

Polish Journal of Political Science

Volume 5 Issue 1 (2019)



Table of Contents

Articles

Agostino Massa

The sub-municipal level of politics in Italy: a case study p. 7

Ayman Al Sharafat

The Middle East in American media: a 21st century overview p. 35

Mikołaj Piotr Jankowski

Munich massacre Research study of propaganda in
communist countries p. 59

Wai-Yip Ho

Re-Emergence of the Middle East in China: Towards
a New Research Paradigm in 'One Belt, One Road'..... p. 79

Edyta Żyła

Powrót do Ojczyzny? Patriotyzm wobec nowych czasów.
Kontynuacje i nawiązania [Return to Homeland? Patriotism
in the face of the new times. Continuations and references],
sci. ed. Cezary Smuniewski, Paweł Sporek, Instytut Nauki
o Polityce, Warszawa 2017, pp. 438 p. 93

Paulina Kalina

Report on the ECPR General Conference.
Hamburg, 22-25 August 2018 p. 101

Wai-Yip Ho

**Re-Emergence of the Middle East in China:
Towards a New Research Paradigm in ‘One Belt, One Road’**

Abstract

China’s new global initiative, ‘One Belt, One Road’, has been re-viving the ancient Silk Road trade route to launch an alternative ‘Go Global’ strategy. Commentators foresee China’s new Silk Road, sometimes referred to as the new Marshall Plan, may reshape the dynamics of the regions and lead to confrontation among the big powers. There are fears that whether China is engaged in neo-colonialism in Africa and may become a super-power in the Middle East. While dominant policy and scholarly attention has been given to ‘China in the Middle East’, this paper explores another ignored trend and new research paradigm, namely ‘the Middle East in China’.

Keywords: China; new Silk Road; Belt and Road Initiative; Middle East in China

Introduction: Western Islamophobia, Inter-Asian Connections

There has been a troubled relationship between Middle East and the West since 9/11 attack in the United States and the new wave of Islamophobia against Muslim immigrants in Europe. At the same time, new and closer inter-Asian connections between China and Arabia have been subtly growing, but relatively less attention has been paid to the revival of the Silk Road network. While global media and policy attention has been focused on Europe in tackling the problems of the migrant crisis coming from Africa and the Arab world, the Middle Eastern and Arab community has been emerging in China, but the phenomenon of the Middle Eastern diaspora in China has largely not been covered by media or noticed by mainstream academia. Through my ongoing fieldwork and observation, the main argument of this chapter is to suggest a return of the ‘Middle East in China’ as a part of the revival process of the Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road (‘One Belt, One Road’¹). The paper argues that there is a rise of the Middle Eastern and Arab community in China, which may have a far-reaching implications for China’s Islam and future ethnic-religious landscape.

Revival of ‘the Middle East in China’ along the New Silk Road

While there has been a lot of discussion about the inflow of Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim migrants facing discrimination

¹ *Yidai yilu* (一帶一路), is the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, proposed by China’s President Xi Jinping in his official visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013. Though rejected by the Chinese leaders, some commentators compared the ambition of China’s ‘Belt and Road’ initiatives as comparable to the United States’ Marshall Plan.

in the process of social integration in the America and Europe, this chapter suggests that research should not neglect the importance of the eastward flow of the Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim diaspora to China. In the midst of China's recent strategic initiative of 'One Belt, One Road', which is part of China's 'Go Global Strategy'² through reimagining the ancient Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road in the globalization context, mainstream academics and policy makers are focusing on Eurasian and China-Middle East integration, especially China's long march to Central Asia, Africa and the Arab world, driven mainly by energy and raw-materials diplomacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This chapter, however, focuses on the reverse flow of the Middle Eastern and Arab community to China, namely the understudied trend of re-emergence of the 'Middle East in China', which has been positively accelerated by China's 'Welcoming In' policy³ in pulling Middle Eastern traders to China as well as the Arabs' new global outlook of 'Go East' policy. Methodologically, my ongoing research suggests the importance of interdisciplinary, reflecting engagement within sociology, qualitative research methods in oral history and ethnography, as well as both China and Islamic Studies. The aim of this chapter is to suggest a research framework that is crucially

² *Zouchuqu zhanlue* (走出去戰略) is sometimes named as the 'Go Out Policy', which refers to China's outreaching and travelling out policy to reconnect with the international community after years of isolation from global affairs.

