Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)

ISSN: 1937-0679 (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmei19

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Robert R. BIANCHI

To cite this article: Robert R. BIANCHI (2015) Islamic Globalization and Its Role in China's Future, Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), 9:3, 29-48, DOI: 10.1080/19370679.2015.12023268

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2015.12023268

Islamic Globalization and Its Role in China's Future

Robert R. BIANCHI[①]
(Law School, University of Chicago)

Abstract: *Islamic Globalization is a combination of religious, economic, political, and diplomatic advances that are transforming the Muslim world. Its building blocks are the hajj and religious travel, capitalism and Islamic finance, democracy and Islamic Modernism, as well as new international regimes tailored to the varied needs and tastes of Muslims in diverse cultures. Islamic Globalization allows modern Muslims to join the mainstream of international life and to reform it at the same time. These are also China's goals, particularly as Chinese leaders express greater interest in soft power; eager to identify with visions of civilizational exchange and global governance.*
Key Words: *Islamic Globalization; Hajj; Islamic Finance; Islamic Modernism; International Regimes; Democracy; Interest Groups*

Islamic Globalization is just an idea. I suppose it's fair to call it less than a fact and more than a fantasy, but it's far short of being a concept or a model—and light-years from becoming a paradigm or an agenda.

It's just an idea that I encountered—or dreamt up—a couple of

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[①] Dr. Robert R. BIANCHI is professor, political scientist and an international lawyer with special interests in China and the Islamic world. His most recent book is *Islamic Globalization: Pilgrimage, Capitalism, Democracy, and Diplomacy*, World Scientific Press, 2013. He has taught at the University of Chicago, the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies, the American University in Cairo, the University of Pennsylvania, Qatar University, and the National University of Singapore.

years ago when trying to stitch together a plausible story that could explain things I'd learned—usually in spite of myself—at different times and places (Bianchi, 2013). Then again, maybe I should say the idea found me. I wasn't looking for it and it might even have been trying to get my attention for a long time without my noticing. Pirandello would have understood the experience, but Max Weber would probably have frowned at its irrationality.

Now, to be truthful, I have to admit that Islamic Globalization is really more than just an idea. In other words, I've already lied—trying to trick my readers into picturing me as an innocent bystander who was ambushed by history. In fact, Islamic Globalization is a figure of speech—a trope, a pun, a pin prick, a gadfly, a counter-intuitive tease that pushes against much of what we think we know about Muslims and their place in the world.

How so? For example, everyone "knows" that Muslims don't globalize. That would mean becoming Western, secular-atheistic, and inauthentic. So, instead, Muslims are rejectionists who go their separate way, Islamifying or Islamizing or Islamicating one another and the rest of us as much as possible.

There you have it; the cat is out of the bag. Islamic Globalization is a willful device for summoning our imaginations—all of them—sociological, humanistic, scientific, and spiritual. Having imagination is just another way of saying that we open our eyes a bit wider and welcome surprises that make us rethink our experience and, eventually, reshape our world.

I have no way of knowing what will happen to Islamic Globalization—either the idea or the collection of real-life behaviors of Muslims around the world that have pushed their way into my awareness over the years. Perhaps the most important feature of Islamic Globalization is that it has a life of its own—beyond the control of writers who might want to invoke the idea, but also beyond the control of any great power or any would-be monopolist of truth or wealth who might try to stifle the activities or use them for selfish

ends.

What were the serial discoveries that prompted me—forced me—to look beyond the data in search of wider trends and deeper meanings? And what can these insights contribute to current debates about world politics, including China's ever-growing importance?

In order to truly appreciate the puzzling path I followed, it's best to start not at the beginning or the end, but in the middle—not with my earliest work on associational life and interest group politics or with my current explorations of Chinese and American diplomacy, but with the intervening years when I was immersed in studying and experiencing the hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

I. Pilgrimage and Religious Travel

The hajj is the heart and soul of Islam and one of its Five Pillars. It embodies and perpetuates Muslims' most cherished ideal—a universal community in which God views everyone as equals, distinguishing and judging them merely according to their conduct and conscience while ignoring irrelevant divisions of race, nation, class, gender, age, sect, party, family, ethnicity, language, and rank (Bianchi, 2004).

