Country Advice

China – CHN36199 – Hangzhou – Han Muslims – Converts to Islam – Mosques – Saudi Arabia

5 March 2010

1. Please advise whether Han Chinese Muslims or Converts to Islam are subject to ill-treatment/discrimination?

Reports indicate that it is unlikely that a Han Chinese who has converted to Islam would be subjected to ill-treatment or discrimination as long as they practiced their faith within the state-sanctioned requirements of the law. No reports were found regarding adverse treatment of Han Chinese Muslims in China. Similarly, no information was found suggesting ill treatment or discrimination of Muslims more generally in Hangzhou or Zhejiang (see also Question 2).

Limited information was found relating to Han Chinese converting to Islam. The reason for this lack of information is likely due to the fact that only a very small percentage of Han Chinese convert to Islam as acknowledged by an academic paper in 2010 presented to the Population Association America Annual Meeting, which states that “few Han converts to Islam.”

Han Muslims are not included in the ten ethnic Muslim groups of China illustrating the minority status they represent.

Ill treatment by officials may become an issue when a Muslim practices their religion outside of the state-sanctioned parameters. The 2009 Amnesty International report on China states that “individuals who practised their religion outside officially sanctioned channels, including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and others, faced harassment and persecution.”

According to the 2009 Annual Report of The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), Chinese authorities maintained tight controls over the practice of Islam across China as demonstrated below:

- Muslims throughout China faced state controls over activities including the interpretation of theology, the content of sermons, the training of religious leaders, and the freedom to make overseas pilgrimages.
- Authorities continued efforts to align aspects of Islamic practice in China to government and Communist Party policy.
- Authorities expressed concern about aspects of Islamic practice deemed incompatible with government and Party goals.


1. Muslim religious leaders throughout China remained subject to government- and Party-led political training classes.\(^4\)

The most recent US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – China* states that the Chinese government only allows for the proselytising of five religions, including Islam, within registered places of worship. The report states:

> The Constitution states that Chinese citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief.” It also bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion. The Constitution and laws protect only “normal religious activities” that are overseen by the five (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (PRAs).

> ...The Government permits proselytism in registered places of worship and in private settings, but does not permit it in public, in unregistered places of worship, or by foreigners.\(^5\)

The USDOS report also states that “in contrast to the close supervision of the practice of Islam in the XUAR, Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces engaged in religious practice with little interference by the Government.”\(^6\) This indicates that non-Uighr Muslims are subjected to a minimum level of government supervision and so it is likely that Han Muslims would be able to practice their religion within state-sanctioned, registered places of worship.

Further, the USDOS report provides the following information on Muslims in China:

> According to official figures, there are as many as 20 million Muslims...the country has ten predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Hui, estimated to number more than 10 million.

> ...There are more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in the XUAR\(^7\)), more than 45,000 imams nationwide, and 10 Islamic schools...In Beijing, there are 200,000 Hui Muslims and 160 mosques. The Government supports the building of mosques, pays the salaries of imams, and supports halal stores and hospitals.\(^8\)

In a further demonstration of the tolerance granted to Muslims practising within state-sanctioned requirements, according to the Population Association of America’s 2010 Annual Meeting, pilgrimages from China to Mecca are allowed. The paper states that: “Pilgrimages of China’s Muslims to Mecca have increased in the past 30 years since the first state-sponsored trip in 1976.”\(^9\)

Further, according to an article published in 2006 on *Islam Online* website:

> a record 9,600 Chinese Muslims are expected to leave for a pilgrimage to Makkah this year, escorted by China’s Patriotic Islamic Association.

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\(^{7}\) Researcher’s Note – XUAR is the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.


…the national policies are opening up and as long as you don’t go against the country’s religious policies and regulations, you can freely progress.10

Regarding the practice of Islam within Chinese national policies, the view of the religious leader quoted in the above article is in line with information provided by the CECC and the USDOS in more recent years.

2. **Provide information on the situation of Muslims (especially Han Muslims) in Hangzhou – mosques, numbers, reports?**

As outlined in response to question one, the situation for Muslims in China does not suggest they are subjected to ill-treatment or discrimination as long as they practice their faith within the state-sanctioned requirements of the law. Whilst no information was found regarding the situation of Han Muslims in Hangzhou in particular, evidence suggests that there is an active Muslim presence within the city and no reports were found to indicate that Muslims in Hangzhou are exposed to any adverse treatment.

