Islam, history, the China Empire.

Introduction

The history of Muslims and Islam in China was usually written by Chinese scholars who maintained close ties with imperial authorities or even took the official positions as scholar-officials, and therefore their scholarly works were largely biased against the alien spiritual traditions out of their deep-rooted, self-centered mentality of Confucianism and the ruling ideologies. Hence, the narrative of the Muslims themselves for their own community affairs and their Islamic faith was often missed, omitted or neglected by these mandarins who were mostly non-Muslims with little sympathy for, and understanding of, the Other; namely Muslim minorities and Islam. Nevertheless, a history of Islam or Muslims in China was unfortunately, if not entirely, filled and fed by official recordings and narratives, which deliberately reflected the intention of the statecraft mechanism, instead of the voice of Muslims in China. As a result of this development, the conception or phenomenon of *shahid* (martyr) or *shuhada'* (martyrs) is very seldom studied by the academic world both in China²

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2. For example, in Yu Zhengui's book *Zhongguo Lidai Zhengquan yu Yisilan Jiao* (The Successive Regimes in China and Islam, Yinchuan, China: Ningxia People's Publication House, 1996), *shahid* is not mentioned at all as it talks about the relationship of Islam with the imperial authorities in China. It reflects

and in academic circles in other parts of the world. Given the current situation in which academic journals and research institutions in the Mainland are subject to restrictive censorship imposed by the Communist Party and state agents, certain subjects related to sensitive religious and ethnic groups suffer difficulties for publication.³ Guided by the notion of “political correctness,” a few Islamic terms, such as *shahid*, *jihad*, and *halal*, became taboos in the last decades. Such policies are harmful to the work of independent researchers on Islam. Monitored by this administrative approach, a historical feature of Islam or of Muslims in China is sometimes exhibited as either “acculturated, harmonious” or “rebellious, disobedient” with an easy generalization swaying between the extreme poles driven by a growing Chinese nationalism.

This paper attempts to unfold the substantiality of the *shahid* conception in the history of Islam in the China Empire on the concrete basis of the Islamic monument inscription in Muslim enclaves, the private publication among the Hui Muslims themselves, and the historical observation of the ritual services performed by the Uighur in Xinjiang as well as other works out of the unofficial scholarly spheres. Especially, the writings by Muslim intellectuals and scholars are highlighted in this paper. Muslim scholars have published private works with the help of donations from Muslim communities, and as a matter of fact, these publications are labeled “illegal publication” or “unofficial publication,” namely without any permission from governmental authorities who try hard to ban these Muslim publications at the private level, but to no avail. Hence, through the veneer of these unofficial writings and materials, this paper aims to display an objective historical aspect of Islam in China differentiated from the imperial chronicles and the official academic works, which have totally dominated publications and public mass media. Consequently, this paper provides a narrative as much as from the inside of Muslims themselves or by using Muslims’ own voices in explaining the notion of *shahid* in their history.

An Overview of the *Shahid* Conception in the Islamic World

The word *shahid* (plural, *shuhada*’), meaning both witness and martyr in Arabic, is influenced by the Syriac *sahido*, which is used to translate key Christian concepts concerning martyrdom in the Syriac Bible (Jeffrey 1938). In fact, the word for martyr in Arabic has the same root as the word—*shahida*—

the general feature of how hard it is for scholars who want to maintain their independence in academic research under authoritarian systems. Another book *Xiyu Hezhuo Jiazu Yanjiu* (Study of the Families of Khoja in Xinjiang. Beijing, China: Chinese Social Sciences Publication House, 1998, written by Liu Zhengying and Wei Liangtao) also entirely neglects the *shahid* conception as the book presents a history of the Khojas’ insurgency in Xinjiang.

3. Even if a few Hui scholars such as Bai Shouyi who was influenced by Marxist ideology failed to write anything connecting with *shahid*, that is, see his book of *Zhongguo Huijiao Xiao Shi* (A Brief History of Islam in China), the first edition was published in 1944, and reprinted by Ningxia People’s Publication House in 2000, and so do some of his other works.

meaning to witness or testify. In a testimony of faith, Muslims publicly state what is known as *shahada*, proclaiming that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His prophet (Davis 2003). In the Arabic version of the Quran, *shahid* or *shuhada*, just like its Christian counterpart, means “martyr” or “martyrdom”; that is, fighting for keeping the faith, or being “killed in the way of God.” For instance, the Quranic verse 3:139 says: “We bring these days to men by turns, that Allah may know those who believe and take *shuhada*’ from among you. And Allah loves not the wrongdoers.” This verse of the Quran is dated to the Battle of Uhud (625), the one serious retreatment in a battle that the early Muslim community suffered, according to the traditional Muslim chronology (Cook 2007). In the Quran 4:69, it says “And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the *shuhada*’ and the righteous, and a goodly company are they!” Other verses of the Quran (39:69 and 57:19) also point to this. The latter says: “And those who believe in Allah and His messengers, they are the truthful and the *shuhada*’ with their Lord. They have their reward and their light. And those who disbelieve and reject the messages of the Quran, they are the inmates of hell.”

The other verses of the Quran also cite *shahid* or *shuhada*’ referring to the reward for those slain in the way of God; for example, in the Quran the verses 2:154, 3:157, 4:74, 9:111 and 47:4-6 all tackle with rewards of martyrdom. The most decisive verses specifying the martyr’s reward are the Quran 3:168-69: “And think not of those who are killed in Allah’s way as dead. Nay, they are alive being provided sustenance from their Lord. Rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace, and they rejoice for the sake of those who (being left) behind them, have not yet joined them, that they have no fear, nor shall they grieve.”

