CHAPTER 8

Analysis of the Introduction of Islam into Kuqa

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Abstract

Historically, there were two large-scale disseminations of Islam in Xinjiang that subsequently established a privileged stance for Uyghurs. From the 10th to 13th Centuries AD, the Kara-Khanids disseminated Islam to the Northern edges of the Tarim Basin. Then from the 14th to 16th Centuries AD, such religious influences were passed down and extended to Turfan, Hami and the settlement of Mughals in the Northern Tian Shan Circuit. Relying on these accounts, a more precise time during which Islam was introduced into Kuqa (kuche 庫車, now in western Xinjiang) is disputed. After examining relevant historical materials this article suggests that Islam was first introduced to Kucha in the mid-14th Century AD. This occurred as a result of Sufi masters’ preaching and the active support of the Moghulistan khans [of the Eastern Chaghatai Khanate], and occurred in parallel with the replacement of Buddhism by Islam.

Keywords

Islam – Kucha – Religious dissemination

The introduction of Islam from the West to the East lasted for a period of five centuries. There were two large-scale Islamic disseminations. From the 10th to 13th Centuries AD, the Kara-Khanids disseminated Islam in what is regarded as the initial stage; the second stage ranged from the 14th to 16th Centuries AD when Moghulistan came to power. Having passed through these two stages, Uyghurs in Xinjiang found strength in taking Islam as their national religion. Before discussing these stages, we must first clarify a few issues.

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First, Islam’s earliest influences developed around the area of Kashghar. In 915 AD Satuq Bughra Khan usurped the khanship of the Kara-Khanids and forced his ruled subjects to become Muslim. The consequence of this is the first large-scale dissemination of Islam in the region.

Second, within 915–1006 AD, the Kara-Khanids waged war against the Khotanese kingdom, which was at last defeated and whose land was annexed to the Kara-Khanids. The people in Khotan were subsequently forced to become Muslim.

Third, in 1354 AD, the Chaghatai khan, Tughlugh Timur, announced in the city of Almalik that he believed in Islam and promoted it to the tribes and clans he ruled, thus resulting in the second wave of Islamic conversions in the region.

Fourth, at the end of the 14th Century AD, Khidr Khwajah employed his military forces to occupy the surrounding regions of Turfan and required those he conquered to become Muslim.

Fifth, in the 16th Century AD, the Turfan rulers Ahmed bin Küchük, Mansur Khan and others expanded their territories to Hami, beginning the dissemination of Islam there.

These historical accounts have been accepted by most scholars based on the verification of ancient documents—Chinese and foreign. But, by these accounts, the first spread of Islam reached the southern edges of the Tarim Basin and the second wave included the northern lands of the Mongols, Turfan and Hami. The question becomes, situated at the northern edge of the Basin, when did the ancient kingdom of Kucha (Qiuci 龜茲, in the region of Kuqa) first receive Islam? Several explanations point to different historical references. One date proposed by Hadani Ryotai is the 11th Century:

In the sayings of the Uyghurs, in 1010 AD, an emissary sent by the Kucha king paid tribute to the Song. Kucha, in the period from the late 10th to the early 11th Century AD, was invaded by the Turks, and all Kucha inhabitants converted to Islam; the blossoms of Buddhism then withered away.

The above description is weakly supported, as it is somewhat inchoate in only relying upon what the Kucha emissary said, and therefore does not fully support the statement that all inhabitants of Kucha converted to Islam. Also, the mention of the invasion of the “Turks” lacks reference. It may refer to the battles between the Kara-Khanids and the Gaochang kingdom, which lasted almost

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1 Hadani Ryotai (羽溪了締), *Buddhism in the Northwest (Seiiki no Bukkyō 西域之佛教)*, trans. He Changqun (賀昌羣) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1956), 290.