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## Conflict Study on Islamic Religious Affairs Management



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### ABSTRACT

Religious affairs management has long been a concern in China's ethnic minority areas. This case study investigated the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, the residents of Yinchuan community, and the religious affairs management in China. According to the data on the current understanding of faith among Islamic people, religious factors and the correlation between ethnic conflict and fusion were verified to explore suitable measures for developing national unity through the administration of religious affairs, thereby forming a consensus of social coexistence in Chinese society.



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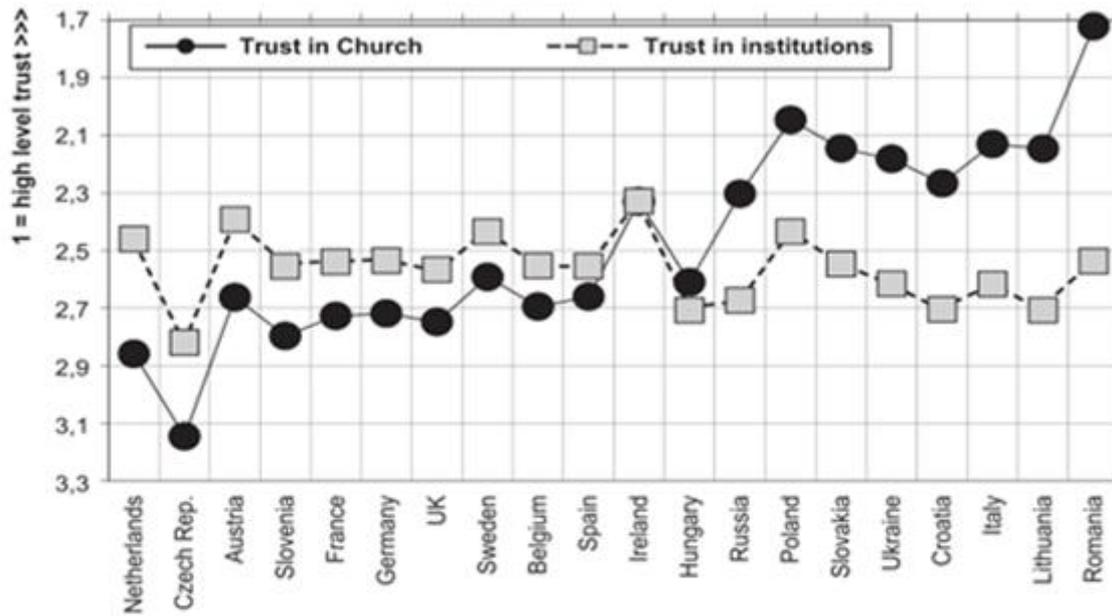
## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the population of religious believers in China has sharply increased. Referring to the World Value Survey, we conclude that Chinese people's belief structure is undergoing significant changes. The proportion of religious believers is rapidly growing, whereas the proportion of atheists is fast declining. Other national and regional surveys showed that religion in China was developing rapidly<sup>1</sup>. In a recent meeting about national religious affairs, Chair Xi pointed out that religious affairs management must adhere to the Party's basic principle and that religious affairs must be handled according to law. Therefore, religious affairs management is a key issue in China. It is related to national unity and social stability.

Through long-term field research, the investigators found that Islamic believers in two ethnic enclaves, namely, the Ningxia Hui autonomous region and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, appear in many different sects. The different denomination sects living in the same community appear to face some collisions. This growing conflict affects national unity and integration. It also emphasizes the serious role of the government during ethnic conflicts caused by denomination sects. Therefore, establishing a religious management mechanism within the government is important in China's national unity.

### **Concept of religious affairs management**

Through a study about the role of religious culture in the political investigation of the influence of mass incidents, Johnny E. Williams found that culture is the most important influencing factor of the civil rights movement. He assumed that adding political "color" to religion may provide the most powerful support for religious affairs management<sup>1</sup>. Miklo's TOMKA, a social organization member of the American Catholic University, studied the trust of religious organizations among religious believers from different European countries. The research showed that people from some countries with a rich history, such as Rome and Italy, would rather believe in the church than in religious organizations, although most of these organizations are managed by religious believers. Some details are found in Figure 1.<sup>2</sup>



**FIGURE 1**  
Average trust in public institutions and in the Church in some West and East (including East-Central) European countries

In the management of religious affairs, the politicization of religious organizations is not enough to encourage people to trust regulated religious organizations. As a result, the management of religious affairs should be controlled regularly but moderately. The survey also showed that traditional religious ideas in different parts of Europe must be changed and standardized.