The word *shahid* or *shuhada*’ is found not only in the Quran but also in hadiths, the speeches and practices of the Prophet Muhammad that are also treated by Muslims as a fundamental source of the Islamic law. Al-Suyuti, an early Islamic scholar, cited the most popular tradition expanding the number of possible cases of martyrdom: “The Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] said: ‘God Most High has established [the martyr’s] reward according to his intention.’ What do you count as the circumstances of martyrdom? They said: ‘Dying in the path of Allah [jihad].’ The Messenger of Allah said: ‘There are seven categories of martyr other than being killed in the path of Allah. The one who dies of a stomach complaint is a martyr, the one who drowns is a martyr, the one who dies of plague is a martyr, the one who dies in a structural collapse is a martyr, the one who dies in a fire is a martyr, the one who dies of pleurisy, and the woman who dies in childbirth is a martyr’” (Cook 2007).

Al-Suyuti also listed a number of other circumstances of martyrdom: a traveler who dies away from his home, one who dies of fever, someone who is thrown from his mount while going to fight and dies, someone who guards

(*murabit*) the frontiers of Islam, someone who dies in defense of his/her property, someone who is eaten by wild animals, someone who is denied justice and dies from it, someone who is killed by an unjust ruler after he enjoins the latter to righteousness, someone who is bitten by a venomous creature (a snake or a scorpion) and dies from it, whoever dies of sickness, whoever dies of lovesickness, as well as whoever dies of seasickness (Cook 2007, 35).

Another hadith also offers an extended notion of *shahid*: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘...Two: all of the prophets were washed after their death, and I will be washed [as well], but martyrs are not to be washed, since they have no need of what is in this world. Three: all of the prophets were wrapped [in linens], and I will be wrapped [as well], but martyrs are not to be wrapped, but buried in their clothes’” (Cook 2007, 42). Many Islamic scholars (in particular, Malikis, Shafi‘is, and Hanbalis) held that “one should not pray over the martyr’s body.” “Again, this is a graphic statement that there was no need for any prayers since the martyr would go directly to heaven” (Cook 2007, 43).

Other scholars such as the great Sufi scholar al-Ghazali (d. 1111) added another definition of *shahid*, which has some controversial sentiment today, but it does not represent the mainstream notion in the Islamic ideological works (Cook 2007, 42).

In a summary, a *shahid* is anyone who is slain as a result of oppression or persecution in upholding Islam faith. Everyone who dies in the midst of battle defending his homeland or fighting evil is worthy of the ranks of the *shuhada*’. In general, there are three types of martyrs according to the Islamic scholars: “1. Choosing to suffer or die rather than give up one’s faith or principles; 2. Being tortured or killed because of one’s convictions; 3. Suffering great pain or misery for a long time (Cook 2007, 34).” *The Islamic Desk Reference* defines a martyr as someone who “seals his belief with his death (Donzel 1994).”

In *the Encyclopedia of Islam*, *shahid* is defined basically as above by al-Suyuti but with a strong affirmation that it includes the “martyrs of love” and the “martyrs who died far from home” (*shuhada’ al-ghurba*) “... and who die in a foreign land...” and “a journey in search of knowledge or a prayer (including a prayer for death in the battlefield)” (Bearman et al., 1995).

Citing an Islamic source, Raphael Israeli holds that *shahid* received from Allah six special gifts, including no torment in the grave, and the choice of seventy members of his family and his confidants to enter the Paradise with him (Israeli 2003).

After the dawn of the nineteenth century, martyrdom is a powerful perception in the modern Muslim world, one that summons the turbulent history of the earliest days of Islam in the seventh century, when followers of Islam died defending their new, persecuted faith (Davis 2003).

Shahid is definitely used by the Muslim minority groups in China such as the Hui, the Uighur, the Salar, the Kirgiz, the Dongxiang, and Bao-an. Such ethnic Muslim groups use it as *Shexide* in its Chinese transliteration or in its

plural form as *Shuhaidayi* for its Arabic characterization of *shahadat* or *shuhada'* in their long historical interaction with non-Muslim neighbors and in the religious discourse. The former means “martyr, one killed in battle with infidels in defense of the faith,” and the latter means “spirit of the martyr, martyrdom” (Wang 2001). Lipman points out that “ready for holy war and prepare for being *shahid* (martyr) makes the Hui very different from Chinese” (Lipman 1997).

However, an overview of the *shahid* conception in the Islamic theological and academic discourse will manifest the substantial character of Islam in China’s Empire: What explanation have Chinese Muslim scholars offered for this important notion? How did Chinese Muslims view this notion, and how did Muslims in China’s Empire, both Hui and the Turkic Muslims, put the *shahid* concept into practice?