Naturally, we all know this is a Utopian vision—an impossible dream that will never come true. Yet, that may be precisely the reason that, instead of dying, the dream grows ever stronger, appearing more alluring and infectious as the injustices and inequities of everyday life feel more overwhelming and intolerable (Hodgson, 1974).

In practice, however, the hajj divides people as much as it unites them and it promotes hierarchy as much as it levels the social landscape. Because the hajj is as old as Islam itself, it has been generating these contradictory tendencies every year for over fourteen centuries in all corners of the world. Today's hajj has reached collossal proportions, mobilizing and caring for a million and a half pilgrims from every country. This requires the year-round aid and

collaboration of international organizations, national and local governments, businesses, investment funds, community groups, politicians, preachers, engineers, telecommunications experts, security forces, health professionals, journalists, extended families, and countless others.

Since the hajj has become so deeply enmeshed with every aspect and institution of modern life, it inevitably reflects and reinforces existing structures of power and wealth even while its core values—its symbolic and spiritual essence—pose a constant challenge and critique of those structures. No wonder hajj management is one of the most thankless tasks imaginable. No one can satisfy the deluge of material needs and personal demands much less remain faithful to the transcendent experience that pilgrims expect to connect them in this world and the hereafter.

Most Muslims expect—indeed, they demand—that their rulers support and facilitate the hajj because it is their duty to help as many people as possible in fulfilling Islam's most sacred religious obligation. Some Muslims are willing to give their votes and loyalty in exchange for the opportunity to make the hajj, but most people reject such reciprocity because they believe that God requires all governments to aid the pilgrimage and that no one owes them anything in return. Consequently, there is little public praise for leaders and officials who run the hajj, but there is ceaseless and scathing criticism of any appearance of inefficiency, favoritism, corruption, and self-dealing.

Muslims have always been formally required to make the hajj, but throughout history it has been effectively considered voluntary because the vast majority of people lacked the material and physical capacity to undertake such a costly and arduous journey and Islam requires that one cannot go into debt in order to make the Hajj. Nonetheless, since the end of World War II hajj has blossomed into a mass movement of religious tourism supported by intersecting networks on every continent.

As I explored hajj activity in one country after another, I realized that in just a few decades, it had changed beyond recognition. Not only was the size unprecedented, but for the first time the national and geographic distribution of pilgrims accurately reflected the Muslim world as a whole. Today, most hajjis come not from the closer lands of the Arabs, but from the far more distant countries of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The current hot spots of hajj are Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iran, Turkey, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa. The fastest-growing pilgrimages are in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, and, of course, China and the United States. Mecca is still the symbolic center of Islam, but the countries that were once considered the margins and peripheries have overtaken Saudi Arabia and its neighbors in nearly every measure of modernization.

Equally important, the hajj is no longer the preserve of men, the elderly, the wealthy, and the towns. In a growing number of countries and regions, women comprise the majority of pilgrims year in and year out. The average age of pilgrims drops every year, including higher percentages of recent university graduates. Government subsidies and package tours are lowering the price of travel and accommodations so that middle-class and working-class savers can build nest eggs in special bank accounts for family pilgrimages. The green revolution and urban migration have integrated prospective hajjis in the most remote villages with provincial markets and nationwide information networks. The steady expansion of democratic elections and grass-roots party organizations has turned hajj services into staples of patronage politics comparable to building better roads and supplying cheaper electricity.

I also discovered that hajj management had evolved into a full-fledged international regime reflecting the eclipse of Saudi Arabian sovereignty in favor of explicit power-sharing agreements with non-Arab countries in Asia and Africa. As I explored the legal

bases of this international regime, I was struck by its sophisticated balance of competing interests and claims to legitimacy. The compromise acknowledged the need to balance the conflicting demands of national sovereignty, freedom of travel for all pilgrims, and preservation of the common heritage of humanity for future generations.