³ *Qingjin lai* (請進來) means 'Welcome In', which usually refers to China's friendly strategy in welcoming and inviting overseas investments, but my research here refers to welcoming Arab and Middle Eastern students for training and studying in China's universities, some of whom stay on, work and marry in China after graduation.

interdisciplinary, bridging the fields of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies as well as China Studies.

The 'Middle East in China': A Brief Historical Review

In 751 A.D., there was a small-scale armed conflict when a Muslim army defeated the army of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) in China; no other major conflicts followed, and Islam came to China with merchants. Tracing the formative period of Islam in China, the first wave of Muslims arrived in China by the inland Silk Route to Xian and also by along the maritime Silk Road to the coastal cities Guangzhou and Quanzhou.⁴ Following the arrival of Arab Muslim merchants, they did not only engage in trading, but also practiced faith and introduced themselves to China. The two oldest and surviving mosques in China were built in Xian and Guangzhou. Along the maritime trade route, Arab Muslim traders also set foot and settled in the coastal cities of Yangzhou, Hangzhou and Hainan since the seventh century.⁵ Persian and Arab merchants, as the cultural bearers of Islamic culture, played an important role in the formation of culture and economy of the Hui community in Guangzhou.⁶ Since the Tang Dynasty, the Muslim community from the Arab world settled in coastal China through the maritime route and they engaged in trading and business in China. During the eighth century, the Muslim community gathered and settled as an ethnic enclave called *Fanfang* - 'foreign quarters'⁷- which was separated from the Chinese community. The settlement is to prevent

⁴ Benite (2010): 412-413.

⁵ Ma, Tian (2008).

⁶ Ma (1996): 32.

⁷ *Fanfang* (蕃坊) means 'foreign quarters'.

Arab and Persian Muslim traders from spreading Islam faith to the Han Chinese⁸ and a *Fanzhang* - 'governor of foreign people'⁹ - was appointed to oversee the everyday affairs involving the foreign community. As a foreign community, the newcomers were identified as *Fanke* - 'foreign guests'¹⁰. For those staying in China without returning home, these people are named as *Zhutang*¹¹ - 'living in Tang China'- and *Zhutang* were the ancestors of the Hui Chinese Muslims.¹² During the Tang dynasty, strict separation between *Fanfang* and the Han Chinese people was imposed by the government. However, that policy relaxed during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD) in the thirteenth century. Without census survey data, it is now difficult to estimate the population of *Fanke* in Tang China. But an Arab source hinted there should be a significant presence of *Fanke* in Guangzhou. During the Huang Chao Rebellion (874-884 AD) when his forces shelled Guangzhou in June 879, around a hundred and twenty thousand of *Fanke* merchants were killed by Huang's army. If this source is reliable, the population and the business of *Fanke* in Tang Guangzhou should be quite vibrant.¹³ *Fanke* did not only engage in trade, but also played an active role in the Islamic da'wah activities ('Invitation to Islam', missionary activity). And they indirectly gave birth to the formation of the Hui Muslim community. As they mainly interacted through trade, it seems quite clear that Chinese interactions with Arab Muslim settlers went beyond theological debates

⁸ Tan (2009): 11, 85.

⁹ *Fanzhang* (蕃長) means 'governor of foreign people'.

¹⁰ *Fanke* (蕃客) means 'foreign guest'.

¹¹ *Zhutang* (住唐) means 'living in Tang China'

¹² Qiu (1996).

