

The following seven documents have been translated into English by historian David Brophy from a collection of telegrams originally written in Chinese by the Han governor of Xinjiang, Yang Zengxin (1864–1928). Yang was an official of the late Qing dynasty who served for forty years in the northwestern Muslim regions of China, first in Gansu province and later in Xinjiang. As a result, he became very familiar with the various communities of Hui (Chinese Muslims) and Uyghurs who lived in these regions. These documents are an excellent basis upon which to understand how a typical Han official—educated in the Confucian classics, possessor of an orthodox examination degree, yet posted to a Muslim region of China—understood, managed, and attempted to rule over groups of people whose culture, ethnicity, religion, and sometimes language was different from his own.

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**DOCUMENT 1: Instructions to the Akhunds of Every Mosque to Exhort the Muslims to Follow the Quran and Be Content with Their Lot**

**DATE: September 10, 1921**

Whether Heaven sends down blessings or misfortune depends on whether people's hearts are good or not. To those who do good, Heaven sends down blessings; to those who do evil, Heaven sends down calamities. In the Islamic Quran, God inspires Muhammad to instruct the masses by telling them: "You people, do you know what the human heart treasures? What the heart treasures is focus. Your hearts are still unsettled. What the heart treasures is tranquility. Your heart is still in turmoil. Commentators take "unsettled" to mean being disturbed by frivolous matters, and confusing the guiding principle of good; "in turmoil" means the turmoil of absurd seductions, and losing the essence of tranquility. Thus those who maintain this state of mind are those who are content with my blessings. Those who abandon this state of mind are those who suffer my punishments." It also says: "Obey me, and obey the prophet I have sent to you, and obey the respected people who protect and govern you. To rebel against those who protect and govern you is to rebel against the Prophet; to rebel against the Prophet is to rebel against me." These glorious scriptures are the accepted teachings of Islam. Although we find ourselves in a time of manifold change, yet in the unseen world Allah abides, miraculously providing sustenance.

Now, to speak of the various countries of the contemporary world, since the European War the number of people who have suffered the ravages of war has exceeded twenty six million. In Russia, the military calamities of the political struggle between the two parties, old and new, have been particularly severe. Though this may be the great punishment that Heaven has decreed, it has manifested because of people's hearts not being good. In each of China's provinces since the founding of the Republic, the people are poor, and finances are exhausted, so there are many places in ruins, and few remain intact. Yet in Xinjiang the local customs are simple, and for the last nine years the various races of Han, Mongol, Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh and Kirghiz, thanks to Heaven's blessing, have continued to enjoy peace. This is truly an unsurpassed joy!

However, in the current situation, some continue to entertain thoughts of

wreaking havoc, whether Chinese or foreigners, and do not wish for the peace of the region. I sincerely hope that the people of Xinjiang will each content themselves with their lot, and not listen to the agitation and conspiracy of traitors—whether they are harboring bad intentions, or acting in evil ways—so as to harm themselves and others. To wish for great peace is [the same as wishing for] the joy of the commoners. If there are people who are not satisfied with their station and gloat at the misfortune of others, then I permit the akhunds and elders to report them by name to local officials, to enact strict measures to deal with such troublemakers. In protecting the good people there is no room for leniency.

Once a week after gathering for prayers and reading of the Quran, the senior akhunds in the Muslim mosques must expound and discuss these instructions in detail, not tiring of repetition, in order that everyone understands them. All this will benefit the people's state of mind and the popular mood. If local officials adopt policies that are not beneficial for the people, then I permit the commoners to report this directly based on facts. I will consider whether or not we should require improvements. To conclude, I hope that you will not obscure [the fact that] the Republican principle is beneficial to the people. I expect the senior akhunds, chiefs, village elders, and the Muslim commoners to obey as one and act accordingly, and not burden me with repeated exhortations.