Historically, Hangzhou’s significant location along the Silk Road has ensured an Islamic existence within the city. As acknowledged by the *Islamic China* website “Hangzhou is an ancient city located in East China and it is one of the most important cities along the Marine Silk Road. Arabian traders reached Hangzhou as early as the Yuyuan dynasty some what 900 years ago”.11

As a reflection of this early trading era and of historical importance, the Phoenix Mosque in Hangzhou is regarded as one of the most famous and oldest mosques in South East China. According to the *Islamichina* website:

Phoenix Mosque was first built in the Tang Dynasty and renovated later in the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties and it is regarded as one of the four most famous mosques in Southeast part of China...Hangzhou Phoenix Mosque covers a floor space of 2600 square meters with its prayer hall covering 570 square meters.12

The Phoenix Mosque is also known by the following names – Feng-Huan Mosque, Feng Huan Mosque, Zhenjiao Mosque, Zhen Jiao Mosque, Zhen Jiao Si Mosque, Fenghuang Mosque.13 According to the *Intouch Zhejiang* website, the address of the Hangzhou Phoenix Mosque is 227 Middle Zhongshan Rd., Hangzhou.14 The *Islamichina* website notes that the Phoenix Mosque is now the only mosque in Hangzhou.15

Whilst it is unknown how many Han Muslims live in Hangzhou, the *Islamichina* website states that within the vicinity of the Phoenix Mosque there is a Muslim community of 1250 people. Islamic culture within this community has led to the existence of halal restaurants operating in Hangzhou. According to the *Asia Planet* website, (with information provided from the China National Tourism Association), the Hangzhou Phoenix Muslim Restaurant is reported to be

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jointly run by the state-sanctioned Hangzhou Islamic Association and the Hangzhou Office of the Yinnan Regional Government, Ningxia Hui Autonomous region:

The Hangzhou Phoenix Muslim Restaurant, jointly run by the Hangzhou Islamic Association and the Hangzhou Office of the Yinnan Regional Government, Ningxia Hui Autonomous region, is a Muslim restaurant open to both Chinese and foreign visitors. It is at 223 Central Zhongshan Road, near the Phoenix Mosque, one of the four internationally reputed major mosques along the southeast coast of China. Having a business area of 200 sq. meters with seats in balcony or gallery and box rooms, the restaurant manages all its facilities and businesses in strict accordance with the rules of processing Muslim foods.16

Further, the AirAsia website informs Muslim travelers that halal food is available in Hangzhou. It states that “To all AirAsia Muslim travelers fear not as halal food in Hangzhou is located at Gao Yin Jie – The famous food street and Night Market. It is very near West Lake”.17

The situation of Muslims in Zhejiang province more generally can be further demonstrated through an expatriate online website called In Touch Zhejiang which notes:

While the Zhejiang province is overrun by Buddhism and Christianity, Islamic culture also plays a small role in the religious make-up of the province. Small yet prevalent, this ethnicity makes its presence known throughout the area in a handful of communities. Aside from mosques, other cultural aspects that can be easily recognized are the small Muslim restaurants you will occasionally stumble upon in many of the towns and cities of Zhejiang.18

Also according to the In Touch Zhejiang website, the most popular mosques in Zhejiang are listed below:

- **(Hangzhou) Phoenix Mosque 凤凰寺**
  227 Middle Zhongshan Rd, Hangzhou 杭州中山中路227号
  Built in the Tang Dynasty, it is one of the four biggest Islam churches in the coastal Eastern China.

- **Jiaxing Mosque 嘉兴清真寺**
  Behind Daniantang, Dongmen, Jiaxing 嘉兴东门大年堂后

- **Ningbo Mosque 宁波清真寺**
  18 Houying Lane, Ningbo 宁波后营巷18号

- **Yiwu Mosque 义乌清真大寺**
  91 West Jiangbin Rd, Yiwu 义乌市江滨西路91号

The website further states that Yiwu, located approximately 140km south of Hangzhou, has the largest number of Muslims in Zhejiang: “With thousands of resident Islam businessmen, the province’s Yiwu has the largest number of Muslims in Zhejiang.”19 A map is provided at Attachment 11.20

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3. What steps/preparations are necessary to convert to Islam (especially in Saudi Arabia)?