¹³ Chin (2004): 233.

or political confrontation. Without a prolonged and critical Western-style debate on Muhammad's role as Prophet-Statesman and his private life in a polygamous marriage after his first one, the perception of Islam in Far East Asia goes beyond the dichotomized or seemingly exclusive options of religion and politics (*din wa dawla*), coastal regions of South China perceived Islam as an opportunity – a business hub linking China and the Middle East. As Ben Simpfendorfer¹⁴ succinctly argues the 9/11 was the turning point, at which the Arab world turned away from the West and rediscovered China, and the new Silk Road has been gradually re-established.

Towards a New Research Framework: Studying Other Middle Easterns and Arabs in China

African and Arab communities have been expanding to become one of the largest diasporic communities in China. Though African communities in South China have recently attracted increasing attention from scholars and policy makers due to the escalating tension between African migrants and Chinese residents in Guangzhou, the growing Middle Eastern and Arab community and its implications for China-Middle East relations is inadequately understood. A future research framework should focus on the emerging Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim traders in China. First, this emerging research framework will re-identify the historical continuity of Middle East-China relations. In particular, it ascertains how China's considerable humanitarian aid, infrastructure and other international projects in the socialist era laid good foundation for the ongoing Chinese presence in the Arab

¹⁴ Simpfendorfer (2011).

world and the importance of shared socialist heritage in cementing strong bilateral relation in the 1950s and after. Second, the future research framework should indicate the pulling factors that have been attracting growing Arab presence in China since 1980s. China's 'Open Door Policy' in 1978 and subsequent economic growth, Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim traders, travelling and managing business between China and the Middle East, served as a business brokers, mainly for Saudi Arabia, explains the increasing presence of Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim sojourners in China. The diasporic lives of the Middle Eastern and Arab community on the two ends of the new Silk Road economy illustrate the transnational circuit of the New Silk Road. Third, the future research framework should focus on how Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim respondents perceive China's economic growth and political development ('China model'). In the midst of the Arab Spring in many regions of the Arab world, the China model provides Arabs with an alternative developmental path and a governance model other than the authoritarian regimes. Through interviewing them, the future research framework should evaluate how the Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim traders imagine the future development of the Middle East. Finally, the future research framework should analyse everyday challenges the Middle Eastern and Arab community faces and how they resolve the difficulties and foresee their diasporic lives in China. Strategically speaking, the future research framework does not only assess China's national policy of 'Going Global' and the growing China-Middle East relations in terms of energy and raw materials diplomacy, but it contributes to evaluate the emerging trend of China's 'Welcome In' policy of accommodating the rising Arab expat community in China.

Future Focus of 'One Belt, One Road': Growing Gulf-China Relations

In order to break through the isolation imposed by the West, China's strategic involvement in the Middle East has been growing since the Tiananmen incident in 1989 and the First Gulf War in the early 1990s.¹⁵ Since 2000, researches have been indicating that closer Sino-Middle Eastern and Sino-African relations are primarily due to China's concern for sustainable energy supply, natural resources as well as bilateral trade and arms sales.¹⁶ Recent research even points out that Gulf-Asia and Gulf-China ties will continue to grow.¹⁷ Most importantly, the consequences of the Arab world shifting from the West to China marks a rebalancing of global power.¹⁸ Having stated that, one should say that Beijing's political involvement in the Middle East has remained passive and insignificant when compared with its strong economic ties within the region. It is due to the cautious attitude of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to prevent China from falling into the volatile regional politics and controversies.¹⁹ While much scholarly attention has been given to China's overall 'going global' policy and its strategic involvement in the Middle East and Africa, recent researches show a growing presence of African traders in Guangzhou and Hong Kong.²⁰ However, relatively less attention has been paid to another emerging presence of Arab traders in China's cities. Indisputably,

¹⁵ Shichor (1992); Gladney (1994).