The formula of the new hajj regime is remarkably similar to the delicate compromise that had previously been incorporated into the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), particularly its open-ended provisions for Exclusive Economic Zones, a Deep Sea Mining Authority, and a Maritime Tribunal. And just as Iran and Saudi Arabia are now quarreling over the interpretation and implementation of the international regime for the hajj, so have China and the United States adopted opposing positions on applying UNCLOS in the contested waters of the Western Pacific.

Gradually, I recognized that the forces placing the hajj within reach of average Muslims around the world are the same forces that are transforming modern life everywhere—the scientific and technological revolutions, rapid industrialization and expanded international trade, the explosion of middle-class consumer markets, decolonization and self-government, democratic elections and mass party organizations, the spread of voluntary associations and social movements, rural migration and new conurbations, the growth of higher education and youthful populations, the empowerment of women in the workplace, longer life expectancy and retirement benefits, the astonishing resurgence of non-Western economies and civilizations, the proliferation of international regimes and intergovernmental organizations, and the multiplicity of regional powers vying for influence in world diplomacy.

In other words, the hajj is a stunning example of flourishing globalization that encompasses all the achievements and predicaments of today's transnational society and polity. But globalization in Islamic

lands is not a duplicate of what came before elsewhere. The hajj remains a religiously inspired force of enormous magnitude. It is propelled by many other intersecting processes and conflicts—both religious and secular—and it reshapes those same processes in turn. This persistent interplay of transcendent and worldly pursuits permeates all aspects of social change among Muslims, coloring their experiences with tones that seem both universal and distinctive at the same time. For this reason, it sensible to speak of an Islamic variant of more general trends rather than a counter-movement or a separate path.

Together with the hajj and religious travel, I have pointed to three other elements of Islamic Globalization—capitalism and Islamic finance, democracy and Islamic modernism, and diplomacy and great power politics. These are the religious, economic, political, and diplomatic building blocks of an Islamic world in the making—a transcontinental network of vibrant and creative societies that seems certain to upset many basic assumptions and expectations not merely among scholars of Islamic studies and international relations, but also in the leading citadels of state and corporate power.

II. Capitalism and Islamic Finance

Entrepreneurs and expanding markets played a central role in the birth and spread of Islam in all periods and cultures, particularly through long-distance trade, commercial lending, and manufacturing. Islamic society has commonly been described as a cosmopolitan network of cities, bazaars, guilds, and ports where itinerant merchants mingled with Sufi missionaries, scholars, artisans, and soldiers. Islamic civilization is renowned for its polyglot blending of lingua francas and vernaculars and for its constant transmission of knowledge and innovation to and from Asia and the West.

Given Muslims' obvious contributions to the creation and growth

of the world economy, it seems odd to hear so much lingering controversy over whether Islam is compatible with modern capitalism. Historians and economists have popularized three viewpoints that generate the sharpest divergences—that Islam is an obstacle to capitalism, that it is a variety of capitalism, and that it is an alternative to capitalism (Rodinson, 1978; Gran, 1979).

The argument that Islam obstructs capitalism usually asks why Muslim societies did not undergo industrial revolutions. The immediate explanation is that Muslims missed out on the revolutions in modern science and technology. This deficiency, in turn, is often attributed to Islam's failure to share in the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and the Renaissance (Turner, 1978; Kuran, 2005). Asians and other non-Westerners know the arguments well because the same type of counterfactual speculation has been recited countless times to explain the alleged backwardness of Chinese, Indians, Africans, Latin Americans, and many other non-white peoples. Such ethnocentric narratives understate the wealth and progress Europeans found in the lands they colonized as well as the damage they inflicted during their occupations. Emerging economies in many non-Western societies are steadily narrowing the gaps with earlier developers in Europe and North America. The current rebalancing of wealth and power between civilizations makes it harder and harder to imagine that capitalism depends on psychological habits and moral virtues that are more likely to flourish in New York or Berlin than in Istanbul or Shanghai.