### National autonomy and religious affairs management

The correlation between religion and nation has become an important issue of religious sociology. Under frequent mass incidents, dealing with such correlation in China is a difficult aspect of research.

Through a study about Indian Islamic religious autonomy, Ayelet Harel–Shalev investigated whether the government should carry out religious autonomy, which goes against the religious affairs management in India. The author pointed out that the conflict between Hinduism and Islam is due to the expansion of rights under Islamic autonomy.<sup>3</sup> This type of conflict is similar to the ethnic conflict in China. Therefore, the feasibility of ethnic autonomy is a controversial problem. In addition, an expert on Tibetan Buddhism said that overlapping, surpassing, and containing phenomena occur between religion and nation. The containing and overlapping phenomena are the primary stages of religious development. Only when religion

surpasses nation can it become a doctrine of universal value. He also defined the relationship between major global religions and ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup>

### **Religion and social conflicts**

A common social conflict is the occurrence of mass incidents. Data show that mass incidents in China increased, resulting in an average annual growth of 17%. During the same period, the number of participants increased, resulting in an average annual growth of 12%.<sup>5</sup> However, some social experts found that religion is the main cause of mass incidents. Professor Ruan pointed out that believers easily hold grievances and participate in mass incidents. The professor also explained that religion plays a positive role in mass incidents but that religion itself is not the root of social conflict as its role in the process of social conflict is more like a “tool”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the cause of religious mass incidents requires careful and deep investigation. We must determine the essence through the phenomenon. We must also refrain from distorting religious teachings in our quest to determine the root cause of sudden mass incidents.

### **Islamic Religious Affairs Management**

In this section, some interesting and significant studies on Islamic religious affairs management in China are introduced. This introduction is realized from three perspectives that affect management: politics, culture, and association with Islam.

First, certain correlations between politics and Islam can promote the development of Islam. Xiao Xian pointed out that politicized religion is the destination of Islamic revival. In fact, in the 1970s, the most direct and far-reaching influence of the Islamic revival movement was the political “Islamization” or the Islamic politics.<sup>7</sup> Liu Yueqin found that mosques are thriving because of the strengthening of the political power in the course of history. In addition, if mosques lose political power, they decline. Mosques are places not only for religious activities but also for politics.<sup>8</sup>

Second, through the Chinese Family Panel Studies (CFPS) in 2011, we found that religion has a close correlation with cultural cultivation, age, and economic development. CFPS data also showed that only 10% of the sample alleged that they hold religious beliefs. However, when questioned about the importance of religion, 82% of the sample thought that religion is important to them, and the proportions in every province were less than the proportion of people alleging to have religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> In other words, respondents in this research hold certain religious tendencies.

Third, we also found that Islamic religious belief has become a special culture in China. In particular, different cultural forms have developed during the growth of Islam in China. One of the most typical forms is the origin and development of the Hui culture. The Hui culture exists in the Chinese Han culture with an Islamic cultural background. Ding Hong pointed out that Islamic culture contains many favorable factors for reference, which have a positive effect on the development of the Hui society. In terms of Islamic modernity, China has no conscious opposition, such as the idea of "Islam versus the West." In addition, in the process of its development, the Hui culture created a development model of religion that is adaptable to society.<sup>9</sup> The study about this model not only benefits the modernization of the Chinese Hui society but also provides a reference for Muslim society.

Lastly, some social intermediary organizations play an important role in religious management. These social intermediary organizations are called ethnic Islamic associations. The National Islamic Association was founded in 1953. Every province has its own division of this association. In a survey about the function of the ethnic Islamic Association in HuBei province, Li Anhui and Chen Xiaomin pointed out that the Islamic Association has become a communication medium between the local government and the people from Hubei Province. Many provinces have attempted to fuse socialism and Islamic philosophy, and such efforts have benefitted the national unity of the country. Essentially, the Islamic Association is an important bridge of communication between believers and the religious affairs management of the government.