***Shahid* in the Early History of Islam in China**

Muslims went to China through two routes mainly in the commercial links between the Islamic world and China: The Silk Road and the Spice Route. For the latter, mariners and merchants from Persia, Central Asia, Arabia, and South Asia settled down in port cities such as Guangzhou (Canton), Quanzhou (Zayton), Hangzhou, and Yangzhou. Muslim immigrants built mosques, married Chinese women, set their own communities, which had their independent judicial system led by Qadi (Islamic judge) to be in charge of their legal cases and establish Islamic schools for teaching the Quran. Even Sufis built their own monasteries in Muslim enclaves as Ibn Battuta reported in his travelogue. However, alien Muslims and their offspring encountered a hostile social environment with an overwhelming non-Muslim majority. For instance, a wedding party was held in the Muslim community of Hangzhou at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, which eventually resulted in catastrophe. Many Chinese neighbors climbed onto the roof of the new chamber to peep into the wedding procession out of curiosity. This ended up in a tragedy since so many people stood on the roof, which collapsed and killed the new couple and many of their guests. Instead of coming to rescue the survivors, the Chinese were so pleased of this event that even a learned scholar wrote an ironic piece in which he joked about this tragedy (Bai 2000). It was too sad for Muslims to live in this non-Islamic land: The Chinese worshipped idols, ate pork, not to say that the Muslims were sometimes randomly slaughtered during the Tang Dynasty, the Sun Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty, and the Ming Dynasty, in addition to large-scale massacres in the Qing Dynasty (Donald 1986). Therefore, many deceased Muslims were conferred upon the title of *shahid* by their communities since they had lived on a remote and alien “foreign land” where the majority practiced pantheism. In what follows, I quote the descriptions of *shahid* through an analysis of tombstone inscriptions preserved in Quanzhou, Yangzhou, and

Guangzhou to introduce an important part of the Islamic history in China at below.

1. *Shahid* among Foreign Muslims in the Enclave of Quanzhou

Quanzhou (Zayton in the narrations of Marco Polo's and Ibn Battuta's travel records) was a harbor of the sea trade links between China and the external world. It was also a concentrated foreign Muslim settler composed of mariners and merchants from Central Asia and the Middle East. On excavated stone monuments of deceased Muslims who immigrated from Persia, Central Asia, Arabia, and other areas for commercial trades and later settled down, there are inscriptions describing the Muslim owners who died in the foreign country as *shahid*. For example, there are at least as many as fifteen tombstones carved with the inscription of *shahid* discovered in Quanzhou, which indicates that Muslims from the Islamic world who lived in that port city had endured hardships within the pork-polluted non-Muslim society during the Mongol Dynasty. When they passed away of illness or old age, the Muslim community conferred upon them the appellation of *shahid* in reference to certain hadiths. The following are representative items, which show the evident of *shahid* concept for the Muslims in their early settlement history.

The earliest record of *shahid* is a tombstone dated Thursday in Ramadan, 670 AH (April 7, 1272) with the following lines: "This is *shahid* Muhammad Shah bin Shah Khawrazim who died in the foreign land. Praise to Allah! May Allah be sympathetic to him and other male and female believers" (Composition Committee of the Religious Historical Manuscript Collection in China 2005).

For other instances, Tombstone no. 32a exhibited in the Mariner Communication Museum of Quanzhou displays: "This is the noblest, greatest and most respected martyr Hajji b. Aubak b. Hajji al-Malaq. On Sha'ban 27, 689 (September 4, 1290 CE, the twenty-seventh year of Reign Ziyuan of the Yuan Dynasty)." Al-Malaq is a county in Turkistan. The backside of this tombstone (32b) is carved with these lines: "Say: 'Surely, we are Allah's, and to Him we shall return' (Q 2:156). Whoever dies in the alien land therefore dies a martyr" (Chen 1984). The monumental stone no. 33 says: "Those who die strangers truly die as martyrs. This is the tombstone of the lovely youth Granto Takin Ibn Sultan Khan. He died in Rajab 698 (April 1299 CE, the third year of Reign Dade of the Yuan Dynasty) (16)." Tombstone 85 cites the same hadith as well as the Quran 2:156 in its recording of a *shahid* who died in the foreign land (32). But Tombstone no. 124 adds a new meaning for *shahid*: "Whoso hath died in the night hath died a martyr" as well as a citation of the aforementioned Quranic verse (40).

Tombstone No. 37a says: "The martyr Amir Sayyid Ajala Toghan-Shah b. Sayyid Ajala Umar b. Sayyid Ajala Amiraw b. Amir Isfahasalar Durr-bikri was from Bukhara. May Allah enlighten their houses of the hereafter and make Paradise their permanent abodes. He died on 9 Safar 702 (A.H.) (3 Oct. 1302

A.D., the 6th year of Dade Reign of the Yuan Dynasty).” On the backside of this stone says: “The Prophet (Blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr’” (Chen, 17).

Tombstone no. 39: “Allah the highest said: ‘Everyone on it passes away—. And there endures forever the person of thy Lord, the Lord of glory and honor (Q 55:26-27). Every soul will taste of death. And you will be paid your reward fully only on the Resurrection Day. Then whoever is removed far from the Fire and is made to enter the Garden, he indeed attains the object. And the life of this world is nothing but a provision of vanities (Q 3:184). The Prophet (may peace upon him) said: ‘Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr.’ The outstanding and eminent Sheikh Aklab Umar ... has passed away. May Allah be pity and forgive him. This is Rabi‘u al-Akhir 703 AH (October, 1303 CE, the seventh year of Dade Reign in the Yuan Dynasty), may Allah pardon him” (Chen, 18). Tombstone no. 73 and Stone no. 74a cite the same Quranic verses (55:26-27) in recording “the stranger died as *shahid*,” only the latter has missed the letters of “martyr” due to a partial damage of the tombstone (28). Stone 80b cites the Quranic verse (3:184) and the hadith of *shahid* (31). Stone no. 162 cites the Quranic verses 55:26-27, then cites the hadith: “The Prophet (may peace upon him) said: ‘Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr.’ May God forgive him (46).”

Tombstone no. 41: “Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr. You must believe in the apostle of Allah. The owner of this grave, the fortunate martyr Husayn b. Haji al-Arus Sir Allah has returned to the good grace of Allah. This grave was built on Safar 23, 704 AH (August 25, 1304 CE, the eight year of Dade Reign of the Yuan Dynasty)” (Chen, 19).