A person may officially convert to Islam by pronouncing the Muslim Profession of Faith or shahada (pledge of conviction of faith) in Arabic. The pledge is to be taken in front of at least two adult Muslim witnesses\(^ {21} \) and is:

“I testify ‘La ilah ila Allah, Muhammad rasoolu Allah.’ The translation of which is: I testify that ‘there is no true god (deity) but God (Allah), and that Muhammad is a Messenger (Prophet) of God.’ When someone pronounces the testimony with conviction, then he/she has become a Muslim.”\(^ {22} \)

Once converted, according to the Islam Religion website, all practicing Muslims are obliged to follow the ‘Five Pillars’ which are:

1. The First Pillar: The Shahada (i.e. the pledge of conviction of faith) is the first and most important of the five pillars of Islam.\(^ {23} \)

2. The Second Pillar: Ritual Prayer or Salah is the daily ritual prayer performed five times a day by all Muslims. Salah is a precise worship, different from praying on the inspiration of the moment.\(^ {24} \)

3. The Third Pillar: Obligatory Charity or zakah – in Arabic it is known as zakat which literally means “purification”, because zakat is considered to purify one’s heart of greed. Charity is not just recommended by Islam, it is required of every financially stable Muslim. Giving charity to those who deserve it is part of Muslim character. Zakat is viewed as “compulsory charity”; it is an obligation for those who have received their wealth from God to respond to those members of the community in need.\(^ {25} \)

4. The Fourth Pillar: Fasting or sawm – the Fast of Ramadan, occurs once each year during the 9\(^ {th} \) lunar month, the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Fasting helps Muslims develop self-control, gain a better understanding of God’s gifts and greater compassion towards the deprived.\(^ {26} \)

5. The Fifth Pillar: Pilgrimage or hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca, the most sacred city in Islam, is required of all physically and financially able Muslims once in their life.\(^ {27} \)

The following reports provide examples of foreigners converting to Islam in Saudi Arabia where Sunni Islam is the official religion and the legal system is based on the Government’s official application of Islamic laws.\(^ {28} \)


According to a 2009 article published by the *World Bulletin*, a religious centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia called The Cooperative Office for Call and Guidance (COCG) at Al-Bat’ha, sees around 200 converts to Islam each month. This COCG is supervised by the Saudi Arabian government and focuses on assisting non-Muslim, migrant workers convert to Islam. In the article, one of Saudi Arabia’s few non-Arab preachers and head of COAG Al-Bat’ha stated that:

The process of converting to Islam involves seeking knowledge about the Islamic faith and attending a ceremony led by a preacher or Imam, where the convert is asked to recite the Islamic profession of faith.

…He says the most difficult and most time consuming thing is teaching the new converts the details of Islam after they officially convert to Islam by reciting the ‘Shahada,’ the Muslim declaration of faith in God. 29

An article published by *Gulf News* in 2009 reports on the mass conversion in Saudi Arabia of over 600 Chinese workers to Islam. The ceremony involved the workers pronouncing their *Shahada*. The Chinese nationals were workers of the Chinese Railway Company, working in Saudi Arabia as part of the Haramain Rail project:

According to a government official the conversion took place 24 hours after getting books introducing Islam in Chinese language to the worksite at Arafat. It was a challenge for the Office of the Call and Guidance to find enough books on Islam in the Chinese language. 30

In an article also published in 2009 by the *Earth Times*, it is reported that the motivation for the mass conversion of Chinese workers to Islam was due to domestic criticism in Saudi Arabia that non-Islamic foreigners had been hired to build a railway link from Jeddah to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. 31 As discussed on the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office website, entry to Mecca and Medina (the two holiest cities of Islam) is strictly forbidden to all non-Muslims. 32

**Attachments**


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5. ‘Dreams of the Chinese Muslims’ 2006, Islam Online website, 29 November  

6. ‘Mosques (Masjid) in Hangzhou’ (undated), Islamichina website  

7. ‘Great Mosque of Hangzhou’ (undated), Archnet website  

8. ‘Islam in Zhejiang’ (undated), Intouch Zhejiang website  

9. ‘China Tourist Cities – Hangzhou’ (undated) Asia Planet website  

10. ‘A sneak peek at Hangzhou, China!’ 2008, Air Asia website  

11. ‘Google Map of directions from Hangzhou to Yiwu, Zhejiang China’ 2010, Google Maps website  

12. ‘Embracing Islam’ (undated), Islam – The Modern Religion website  

13. ‘How to Convert to Islam and Become a Muslim’ 2010, Islam Religion website, 23 January  

14. ‘The Second Pillar of Islam’ 2009, Islam Religion website, 4 October  

15. ‘The Third Pillar of Islam: Compulsory Charity’ 2009, Islam Religion website, 11 August  


19. ‘Ramadan in Saudi Arabia inspires conversion (sic) to Islam’ 2009, World Bulletin website, 8 September  