### Research Hypothesis

*H1: Communal and religion conflicts affect ethnic integration.*

*H2: The publicity and popularization of religious culture will affect the integration of the Hui and Han, and the correlation between them is positive.*

*H3: The stringency of government control will affect ethnic integration. When the government becomes more stringent, more conflicts will arise.*

This case study was carried out in Yin Chuan, which is the capital city of the Ning Xia Hui autonomous region. We chose a typical Hui-populated area. According to the reflection of the national religious affairs management, the ethnic and religious affairs management in Yin Chuan faces a number of problems that must be solved. The religious community that we investigated was a village 10 years ago but is presently a typical religious community. A total of 80% of the people from the last village hold religious beliefs, particularly Islam. These people have moved to and lived in the community that we investigated. We performed research through questionnaires and interviews. After performing the research, we used the

correlation and logistic regression methods to analyze the survey data. The final objective is to verify Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Among the respondents, 99 are men, and 104 are women. Most of the respondents (42.86%) were aged between 26 and 35 years during the study period. The proportion conformed to the population of the community, and the data of the sample were valid.

According to the data analysis method employed, we classified the data into independent variables, control variables, and dependent variables. The independent variable included the degree of ethnic integration. The dependent variables included the degree of belief, the manner and degree of religious culture propaganda, and the frequency of religious conflicts. The control variables included the characteristics of the population and the social characteristics of the variables.

### Relations between conflict and ethnic integration

This study identified a number of conflicts affecting ethnic integration and the friendship between different nations in China. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formed: communal and religion conflicts will affect ethnic integration; in addition, the correlation between them is positive. We call these conflicts as internal and external religious conflicts. Here, we used the correlation analysis from the data analysis software to verify H1. The variables used in this verification were subjective integration, virtual communal conflicts, and religion conflicts. The distribution of the measured data about subjective integration was not normal. Therefore, we used Spearman's correlation to verify the relationship. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Correlation between religion conflict and subjective integration**

	Spearman	Sig.	N (total sample)
Communal conflict	-0.109	0.122	203
Religious conflict	-0.075	0.288	203

Table 1 shows that the correlation between communal conflict and subjective integration is weak and negative. The correlation coefficient is  $-0.109$ . Similarly, Religious conflict has a weak negative correlation with subjective integration. The correlation coefficient is  $-0.075$ . The absolute values of these coefficients are between 0 and 0.5. Therefore, communal conflict has a greater influence on subjective ethnic integration than religion conflict.

**Table 2: Correlation between religion conflict and behavior integration related to eating habits**

	Spearman	Sig.	N(total sample)
Communal conflict	0.026	0.712	203
Religious conflict	-0.016	0.820	203

**Table 3: Correlation between religion conflict and behavior integration related to accommodation habits**

	Spearman	Sig.	N (total sample)
Communal conflict	-0.001	0.992	203
Religious conflict	0.003	0.964	203

Tables 2 and 3 (integration refers to ethnic integration) show that the religion conflict has no relationship with behavior integration in the context of eating and accommodation habits. However, this research is focused on the religious management of Islam. The followers of Islam are known to adopt the following: “Don’t eat pork or any other food made from pigs.” However, the correlation coefficient shows no relationship between religion conflict and ethnic integration. People with different religious beliefs can respect one another. H1 is thus rejected. Therefore, religion conflicts have no relationship with ethnic integration regardless of whether such integration is subjective or behavioral.

**Relationship between propaganda and popularization of Islamic culture and ethnic unity**

In this part, the propaganda effects of local government, the degree of community participation in ethnic activities, the degree of understanding of halal food, and the manner of propaganda all measure the independent variable, which is the propaganda and popularization of Islamic culture. Different relations were observed between the variables. Tables 4, 5, and 6 show the output of Spearman’s correlation.

**Table 4: Correlation between the wide range of propaganda and subjective integration**

	Spearman	Sig. (double sides)	N
Propaganda effect	0.151*	0.032	203
Participation in ethnic and religious activities	-0.105	0.137	203
Popularization of ethnic and religious activities	0.021	0.768	203
Halal food	-0.016	0.820	203
Propaganda method: Internet	0.110	0.117	203
Propaganda Method: Others	-0.173*	0.014	203

Remarks: \* shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.05.