¹⁶ Olimat (2010); Zhu (2010): 53-77; Huwaidin (2002).

¹⁷ Davidson (2010).

¹⁸ Simpfendorfer (2011).

¹⁹ Shichor (2006).

²⁰ Lyons, Brown, Li (2012); Mathews, Yang (2012); Bodomo (2010); Bertonecello, Bredeloup (2007).

the growing presence of the Arab Muslim Diaspora does matter to the geopolitics and Chinese-Arab ties. Nevertheless, the future research framework of the Arab diaspora in China should explore the potential and long-term impact of the Arab traders' perception of 'progress' and alternative Arab development under the shadow of the 'China Model'²¹ or 'Beijing Consensus'²² in the times after the Arab Spring, and how the presence of Arab traders transforms China's Muslim landscape in terms of Islamic thought and architecture.

Conclusion: Future Research of New *Fanke* in Chinese Cities

In forging a closer link with the Middle East and Arab world, the Chinese government has been becoming aware of Islam – an uncompromising monotheistic faith which defines the cultural identity of Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims and shapes national behavior and foreign policy of the Muslim world. After the success of the flourishing Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim traders business in Yiwu of Zhejiang province, China has been strategically transforming Yinchuan of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region as the Islamic hub of China-Arab trade. Ningxia province will play an increasingly ambassadorial role in enhancing the future China-Middle East financial cooperation. Compared to the successful story of Yiwu in Zhejiang province – which attracts thousands of Arab and Middle Eastern traders to its wholesale market for cheap consumer goods and small business²³ – large-scale investments in the areas where most Muslims live have been more limited. Nonetheless, in contrast with

²¹ Yip (2012); Ding (2011).

²² Halper (2010).

²³ Simpfendorfer (2011).

the bottom-up Middle Eastern and Arab business formation process of Yiwu, Sino-Arab business connections in Ningxia (which has a strong Muslim community) enjoy governmental encouragement. This is seen as a national project, blessed by the Chinese state.²⁴ Including Yiwu, this future research framework proposes to investigate the rising community of Middle Eastern and Arab traders in Guangzhou, South China, and its implication to the emergence of Inter-Asian connections along the New Silk Road.²⁵ As Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim traders were the important cultural bearers in making the maritime Silk Road and one of the important origins of China's Islam in history, this future research outlook will analyze the re-emergence of *Fanke* in Guangzhou and other parts of coastal China. Based on my ongoing ethnographic study of Yemeni traders, the largest Arab trader group in China,²⁶ this future research framework will point to the re-emergence of the Middle Eastern and Arab community (*Fanke*) in China's cities (Guangzhou, possibly extend to Yiwu, Wuhan and Beijing), where the Middle Eastern and Arab communities are located, and how these diasporic communities contribute to the Inter-Asian connections in the revival of the New Silk Road.²⁷

The relevance of this new research perspective is to analyze the long-term implications of the growing influence of Sino-Islamic connections across the Middle East and China. This new research framework will allow for a new understanding of China's emerging soft power in the Middle East. While

²⁴ Ho (2013a); Ho (2013b).

²⁵ Simpfendorfer (2011); Ho (2013a); Ho (2013b); Ho (2013c).

²⁶ Ho (2014a).

²⁷ Ho (2013c).

Middle Easterners and Arabs in China are Muslims, the new research framework will also explore China's cultural diplomacy aimed at reviving Silk Road business networks through mobilizing its own ethnic Muslim minorities in China. As regards China's national strategy of 'Welcome In', it considers China as attracting incoming the Middle Eastern and Arab community and promoting a stronger China-Arab economic ties. In addition, it also sheds light on the cyber-Islamic environment in the Chinese language and the new Silk Road in the world economy, the cultural expression of Islam in Far East Asia as well as how the Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim communities in China critically perceive China's development and 'China model' as their developmental model.