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**DOCUMENT 2: Comment on the Report Submitted by *Imams* of the Various Congregations that Ma Ahong of the Shaanxi Dafang is Monopolizing Religious Authority**

**DATE: April 16, 1921**

The Gansu Muslims have the tradition of adherence to various Sufi sects; the so-called “Four Great Sects” are the Huasi, Humen, Baizhuang, and Muft. Apart from these, there are also the various sects of Bijiachang and Da Gongbai, Zhangmen, and Shagou. They frequently fragment, which easily leads to conflict. Previously under the Qing, the Muslims of the Gansu region were continuously getting into trouble because of religious strife—it all arose from this. In fact, apart from the single province of Gansu the Sufi sect tradition does not exist anywhere else. The people who lead these sects are called “master.” When the father dies, the son succeeds, or the younger brother takes the place of his elder brother. People of one sect entice people from another sect; people from the other sect entice people from the first sect. The initial establishment of different sects leads to struggle between these sects, and disasters follow. The Uyghurs in Xinjiang take only Muhammad as their master. Apart from Muhammad they do not recognize any other secondary master. As a result they are yet to have cases of sectarian struggles. Only the Hui have been led astray by the émigré Hui who have come out beyond the pass, and have been hoodwinked by the sect tradition. Still, among the Hui mosques in Xinjiang, there is only the Southern Mosque, which promotes the teaching of Ma Yuanzhang of Shagou in Gansu, and the Kengkeng mosque that transmits the teaching of Ma Hualong's grandson Ma Er. Apart from these two mosques, there are no other sect customs here.

According to this governor's investigations, Muslims only have one religion, and

they only have the Prophet Muammad as the sole leader of the Muslims. Apart from him one cannot have a second prophet. Nor can one take a second master. Indeed, a religious system by definition precludes the existence of this or that master's name. China's millennia-old imperial system has already been overturned. China no longer has a monarch, it has become a democracy. People in a democratic country are all under the sovereign authority of the Great President. Besides this one cannot have another master, each establishing their sects and causing unrest. To speak of sovereignty implies that the name of some or other master should not exist. My understanding is that Muslims only have Muhammad as their prophet; at the head of Islam there is only Muhammad. Taking the prophet of the West [i.e. Muhammad] as one's master is the only way to ensure that the true religion will endure perpetually without corruption. By taking a man of the East as one's master, to every sect there will be a master. The more masters there are, the greater the level of conflict. Intelligent Hui can see the drawbacks of this for themselves; there is no need for repetition. This governor's desire is that among the Hui Muslims of every congregation and mosque in Xinjiang, those who are yet to be infected by the bad habit of sectarianism should continue to respect the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad as before, and take the Prophet Muhammad as their master. There is no need to be misled by the custom of sectarianism, lest conflicts arise. This is truly a plan for long-term stability.

As regards the Shaanxi Dafang, they are mostly old émigrés beyond the pass, and still do not know what a sect is; they should not invite akhunds of every sect from inside the pass into their mosques, which would result in Hui who are yet to belong to a sect being recruited into other sects, resulting in inevitable corruption. I have served as an official in the two provinces of Gansu and Xinjiang for a number of decades, and have a rough understanding of the origins of the various Gansu sects. In order to preserve the region and protect the religion, I will not hesitate to raise this with you Muslims.

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**DOCUMENT 3: Secret Order to All Subordinates Not to Allow Hui to Illicitly Construct Mosques**

**DATE: October 1, 1921**

Since Islam is an ancient and holy religion, and at its inception took what is pure and true as its principle, there is only one teaching and no other teaching. Since then, people have split into factions, and conflicts have come about as a result. While previously serving as an official in Gansu, I learnt by experience of the basics of Islam, i.e., that those who join the Huasi sect recognize Ma Rubian of Bafang in Hezhou as their shaykh; those who join the Muft sect take Ma Weihan of Didao as their shaykh; those who join the Humen sect recognise Ma Fushou of the Taizi Mosque as their shaykh; those who join the Shagou sect recognise Ma Yuanzhang of Zhangjiachuan as their shaykh. Each has their teachings. All those Hui who join a sect look to a master of the East, and listen to, and act on, the commands of this Eastern master. Those Hui who do not belong to a sect follow the Prophet of the West, and act according to the traditions of the Western Prophet. By "master" is meant the shaykh of the sect. The Hui in Gansu have

many sects, and thus there are many cases of religious disputes, like the 1895–96 Hezhou and Huangzhong unrest, which came about because of doctrinal disagreements. The Xinjiang Hui do not have many sects, there are only the teachings of Ma Yuanzhang and the teachings of Ma Hualong’s grandson Ma Er; when these were spread from Gansu to Xinjiang they became known as the Southern Mosque. If we allow the sectarianism of the interior to spread to Xinjiang, then religious disputes will be unavoidable. To prevent these ills, we must begin by not allowing the illicit construction of mosques.