Table 5 shows that subjective integration maintains different relations with the propaganda method. The correlation coefficients of the Internet and others are 0.11 and -0.173, respectively. In addition, the Sig. value of “newspaper and television” and subjective integration is less than 0.05. The variables show an imperfect and negative correlation. By conducting random interviews with the respondents, we found that the “others” method refers to asking the imams, watching TV, or any other unofficial methods. The coefficient shows that when we choose the “others” method more often to understand ethnic and religious culture, we subjectively think with less unity. In addition, the Internet and official methods promote ethnic integration. The government must use the network media to propagate and standardize religious culture.

**Table 5: Correlation between wide range of propaganda and behavior integration related to eating habits**

	Spearman	Sig. (double sides)	N
Propaganda effect	0121	0.085	203
Participation in ethnic and religious activities	-0.011	0.879	203
Popularization of national and religious activities	0.023	0.744	203
Halal food	-0.164	0.019	203

Remarks: \* shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.05.

**Table 6: Correlation between wide range of propaganda and behavior integration related to accommodation habits**

	Spearman	Sig. (double sides)	N
Propaganda effect	0.209**	0.003	203
Participation in ethnic and religious activities	-0.001	0.993	203
Popularization of ethnic and religious activities	0.080	0.256	203
Halal food	-0.162*	0.021	203

Remarks: \* shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.05.

\*\*shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.01.

The analysis of experimental data shows that the propaganda method does not affect the behavior integration (eating or accommodation). Therefore, we only analyzed the correlation between propaganda effect and behavior integration, between participation in and population of activities and behavior integration, and between understanding of halal food and behavior integration. The results show that the understanding of halal food would affect the degree of behavior integration and that the correlation is negative. In addition, the evaluation of the propaganda effect would affect the degree of behavior integration, and the correlation is positive. Therefore, H2 is not completely accepted.

The data analysis implies that when people are highly aware of religious taboos, such awareness exerts a negative effect on social stability. As for the propaganda method of religious culture, the correct and official method is favorable to ethnic unity. Some civil and social organizations or individuals use the wrong and unofficial method to willfully spread religious cultural propaganda. This method easily leads to ethnic and religious conflicts.

Therefore, how does the government choose the right method to spread religious cultural propaganda? This problem will be solved in the next part. We used the logistic regression analysis method to solve the problem, and we created a model to test which methods are useful. The parameters in logistic regression are usually estimated by the maximum likelihood method. The regression model of digital expression formula in this study is:

$$\ln \frac{P}{1-P} = \alpha + aX1 + bX2 + cX3 + \varepsilon$$

P represents the probability of propaganda effect evaluation  $\alpha$  is the intercept term of the model. a,b,c are the estimated parameters. X1 represents the participation in ethnic religious activities. X2 represents the popularization of national ethnic and religious activities. X3 represents the propaganda methods.  $\varepsilon$  is the error term. In this study, the error term is showed in the table 4-7. The influence of the error term is so small that we choose to ignore it.

In this study, the formula was used to represent the model. In model testing, when the factors (propaganda method, participation in ethnic religious activities, and any other propaganda methods) are added to the formula, the fitting degree of the model would improve. The chi-square value was 10.926, and the probability value was 0.012 (< 0.05). We can then identify and explain the method that is useful by using the logistic regression model. The regression model coefficient and relative content of each variable are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7 : The regression model coefficient and relative content of each variable**

	B	S.E	Wals	Sig.
Participation in ethnic and religious activities	0.614	0.315	3.795	0.051
Popularization of ethnic and religious activities	0.150	0.099	2.283	0.131
Propaganda methods	-0.302	0.152	3.947	0.047
Constant	0.417	0.478	0.760	0.383

From Table 7, the last formula is obtained:

$$\ln \frac{P}{1-P} = 0.417 + 0.614X_1 + 0.15X_2 - 0.302X_3$$

X1 is the popularization of national religious activities. X2 is the degree of activity participation. X3 is the propaganda method (this method is mainly referred to as the unofficial method). X1 and X2 represent the coverage of ethnic and religious community activities and residents' desire to engage, respectively. The model showed the utility value of setting up ethnic and religious activities in the community. Through the model, we can determine the most efficient method to realize the propaganda of ethnic culture. In addition, this method becomes official and completely conforms to the idea of a harmonious society.