Selected References

- Bertoncello B., Bredeloup S. (2007), *The Emergence of New African “Trading Posts” in Hong Kong and Guangzhou*, “China Perspectives” 2007, No. 1.
- Bin Huwaidin M. (2002), *China’s Relations with Arabia and the Gulf*. London.
- Bodomo A. (2010), *The African Trading Community in Guangzhou: An Emerging Bridge for Africa-China Relations*, “China Quarterly” 2010, No. 203.
- Davidson Ch. (2010), *The Persian Gulf and the Pacific Asia: From Indifference to Interdependence*. New York.
- Ding X. (2011), *The China Model: For and Against*. Hong Kong.
- Freitag U. (2002), *Arab Merchants in Singapore: Attempt at a Collective Biography*, in: *Transcending borders. Arabs, politics, trade and Islam in South-east Asia*, eds. H. de Jonge, N. Kaptein, Leiden.
- Gladney D.C. (1994), *Sino-Middle Eastern Perspectives and Relations since the Gulf War: Views from Below* “International Journal of Middle East Studies” 1994, vol. 26, No. 4.
- Halper S.A. (2010), *The Beijing Consensus: How China’s Authoritarian Model will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*. New York.
- Ho W.Y. (2013a), *Mobilizing Minorities for China’s Social Development: Hui Muslims, Ethnic Relations and Sino-Arab Connections*, “Journal of Comparative Asian Development” 2013, vol. 12, Issue 1.
- Ho W.Y. (2013b), *Mobilizing Muslim Minority, Targeting Arab Trade: China’s Ningxia as the Islamic Hub for China-Arab Connections* in: *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century: The Local to Global Transformations*, ed. T. Niblock M. Malik. Berlin.
- Ho W.Y. (2013c), *Islam and China’s Hong Kong: Ethnic Identity, Muslim Network and New Silk Road*. London.
- Ho W.Y. (2014a), *Emerging Yemeni Community in China: The Socialist Legacy, the New Silk Road Broker and the Chinese Model*, in: *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. H. Lackner. London.

- Ho W.Y. (2014b), *China's Emerging Policy of Soft Power in the Middle East: CCTV Arabic International Channel*, "The Maghreb Review (Special Issue on China's Policy Towards the Maghreb, The Middle East Including Iran and Turkey, and Africa Part 2)" 2014, vol. 39, No. 1.
- Ho W.Y. (2014c), *Connecting China and the Gulf Economically: Geopolitics of Hong Kong as China's Gateway of Islamic Finance*, in: *Security Dynamics of East Asia in the Gulf Region*, ed. T. Niblock, Y. Guang. Berlin.
- Lyons M., Brown A., Zhigang L. (2012), *In the Dragon's Den: African Traders in Guangzhou*, "Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies" 2012, vol. 38, No. 5.
- Ma J.Z. (1996), *The Role of Islam in the Formation of the Culture and Economy of the Hui Community in Guangzhou*, "Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs" 1996, 16 (1).
- Ma Y., Tian X.J. (2008), *Hui Commerce Extending in All Directions*, Yinchuan.
- Mathews G., Yang Y. (2012), *How Africans Pursue Low-End Globalization in Hong Kong and Mainland China*, "Journal of Current Chinese Affairs" 2012, No. 2.
- Olimat M.S. (2010), *The Political Economy of the Sino-Middle Eastern Relations*, "Journal of Chinese Political Science" 2010, vol. 15, No. 3.
- Qiu S. (1996), *Hui Nationalities History of China*, Yinchuan.
- Tan T.S. (2009), *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia*, Singapore.
- Shichor Y. (1992), *China and the Middle East Since Tiananmen*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 1992, vol. 519.
- Shichor Y. (2006), *China's Upsurge: Implications for the Middle East*, "Israel Affairs" 2006, vol. 12, No. 4.
- Simpfendorfer B. (2011), *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. New York.

(this page is intentionally left blank)