Henceforth in every region of Xinjiang, Hui mosques that were earlier in existence may be constructed according to precedent. In the case of mosques that did not previously exist, it is not permitted to construct without authorization. Apart from the mosques that are already in existence, those who spread the teachings of Ma Yuanzhang and Ma Er in Xinjiang are not allowed to build new mosques. When Hui come out from within the pass each adds their own mosque, and this has a factional nature. We must take precautions against such abuses. Although on the surface it is matter for litigation, in its substance it has the makings of religious strife. Therefore I have forbidden Hui to construct new mosques. This is truly the primary method of implementing thorough reforms; we cannot compromise.

As for the Uyghur of Xinjiang, they are devout believers in the teachings of the Western Prophet. They are not inclined to give credence to the habits of the Hui sects, or the traditions of the Hui masters or Hui shaykhs. The Hui are Hui, and the Uyghur are Uyghur. Although they commonly profess Islam, yet each have their methods of practicing, and they cannot be forced to come together. This is key to the fact that the Uyghur of Southern Xinjiang can live in peace with one another and not create religious disputes. Yet Xinjiang’s various magistrates have not conducted the slightest investigation into the religion of the Hui and Uyghur. As soon as they run into a case that has the character of religious dispute, including the construction of new mosques, their handling of the matter completely lacks competence. [You should] clarify in detail the content of Islam, so as to nip things in the bud, and ward off conflicts and future troubles. In this matter the various magistrates must not lose their composure, and should investigate constantly, not allowing religious disputes to occur. This will bring happiness to the region. I am issuing an order together with this, and I expect compliance. Apart from circulating this order to the departments and preparing cases, you should make spare copies and review it at all times. It will surely be of benefit to officials and administration.

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**DOCUMENT 4: A Comment on the Leaders of the Hezhou Congregation’s Petition to Establish a Precedent That Each Hui Should Return to Their Own Congregation to Pray**

**DATE: May 20, 1922**

From your letter I learn that when Muslims have marriages or funerals, they should invite a Muslim akhund to recite the scriptures. This is the common practice of Hui in every province. Only the Gansu Hui have the custom of sectarianism, such as the

Huasi teachings, Muft teachings, Shagou teachings etc.; they split off from one another, and they all have masters. Those who accept his teachings call the master “shaykh.” Those who adhere to the teachings of the various sects, when they have events like weddings or funerals, invite the akhunds of their teachings to recite scriptures. If people from one sect invite akhunds from another sect to recite scriptures, then conflicts will arise. It will not be a conflict over religion, but actually a conflict over interests. Although they dispute interests, in substance it will be a religious dispute. To sum up, they simply wish to spread their influence. Now, previously under the Qing the Hui in Gansu used the custom of sectarianism to lure people to their teachings, struggling with one another, which led on many occasions to great disaster. Since the establishment of the Republic, this kind of custom has become even worse in comparison with before. I wonder about this tradition of sectarianism. Not only does it not exist in other provinces of China, there is no precedent for it in other Islamic countries like Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, or among the Baluch!

From now on, Hui of no matter which congregation, should recite scriptures in their own congregation’s mosque. To avoid dissension they must not listen to others surreptitiously enticing them to follow another teaching. If, among the Hezhou Hui in Xinjiang, there are some who have joined another teaching, I hereby permit people from the Hezhou congregation to go to the office of the local officials in each locale and submit a report, so that afterwards, if there are any major illegal incidents, it will not implicate those who belong to the Hezhou congregation mosque itself. As for these people who have joined other teachings, the Hezhou Hui do not need to have any contact with them, and should cut all ties. Handling matters thus will be most appropriate. I will instruct the Dihua County administration to convey this to the Hui of every congregation, so that they obey uniformly.