### **Relations between the government management of religious affairs and national unity**

The measure of government control can greatly influence ethnic and religious unity. This part shows residents' satisfaction toward the utility of the government management of religious affairs. Six factors affect government management: the standardization of managers in mosques, the hardware facilities of mosques, the professionalization of scriptures teachers, the construction and maintenance of mosques, the legal protection of religious believers, and the emergence of a management mechanism. Table 8 shows the correlations between the six factors and the utility of the government management of religious affairs.

**Table 8**

	Spearman	Sig. (double sides)	N
Standardization	0.156*	0.026	203
Hardware facilities	0.093	0.185	203
Professionalization of scriptures teachers	0.047	0.502	203
Construction and maintenance	0.190**	0.007	203
Legal protection	0.013	0.850	203
Emergence management mechanism	0.034	0.634	203

Remarks: \* shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.05.

\*\* shows that the correlation is significant when the confidence level is 0.01.

Table 8 shows that the correlations between government management efficiency and the six factors are positive. The standardization of managers in mosques, the construction or maintenance of mosques, and the hardware facilities of mosques affect the government management of religious and national affairs more than the other factors. If our government can consider the three factors among all of the factors that we listed, then we can say that the government’s management style over religious and ethnic affairs is tense. In addition, the data show that the factors influence one another and ultimately affect ethnic integration. Therefore, H3 is supported (i.e., the stringency of government control will affect ethnic integration). Moreover, all of the correlation coefficients show that when the government is more stringent, more conflicts arise.

In our research, we interviewed a manager of the mosque in the community (Mr. A) and a government staff who handles ethnic affairs commission (Mr. Y). Both thought that the mosque needs a comprehensive and professional management mechanism as soon as possible. However, for the stringency of government control, they stand differently. Mr. Y said that government religious management has many problems must be considered, especially the standardization of halal food management, the professionalization of managers and teachers in mosques, and the emergency management mechanism of mosques. In the next part, we

will point out some suggestions about Islamic religious management.

### **Suggestions**

**Religious management should adhere to appropriate management, which includes overall management and service.**

The Chinese government adheres to the building of the legal system, and every aspect of management is aimed to be regulated by law. Religious management is no exception. Religious belief is a private feature of people. If governments intervene in people's religious beliefs, then they must do so legally. However, through this research, we realized that religious management should not only be legal but also be humane. Religious affairs must be managed with the idea of service.

**The sources of Mosques' construction and maintenance funding should be broadened.**

The research showed that 400 mosques have no emergency management mechanism. Some have been closed by the government, and others have received a warning of closure. The managers of the problematic mosques told us that this problem could be attributed to "money." Currently, most of the mosques are funded by NGOs and individuals. The idea of management among managers of mosques is always inconsistent. Through our research, we realized that the government should be partly responsible for the expenses incurred by mosques. However, many dissenting views have emerged in relation to this problem. The sources of mosques' funding must be broadened with the aid of other organizations, such as enterprises majoring in religious affairs.

**The degree of popularization of compulsory education about Islamic religious beliefs plays an important role in promoting religious management efficiency.**

Presently, most Islamic religious believers only completed primary school, and some of them do not believe in the usefulness of compulsory education. Nevertheless, they send their children to study the Quran and Islamic doctrine. This behavior will not only mislead children but also violate the aim of making religion scientific. The government should regulate religious management such that it closely follows Marxism philosophy. The cultural level must be improved by the religious and national management department.

**Regulating the religious cultural propaganda is the key to promoting ethnic integration**

Many people do not know about the details of Islam. Our government should reinforce and

regulate the propaganda of Islamic religion to make the religious culture become increasingly common. The forum on China–Arab Cooperation hosted by the Chinese government last year in Yin Chuan (2015) was an excellent first step in Islamic religious cultural propaganda. After the forum, many Chinese participants from different provinces said that the forum gave them insights into the religion. Therefore, the government should focus on the manner of spreading the propaganda and attempt to promote ethnic integration in this multiracial society.

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