Stone no. 48a: “The Prophet (may peace upon him) said: ‘Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr. Whoso hath left this world hath come in the good graces of Allah.’ Shams al-Din b. Nur al-Din b. Ishaq Shahr-Nasa died on Muharram 27, 725 AH (January 13, 1325 CE, the second year of Taiding Reign of the Yuan Dynasty)” (Chen, 21-2). Tombstones no. 49 and no. 54 have the inscription of “fortunate martyr.”

The inscriptions of tombstones of no. 61a and no. 71 have almost the same contents, but the latter has a longer text. As far as *shahid* is concerned, both cite the same verses from the Quran and the same hadith: “Everything will perish but Him (Q 28:88). The Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr. He hath passed away from this illusory world to the Paradise, and is in the good graces of Allah the highest’” (Chen, 28; The Quran, 759).

2. *Shahid* in the Muslim Enclave of Yangzhou

Yangzhou was an important port connected to the Persian Gulf, to which it exported porcelains, tea, and other goods ordered by the rulers of Islamic

kingdoms. There are four excavated tombstones erected in the graveyard of Burhan al-Din, who might originate from Persia or Central Asia, a Muslim scholar who went to China in the late Yuan Dynasty but died in the early Ming Dynasty. The second tombstone has an Arabic inscription on the profile with the second line: “Those who die in a foreign country and a remote land just resemble the *shuhada*’ who sacrificed their lives in the battle-ground.” The is the fourth line: “The name of the deceased is Shams al-Din, a very generous gentleman who made great efforts to do charity work for the poor in his life.” The fifth line: “He died in the tenth month of 702 AH (1301 CE)” (Lin and Chen 1983).

The third tombstone has an Arabic inscription on the profile with the third line saying: “Whoever dies in a foreign country just dies as *shahid* in the fighting.” The fourth line: “The name of the deceased is Shams al-Sin Nabanji.” The fifth line: “He died on the second day of the sixth month, 707 AH (1306 CE).” On the backside of the third tomb-stone, there is an Arabic inscription with the second line saying: “Whoever dies in a foreign country just dies as *shahid* in the fighting.” The seventh line: “The deceased is a woman, died in 724 AH (1324 CE), and her name is Ayisha Haton.... Her father was a famous official in Islam, and his name was Lajunyi” (Lin and Chen, 132-33).

The profile of the fourth tomb-stone bears such inscriptions with the first line: “Whoever dies in a foreign country just dies indeed as *shahid*.” Its fourth line says: “The name of the deceased is Ali al-Din” and the fifth line says: “He died on March 2, 702 AH (1302 CE)” (Lin and Chen, 133).

There are three other tombstones with the name of Allawa’ al-Din, a Hajji who died in 702 AH (1302 CE); Hu’aji Balad Buriwali Quss, a Sheikh who died in 709 AH (1310 CE); Shams al-Din Rajif al-Baraji, a scholar and missionary who died in 724 AH (1324 CE), their monumental inscriptions bearing the hadith: “those who die in a foreign country die as *shahid*” (Composition Committee of the Religious Historical Manuscript Collection in China 2005, 597-99).

3. *Shahid* in the Enclaves of Hangzhou and Guangzhou

Hangzhou, the capital of the South Sun Dynasty, before it was conquered by the Mongols and the Muslims, was another port city with a large number of Persian, Arabian, and Central Asian Muslim immigrants settling down permanently. The unearthed tombstone there bore an inscription with a hadith of *shahid* by the Arabic calligraphic carving: “Khoja Dhusam al-Din bin Khoja Furyiman who came from Laikur died in 707 AH (1306 CE) was entitled as *shahid*” (Composition Committee of the Religious Historical Manuscript Collection in China 2005, 599–600).

In Guangzhou, there were many Middle Eastern and Central Asian Muslim merchants living in *Fanfang* (the Chinese foreigner quarter) during the period

of the Tang Dynasty to the Yuan Dynasty. The foreign Muslim community even built a mosque with its Arabic style minaret, which dated in the ninth century. Several tombstones excavated in this city have carved Arabic inscriptions with following lines: “Ramadan, the son of Alawa’ al-Din, came from Korea, who served as the imperial official of Luchuan County, Daorong Prefecture of Guangxi, died in Guangzhou, in 751 AH (1349 CE)” (Composition Committee of the Religious Historical Manuscript Collection in China 2005, 625-6); “Hajji Mahmed, son of Hajji Muhammad Afanti who came from Rumi (the Othman Turkish Empire), particularly came to venerate the tomb of Saint Sayyid Bin Abu Waqqas, and he fulfilled his wish. Having stayed in Mosque Darkah for two years, he passed away on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month of 1164 AH (1751 CE) (726-7).” Both stones cite the Arabic version of the hadith of *shahid*, but the latter was dated in the Qing Dynasty. The most interesting text was carved on the tombstone of “The Forty Saints in Guangzhou,” which was discovered in the Muslim graveyard with the Chinese calligraphic inscription. The forty saints from Medina carrying a copy of the Quran with them under the instruction of Prophet Muhammad to accompany *Shuhaba* (Arabic for the accompanier of Prophet Muhammad) Waqqas coming to China for the mission of Islam. That took place during the reign of Zhenguang (627-49) of the Tang Dynasty. It was the *juma*’ (Arabic for the Friday congregation), and all of them were slaughtered by a bandit as they were praying. The robber was so shocked after he murdered these Muslims that he committed suicide in shame and died with them. So, he accompanied the saints as a *shahid*. With him buried with them, it became the Tomb of the forty-one Saint *shuhada*’. Owing to the ravages of wind and rain, the inscription on the previous stone tablet was undecipherable. We carve the inscription based on the original text. Date: Re-carved in the second month of the winter, the seventh year of Jiaqing Reign (1802) (Composition Committee of the Religious Historical Manuscript Collection in China 2005, 757).