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**DOCUMENT 5: Circular to All Counties on Prohibiting Uyghurs from Privately Establishing *khanqahs***

**DATE: August 7, 1918**

The akhunds among the Uyghur are the people who impart religious teachings. The mosque is the place where they recite scriptures. The scriptures that are taught treat Muhammad’s Quran as orthodoxy. For a long time the people have lived in peace with one another, and there has not been any issue with people privately opening *khanqahs* and teaching scriptures in secret. Only recently I have discovered that in each district there are cases of *khanqahs* being established, ostensibly to recite scriptures, and stirring up the ignorant people and attempting to raise funds. They disperse during the day and gather at night, inciting people to not go to the publicly established mosques for scripture reading, [but instead] to gather collectively at the unauthorized *khanqahs* for dancing. Among them some are good, some are bad; it is hard to ensure that there are no gangsters sneaking in among them and plotting sedition, like the trouble caused previously under the Qing by the Manas Muslims Ma Yuzhang and Wu-lai-zi, which all came about because they privately opened a *khanqah*. At that time the Xinjiang Governor had the

*khanqahs* that had been opened in all locations investigated. Muhammad Ali, who recently raised a revolt in Kucha, also had collected money and established a *khanqah*, which was spacious enough to accommodate three or four hundred people. He would invite them to gatherings and his gang would recite scriptures in the mosque all night until dawn, until eventually they raised a revolt and attacked the city. If the local officials do not manage this effectively it will result in great calamity. Now that this has already been discovered in one location, other places should be on alert. If we do not conscientiously suppress this, it will be hard to avoid harm coming to the region.

Henceforth no matter whether Hui or Uyghur, all akhunds, imams, and people within the religion are only allowed to go to the mosque to recite scriptures, and are only permitted to read from Muhammad's Quran. They are not allowed to privately open *khanqahs* and be active in the hall at night, or gather people at home to recite scriptures. If it is [a case of] one person at their own home praying, then it is only permitted for members of the same family to gather, it is not allowed to extend a broad invitation to outsiders. Apparently every locale has a number of privately established *khanqahs*. In each place they consist of several rooms. Are these private property, or have they been built mainly by collecting money? Who are the people instructing the religion? You should carry out on-the-spot investigations, create a register, and submit a report after ascertaining the facts. At the same time, encourage the people to close the *khanqahs* by themselves, and evince strict good behavior to enlighten them, so that they are not led astray by the people who have established the *khanqahs* into causing trouble for their family. For the sake of protecting the region and warding off threats yet to manifest themselves, I will not broach any delays. If the people who establish *khanqahs* have other motives and do not comply with the prohibition, then they clearly intend to agitate. I will have no choice but to uphold the law and take action. In no way will I compromise on this matter and leave a legacy of trouble for the region.

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**DOCUMENT 6: Instructions to the Kashgar Circuit Intendant Zhu Ruichi on Prohibiting Ahmad and Others from Establishing a *khanqah***

**DATE: August 12, 1918**

This governor has learnt that in each district there are cases of people privately opening *khanqahs* and gathering at night to recite scriptures. As I see it, this matter of *khanqahs* takes reciting scripture as a pretext to collect funds, gathering at night and dispersing during the day—it truly has a bad quality. There are many mosques in the towns and villages of each district. The Hui and Uyghur people are supposed to go to the mosque to recite scriptures. Why must they establish *khanqahs* beyond this? Indeed, there is no such thing in the Islamic scriptures. I honestly fear that if large numbers of people assemble at the *khanqahs*, there will be treacherous people concealing themselves and inciting the ignorant people to cause trouble. I also hear that in these newly constructed *khanqahs* there are English, Russian, and Turkish subjects. The Turks have the same customs and religion as the Uyghur. If we allow them all to gather in a single *khanqahs* without distinguishing Chinese from foreigner, clearly using the empty excuse of reciting

scriptures and secretly implementing plots to cause disturbances, the harm will be unimaginable! This must be urgently suppressed to avoid hidden dangers and preserve public order. Apart from communicating with Commander Ma on handling this, I will also issue an order to the Circuit Intendant to cooperate with Commander Ma to quickly shut the *khanqahs* established by Amad Khalfa and others, and those that I have yet to hear of without exception, and at the same time carry out instruction. Henceforth it is only permitted to go to the mosque to recite scriptures, it is not permitted to disobey the prohibition and again establish a *khanqah*.