The authentic nature of this stone monumental inscription is very hard to be proved right now, however. Even if it is a cultural counterfeit, the stone inscription reflects the *shahid* notion of Muslims in Guangzhou anyway: the imagination of Chinese Muslims for their early history, and the reality of the hostile environment where they lived, which created the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the maintenance of their Islamic faith in a non-Muslim society.

***Shahid* in Xinjiang: The Jihad against the Infidels**

The Islamization of the Uighur people in Xinjiang (*Shariqa Turkistan* or the Eastern Turkistan, or China’s Turkistan before the PRC termed by Westerners) went on a very different path, while Islam could just be found in the scattered enclaves in the coast region of Inland China. The Sufi missionaries and the holy war (*jihad*) launched by the newly converted Uighur Muslims played a very

important role in the expansion of Islam in this vast desert, spreading with oases. *Shuhada'* who fell in the battles fighting against Buddhist forces for the course of Islam became the main themes in the early history of Islam in Xinjiang. The jihad launched by Sutuk Bughra Khan and his successors, rulers of the Qara Khanate, the violent assault on the powerful Buddhist kingdom in Khotan from the tenth to the eleventh centuries, actually lasted for more than one hundred years (Ma 2001; The Writing Team of History of Islam in Xinjiang Region, China 2000; Yu 1996).

Sutuk Bughra Khan was the first Uighur Khan who converted to Islam under the guidance of a Sufi Sheikh from Central Asia and died in 955. He was buried in Atush where a famous *mazar* (Arabic for tomb or mausoleum) was built and dedicated to him and his Sufi master. The newly converted Khan and his Islamic Qara-Khan Dynasty immediately began series of military expenditures into the territory of the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan, because Uighur tribes in Kashgar always competed with their main rivalry: the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan in the southern Xinjiang. Through a long process and large-scale jihad, at the end the Muslim army won the war. However, they also paid a very high price: in their prolonged jihad, one Khan and several royal family members with more than ten thousand Muslim soldiers became *shuhada'*, and these martyrs were buried in the desert that was the battle-field of this seesaw military struggle with both sides showing their religious zeal (Ma 2001).

The war launched by the Qara-Khan Dynasty against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan continued by his successors such as Musas Arslan Khan, Hassan Ali Arslan Khan (Hassan Ali Bughra Khan) up to Yusuf Kadir Khan, the cousin of Hassan Ali Arslan Khan, who finally completed the conquest of the Buddhist kingdom. It was said that, in the name of jihad, Yusuf Kadir Khan appealed for aids from other Islamic countries in Central Asia and West Asia. Muslim soldiers from Bagdad, Ghadhani (Afghanistan), Khwarizm, and so on consisted of an army of more than one hundred thousand soldiers for this long-distance Islamic adventure. The four Imams of the Isma'ili Shi'ite from Madain were the first supporters of, and participants in, this holy war against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan. In the early stage of the jihad, the Muslim army of the Qara-Khan Dynasty was in disadvantage, even the imams were captured by the army of Khotan's Buddhist Kingdom. However, due to the large number of Muslim soldiers and the strong spirit of jihad and *shahada*, the Buddhist kingdom was defeated and occupied by Muslim troops. The Qara-Khan Dynasty encouraged its army with the slogan "to wipe up the infidels" in the process of the jihad against the Buddhist Kingdom. The Muslim soldiers thought that if they died in jihad, they were *shuhada'* and would go to the Paradise (Li et al., 1998).

According to the Uighur oral sources, Hassan Ali Arslan Khan, Sutuk Bughra Khan's grandson or Musas Arslan Khan's son, was the commander of the army of the Qara-Khan Dynasty in that period of jihad and was also a very

pious Muslim. Most of his life was spent in the jihad against the infidels (namely, the Buddhists in the Kingdom of Khotan), and achieved many triumphs against the Buddhist army. He engaged in this holy war against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan for over twenty years (Li et al., 1998, 148). At the end of the first month of 388 AH (998 CE), the Muslim army fiercely fought with Buddhist army in Odam Qara. Arslan Khan was slain as he was leading the Muslim army for Morning Prayer when the Buddhist army launched a sudden attack. Many Muslim soldiers also died in this assault. Those who also became *shuhada'* in this jihad were the four Imams: Muhu'i al-Din, Nasir al-Din, Jawli al-Din, Qawami al-Din. The *shuhada'* in this fiercest jihad include Hussain, the fourth uncle of Ali Arslan Khan, Hassan, the second uncle of Ali Arslan and Princess Ali Nura, the old sister of Ali Arslan. In fact, the whole Muslim army led by Ali Arslan Khan perished in this battle (Ma 2001, 44). So, Ali Arslan was the first Khan who became *shahid* and the most esteemed *shahid* of the Qara-Khan Dynasty in the jihad against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan (The Writing Team of History of Islam in Xinjiang Region, China 2000, 94). Arslan Khan's beheaded corpse was buried in the desert where he fell and his tomb became Mazar Odam, a place mostly revered by Uighur Muslims even today. The place where the four Imams were buried is called *mazar* of the Four Imams, which eventually became part of Mazar Odam (The Writing Team of History of Islam in Xinjiang Region, China 2000, 96-8).

This desert area in which the corpses of *shuhada'* were buried turned into Mazar Odam, a complex of *shahid* tombs, which now has developed into the largest *mazar* in South Xinjiang region. It is located in the desert-land of Sule County and Yangishar County of Kashgar Prefecture. In the Uighur language, "Odam" means "palace" or "royal family." *Mazar* as an Arabic-Persian word especially refers to the tomb of Sufi saints or great figures in the Uighur linguistic point of view. In the 1980s, it was visited annually by dozens of thousand, even several hundred thousand, Uighur Muslims. These Uighur pilgrims came from all places such as Gulga (Yili), Qumul (Hami), various areas in Kashgar Prefecture, and the Khotan Region (Ma 2001, 46). So, the ritual of venerating *shuhada'* at Mazar Odam has become one of the biggest Islamic activities in the Uighur Muslim society.

Mazar Odam is out-stood by three huge bounded "Wooden Pagodas," composed of many poles of banners. Every year, pilgrims tend to add more poles of banners to these "Wooden Pagodas" in the ritual of *mazar* visitation. Sufi Muslims often perform *sama'* (Arabic for a kind of dance) and chant *zikr* (Arabic for particular phrases in praise of Allah and Muhammad) at the site of *mazar*.⁴ In memory of the *shahids*, Uighur Muslims perform *sama'* in a circle at the site of Mazar Odam as they revered these fallen heroes in the ritual of *mazar* pilgrimage (The Writing Team of History of Islam in Xinjiang Region, China 2000, 279). Ali Arslan Khan's head was buried in the suburbs of Kashgar city, which also developed into a *mazar* bearing the name of Ali Arslan.

***Shahid* in the Uprisings against the Discrimination Policy of the Qing Empire**

1. *Shuhada'* in the Struggle of the Jahriyya Order

The Jahriyya⁵ *tariqa* (Sufi order or monastery organization) was formulated in the eighteenth century when Ma Mingxin (1719-1781) came back from Yemen after he studied Sufism there for seventeen years. He taught a version of Sufism with a different chanting method by the high tone, which sharply contrasted to the silent tone chanted by the Khafiyya led by Ma Laichi (1681-1766) who also studied Sufism in Yemen for several years. The two Sufi factions fell in tensed relations because they strived to attract Muslim followers and crashed each other with violence. Qing imperial authorities lost the even hand to mediate between them, pitted the Khafiyya against the Jahriyya, and finally they adopted a highly discriminative policy against the latter. Thus, the Jahriyya had to launch insurgences against the Qing Empire, and embarked on a prolonged period of bloodily rebellion.

When it came to the religious faith, there was much in common between the Jahriyya and the Qadim (Arabic for old or ancient) or the traditional Sunni majority group in China. However, followers of the Jahriyya especially revered their *tariqa*'s chiefs because many of them were *shuhada'*, who sacrificed their lives for safeguarding Sufism due to its history of fierce war with the Manchu (the Qing) government. Nevertheless, the perception of *shahid* occupies a preeminent position in the Jahriyya doctrine. For those who believed in the Jahriyya, "their chiefs are the Imams (religious leader) whom they must follow" (Mian 1981). The Jahriyya Order had undertaken several large-scale upheavals against the Qing imperial government in its one hundred and fifty years of rebellion, beginning from the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1760s) to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty (1911). For this reason, this Sufi group suffered the cruelest massacres and even genocide in its miserable history. Indeed, the idea of *shuhada'* in the sense of wearing bloodstained clothes and fighting for survival was one of the most important creeds for the followers of this group. The so-called *shuhada'* spirit for the Jahriyya is the spirit to fight for the right to live and adamantly persisting in the course of Islam, while it is also the alternative name of jihad as an Islamic notion. The road of *shuhada'* advocated by the Jahriyya was not set for the existence and maintenance of the Islamic faith in the entire national territory; rather, it came out just for the self-survival and self-development of this Sufi group (Ma 1986).

Why did the Jahriyya so emphasize the *shahid* identity in its history? This was because the development of this group from its beginning had to do with the tragic death of its founder Ma Mingxin, himself a *shahid*, who died in the massacre committed by the Qing authorities (Jin 1971). The history of the Jahriyya Order says that, before he returned to China after his studies of Sufism in Yemen, Ma Mingxin requested to be bestowed the *shahid* title by his Sufi

master of the Zabid *tariqa* (Li et al., 1998, 332-33). Hence, in his Sufist preaching, Ma Mingxin advocated the path toward *shudaha*’, and encouraged the spirituality of “marching forward while carrying the blood-stained clothes” among his believers. In the doctrine of the Jahriyya Sufi Order, the way of dying for Islam and the Islamic ideal is the way of *shuhada*’, and the Jahriyya followers would easily go to the Paradise of the hereafter with their bloodstained clothes. Therefore, the way of *shuhada*’ is the shortest road ascending to the Paradise. In the tenet of the Jahriyya, the *shahid* percept in the holy war emerged so outstandingly that the Jahriyya regarded *shahid* as a way Allah would try their hearts with the biggest *bala*’ (Arabic for catastrophe or test). Believers should go through various trials with the strongest and most determined *iman* (Arabic for faith). To face such a *bala*’ was rather a religious merit and virtue for Muslims. The Jahriyya thought that they should raise the green banner in order to sacrifice its followers’ lives with the blood of *shuhada*’, this tradition must be passed from the old to the young generation. Nevertheless, the status of *shuhada*’ for the Jahriyya leaders actually became a religious obligation and achievement. A common proverb circulating among Jahriyya followers was: “To shed a drop of blood is better than to perform a prayer,” since the rank of *shahid* is higher than that of ordinary believers. Jahriyya Sheikhs usually said to their young people that, in the time of the Qing Dynasty, Akhond of the Jahriyya Order always spoke these words to end his sermon in congregation services: “Oh! *dawstani* (Persian for Muslim brothers)! If you obey this *ayat* (Arabic for sign of Allah, or a verse of the Quran), when *qiyamat* (Arabic for the last judgment) comes the next day, we will carry the bloodstained clothes and return to the *shahid* rank under the green banner of the Prophet Muhammad. Papa (Persian for the respected elder or grandfather) Ali (Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law, the fourth Caliph in the time of the Orthodox Islam) will lead us into the eternal graceful Paradise” (Yang 1981).