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**DOCUMENT 7: Circular Instructions to All Counties That Village Akhunds Are Not to Be Appointed by Local Officials**

**DATE: March 22, 1917**

Like teachers among the Han citizens, the akhunds of the Muslim religion are the ones who give instruction to the young. Someone who is not distinguished in learning is not qualified to educate the new generations. The akhunds are the ones who enlighten the Muslims. Someone unacquainted with scriptures will not be worthy of popular esteem. Therefore the position of akhunds is of the utmost importance. Unless it is someone whose conduct is upright, with a deep knowledge of the Muslim scriptures, they will struggle to fulfill their duties. Now I hear that in villages in each county the akhund is not chosen through election by the commoners, but appointed by local officials. This is most inappropriate. As I see it, the akhund is the chief propagator of religion locally. The teachings of religion are intended to enlighten people and induce them to do good. Good and bad in religion depends on the character of the akhund. With a competent akhund, what he teaches will all be based on genuine scriptures, teaching people to be good, and as a result the people of the religion will do good. But in the case of an incompetent akhund, what he teaches will be his own absurd views, leading people in a bad direction, and thus the people of the religion will behave badly. These questions of religion are the first reason that the commoners should choose someone who is moral and trustworthy to the position, and they should not be appointed by officials.

In the past, Muhammad was the first person to expound the religion in Arabia. The thirty books of his Quran are what later generations of Muslims have commonly revered and handed down. In the course of time, there have been splits into factions, each with their differences. Because of the differences between one set of teachings and others—for example, between the Dafang and Xiaofang factions—those who have transmitted the religion have also had their differences. Though they all adhere to Islam, each village has its village mosque, and each congregation has its congregation's mosque. People from this mosque cannot go to that mosque to recite scriptures, and people from that mosque cannot come to this mosque to teach the religion. With such inveterate habits firmly entrenched, it is just like in China during the earlier Qing examinations: although they were all Chinese scholars, [someone from] one province could not claim registration in another province. If one relies on official power to compel the appointment of akhunds, what will happen if the people who teach religion cannot get along with those

who are receiving the teaching? Religious disputes will break out from this. These issues of people and place are the second reason why akhunds should not be appointed by officials. The akhunds are leaders in educational matters. Such a standing cannot be attained in a single day. Muslims who teach religion must first thoroughly know the scriptures; then they are made mullah, or from mullah promoted to akhund, or from second-degree akhund to senior akhund. Although it is not always entirely this way, still there has not been any case of someone without learning or morality being chosen by the people as akhund. Consequently the Muslims' respect towards the akhund is most earnest, and their obedience is also most sincere. If they are assigned by officials, and are not endorsed by the people, when [the officials] force matters it will easily create conflicts. The fact that people will surely not obey them is the third reason why they should not be appointed by officials.

Generally speaking people of upright morals do not lightly go to the *yamen*. Those who hang around the *yamen* are people who are seeking personal gain, and the type who secretly spread heretical teachings. Previously the akhunds were elected by the people; though limited in their knowledge of the principles of righteousness, they were able to show diligence in following the scriptures. Once the trend of officials appointing akhunds starts, then they will pay no attention to the scriptures, they will only acquire their position through purchase and not be concerned if the people do not obey. Thus if the people from one mosque have a strong akhund, then the people from another mosque will all adhere to that mosque. If the Xiaofang people have a strong akhund, then the people of the Dafang will all join the Xiaofang. As factional prejudices lead to further splits, religious disputes and attacks on officials will all arise. When officials encounter an issue that is hard to resolve, they will use the akhund as a shield to resolve it by criticizing the mosque. The akhunds will profit from their insider status and gang together for evil purposes. This invitation to favoritism is the fourth reason why they should not be appointed by officials.

While serving as an official in Gansu I had already familiarized myself with the positives and negatives in all these various circumstances. Recently I have heard of the corrupt practice of magistrates in counties of Xinjiang selling the position of *aqsaqal*. As if that were not enough, they also sell the position of akhund, so as to satisfy their voracious appetite. If this is left to carry on without check, it is hard to imagine where things will end. Henceforth the akhunds in each county each village must be appointed by the locals themselves, carrying out elections and choosing a native with learning and good character. I will not allow local officials to appoint them in order to win over people's compliance. After circulating these instructions, if there are any cases again of local officials on their own initiative appointing akhunds, as soon as it is found out they will be punished accordingly.