Ma Mingxin’s death is thus a way of *shahid*, and so are the family members of Ma Mingxin. Ma Mingxin’s two wives, daughters and an adopted daughter, also were executed or died in the battle, and their bodies were buried in various places. The Jahriyya followers-built tombs for them, which were titled “*Qubbat Shuhada*” (Tombs of Martyrs). After that, many Hui Muslims visited those tombs to venerate these heroes (Gansu Institute of Ethnology 1979).

Following the *shahid* example of their founder, almost all successors of the Jahriyya Order completed the way of *shahid*. From Ma Mingxin to Ma Zhenwu (1895-1961), the religious chief of the order in all of the eight generations died in abnormal ways, and therefore, these leaders were conferred upon the title of *shahid* by their Sufi followers. As pointed out before, Ma Mingxin was executed in the Muslims’ uprising against the injustice; Mu Xianzhang, the chief in the second generation of the order, died after he was tortured severely in the prison; Ma Datian, the chief in the third generation, died on the way of banishment to northeast China; Ma Yide, the chief in the fourth generation, suffered

humiliation and his corpse was removed after his death; Ma Hualong (1810-1872), the chief in the fifth generation, was also executed by the imperial troop after his forces were defeated in the great Muslim uprising in the Northwest China in the late nineteenth century; Ma Jincheng, the chief in the sixth generation, died as a castrated slave in the house of the imperial official as a physical punishment to the offspring of Ma Hualong; Ma Yuanzhang (1853-1920), the chief in the seventh generation, died of cave collapse in the big 1920 earthquake; Ma Zhenwu, the chief in the eighth generation, died in a prison under the communist ruling. Therefore, all of them were rewarded the title of *shahid*, and were also recognized as saints who sacrificed their lives for Islam. Places of their death and burial were built into tombs and turned into *Qubba of Shahid* (Tomb of Martyr). Even their family members who died on the path of Islam were regarded as *shahids* (Ma 1986, 113).

Among these martyrs, Ma Hualong (Arabic name: Tabi' at Allah), the leader of the Jahriyya uprising in the nineteenth century, was particularly honored with title *Sayyid Shuhada'* (Master of Martyrs), since he surrendered himself to the Qing imperial authorities to save the lives of his followers. Not only the religious chiefs of the Jahriyya were martyrs, but also its believers were firmly convinced of the *shahid* concept. The ordinary Jahriyya mass strongly believes that to sacrifice one's life for Islam while following their religious leader was so glorious and the rank of martyr was so great that a *shahid* could enter into the Paradise without chanting *tawba* (Arabic for repent), even if he committed sins in this world and did not fulfil his religious obligations. In other words, it was "to wear blood-stained clothes to enter the Paradise." As a result, the Jahriyya often called itself a religious group with "the Blood-Stained Neck." There was a popular poem slightly joked by the Jahriyya believers in those days: "The action of the beheaded is like a cap blown down by wind. We would not give up Islam even if we lose our lives. Our predecessors all had blood-stained necks, so I should dye my beard with red blood" (Ma 1986, 77). Such a perception of *shahid* played a crucial role in encouraging their believers to mobilize themselves in the struggle against any oppression.

Because of this notion of *shahid*, the Jahriyya were fearless in fighting against the Qing Empire, although their defiance against powerful authorities eventually led to catastrophes afflicting the group, and the Jahriyya order experienced more bloody suppressions than other Sufi orders in the period from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Since being a *shahid* was always part of their life, Jahriyya Sufis were ready to fulfill their wish to be martyrs. A historical source says that before fights, followers of the Jahriyya Uprising led by Tian Wu (?-1784) had their *kafan* (Arabic for shrouds used to wrap corpses) sewn and then wore *kafan* to participate in battles. They were determined to die in the fights to go to the Paradise (Li 1958). Another historical narrative recorded by the Hui says: "During the second Muslim uprising (the Jahriyya Uprising) in Haiyuan and Guyuan of Ningxia, the Hui were so brave that all family members performed the

major ablution ritual before they went to the fight against the enemy. They were not afraid of death and regarded *shahada* as the most glorious thing in their lives” (Li 1958, 243). The principle of the Jahriyya was: “Allah guarantees His soldiers who go to conquer on the path of Lord. They will go into the Paradise immediately when they fall down on the battlefield, or they peacefully return home with the rewards and trophies” (Bukhari 1982). Those who died in holy wars were buried with their bloodstained clothes and did not need to wash their corpses and did not need any funeral service to be performed for them because they are martyrs (Bukhari 1982, 179). Jahriyya Sufis followed the hadith tradition so closely that just showed the great Islamic knowledge commanded by these Muslims who lived in a peripheral region!

With so many Hui Muslims of the Jahriyya who died in the jihad and faced the great adversity, their population decreased drastically in the second part of the nineteenth century. In order to reverse this miserable situation, in the time of Ma Yuanzhang as the chief of the order in the early period of the Republic, this Sufi leader drew bitter lessons from its history and upheld that the greatest regret was when “one dies before he can fulfill his religious duty.” Therefore, Ma Yuanzhang adopted the strategy of sticking to Islam with peaceful means. He did not only emphasize the *shahid* concept tactfully, but also guided his people from the psychology of pursuing *shahada* in order to enter the Paradise to the way of reviving Islam through efficient and concrete rational actions. For this purpose, Ma Yuanzhang often taught his followers that “*shahada* is not a random behavior; rather, it is a final thing we have to do. If all of us have gained the status of *shahid*, who would chant the Quran (that is, who would follow the path of Islam)? Who would raise the green banner of Islam? If a Muslim only wishes to be *shahid*, instead of survival, for religious development and saving the majority of people, although he enters the paradise, what is the happiness for him when his home has perished, his wife has been jailed or raped by non-Muslim?” (Shu 1985). In this way, Ma advocated to treasure life and the improvement of living standards of his followers. Furthermore, he emphasized the peaceful development of Islam, instead of endless violent wars, while he did not give up the doctrine of *shahid*. Under this strategy, the force of the Jahriyya rapidly recovered from cruelties and bloody massacres committed by imperial rulers (Ma 1981, 303). With this two-front strategy, *shahid* conception for the holy war and for peaceful development acquired deep-rooted support and came to be widely respected by Jahriyya Muslims in China and eventually made the Jahriyya into the largest, the most popular, the most out-stretched, and the most powerful Sufi orders in China (Ma 1981, 304).

2. *Shahid* in Muslim Uprisings against the Oppressing Regime

Not only the Jahriyya but also other Sufi groups such as the Khafiyya and the Qadariyya participated in upheavals against the corrupt Qing Empire in the

nineteenth century, while the conflict between Muslims and the imperial authorities became so violent. The slogans raised by these Sufi groups in the struggle of the anti-Qing Dynasty were: “Fight for the sake of Allah,” “Defend the religion of Islam,” “March on the road of *shahid*,” “The Door of the Paradise opens widely now, the saints of the previous generations are standing at the Gate of the Paradise welcome us!” The Sufis took advantage of these slogans to motivate Muslims to join the jihad (Yang 1988). In the uprisings, many Sufi Muslims from the Khafiyya Order and the Qadariyya Order as well as the Jahriyya Order were slaughtered by imperial armies and these fallen Sufis were no doubt regarded as martyrs by their Muslim brothers. In Northwest and Southwest China, there are many *qubba shahid* (martyr tombs) scattered on the vast yellowish earthen mountains, the desert, the steppe, and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, and even today they are memorized by Muslims for their spirit of sacrifice.

In the stories of the Khoja insurgence against the Qing Empire narrated by Uighur Muslims, there were many *shuhada'* who died in such violent events. For example, the Uighurs regarded “the Fragrant Concubine” (*Xiangfei*), the wife of an Uighur chief (the Young Khoja) of the insurrectionary force, as a martyr because she had to commit suicide instead of yielding to the passion of Emperor Qianlong (Tang 1985). This is therefore a rather different interpretation while the Chinese imperial sources or folklore recorded this Uighur woman as one of the most beautiful concubines favored by this dissipated emperor and died in her middle age in the royal palace.

In face of the massacres committed by imperial forces, many Akhonds and Muslims were ready to be *shahids* for Allah and Islam, and for them, to die as *shahid* could redress all sins one had committed in his life on the earth (Shan 1985). Ma Dexin (1794-1874, style name: Ma Fuchu, Arabic name: Yusuf), the spiritual leader of the Muslim Uprising in Yunnan in the nineteenth century, was honored by the Hui there as a martyr after he was executed by imperial authorities (Ping 1985). Du Wenxiu (1827-1872, Arabic name: Sulayman), the leader of the Hui Muslim uprising in the Western Yunnan and the founder of the Muslim regime in Dali, which lasted for eighteen years (Atwill 2005), extracted poison from a peacock gallbladder and tried in vain to save his Muslim people as he negotiated with the local authorities of the Qing Empire when he faced the failure of the uprising against so powerful imperial forces. The Hui Muslims in China regarded Du Wenxiu as a *shahid* and his tomb erected in Xiadui Village, the suburb of Dali City, has been revered by the Hui in Yunnan since the 1980s when normal religious activities were reinstalled.

Conclusion

The rich primary sources composed by stone monumental Arabic inscriptions and the recordings in the period of the Mongol Dynasty to the Manchu Dynasty

provided by Muslims show that the *shahid* conception in the Islamic history of China Empire is solely based on the foundation of the Quranic creeds and the hadith, the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. The doctrine of *shahid* in Islam greatly affected the Muslims, formerly Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants, and latterly Chinese Muslims, in their determinative efforts in upholding their Islamic tradition and Islamic culture in an overwhelmingly imperial Confucianism society, which is indeed in sharp contrast to a monotheism such as Islam. The historical shift from the notion of deceased Muslims in a strange land being martyrs to warriors with the ideal of fighting for the course of Allah and dying as *shahids* has strongly affected the authentic characteristics of Muslims' self-convention and cultural awareness in China's Empire. The elaboration of the tenet of *shahid* explicitly made by Muslims in China truly reflects the dynamic lineage from Islam in China to China's Islam. The *shahid* conception in the analysis sufficiently testifies the constant contacts between the Islamic center and peripheral regions in such a remote land as China. All the historical materials concerning the *shahid* notion as we have discussed here show strongly that Muslim communities in China Empire had their mosque construction, the Islamic education system, the cleric leadership, the standard of Islamic practices, and the dense Islamic cultural atmosphere upholding the Quranic teaching with which the Chinese Muslims could survive in their daily struggles. Therefore, Islam in China's Empire could be a comprehensive religious system, which was considered compatible, adaptable, and competitive for living in a non-Islamic country for thousand years of history.

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