As for Islam being an alternative to capitalism, even if the prospect is plausible in some theories of Islamic economics, it is increasingly contradicted by the practices of Islamic banks and investment funds. Islamic finance has evolved into a subset of mainstream capitalism rather than a rival to it (Bianchi, 2007: 569).

In every country, Islamic financial institutions must accept the rules and supervision of the government's Central Bank. The Central Banks, in turn, must follow the guidance of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, the so-called Bankers' Club that stipulates world

standards for capital adequacy, risk management, accounting practices, and transaction procedures. The Islamic finance industry can express its views and preferences on regulatory policy, but it has no choice in the matter of compliance and its leaders are eager to demonstrate scrupulous respect for international norms.

Deprived of control over rule-making, Islamic finance has turned its efforts to salesmanship and public relations—often with ingenuity and success, but also with embarrassment and scandal. Islamic bankers try to offer products and services that mimic conventional investments, loans, leases, savings accounts, and insurance policies. The distinguishing feature—and the key competitive advantage in Muslim markets—is the assurance that their practices follow the principles of Islamic law—as the industry jargon puts it, that they are "sharia-compliant."

There is no consensus on what Islamic law permits or on who has the authority to make such judgments. No such consensus appears on the horizon despite occasional agreements on best practices and local commercial customs. All Islamic financial institutions have a Sharia Advisory Board that evaluates the propriety of contracts and operations, but many of these boards are riddled with conflicts of interest and their views vary widely from firm to firm and country to country. Many Islamic investments are housed inside of garden-variety European banks where non-Muslim executives openly compete for the business of Muslim customers in commercial and consumer markets.

An astute critic of Islamic finance has aptly described the business as "sharia arbitrage"—an effort to repackage ordinary banking and investment with new labels that appeal to patriotic and cultural sensibilities even though prospective customers have inadequate information to evaluate claims about their safety and religious pedigree (El-Gamal, 2007: 187). In fact, such arbitrage is quite appropriate while the industry is still trying to discover its market and needs to learn about local variations in the tolerance for both spiritual

and economic risks. Religiously motivated economic decisions always require balancing moral and material accounts in a very private and uncertain manner. There is no a priori method for segmenting markets; every firm and product is an experiment subject to trial and error in the face of shifting tastes and consciences.

Fortunately, this uncertain environment has stimulated a great deal of flexibility and open-mindedness in some of the leading centers of Islamic finance. More and more, we are seeing spirited debates and borrowings between Islamic bankers and investors in diverse cultures in Southeast Asia, the Gulf, Europe, and North America. Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, and London are routinely adopting approaches and projects from one other instead of trying to carve out exclusive turfs with incompatible rules and interpretations.

Moreover, the core market of Islamic finance has shifted dramatically from a narrow class of Arabian billionaires and governments trying to recycle petrodollars toward the rising tide of middle-class and working-class customers seeking mortgages, educational loans, small business credits, life insurance, retirement plans, and tax-sheltered savings accounts for family pilgrimages to Mecca. These small savers and investors are hedging their bets, splitting their business between Islamic and conventional firms at home and abroad. More than ever, they are making up their own minds about the best balance between what is Islamic and what is prudent, with scant regard for traditional religious authorities and received dogmas.

Islamic finance is becoming more compliant with international economic regulations, more attuned to the preferences of ordinary citizens, and more flexible in adapting to hybrid and pluralistic cultures. Increasingly, Islamic finance reaches outward to become more cosmopolitan and inward to become more rooted in mass society. By deferring simultaneously to global norms and to consumer choice, Islamic finance seems well positioned to benefit from (and perhaps to actively support) another dimension of Islamic

Globalization—mounting demands for the democratization of political life and religious thought.

III. Democracy and Islamic Modernism

Democracy is widely practiced and highly valued throughout the Islamic world. Even when militarist and authoritarian forces try to crush democratic aspirations, they unwittingly reinvigorate them in the long run. In country after country, we have seen a similar drama unfold. Military rulers come and go, constitutions are torn up and rewritten, political parties are banned and reshuffled with new labels. And in the meantime, organized social groups persist—bending with the wind and deepening their roots until the next round of elections opens the way for renewed networking and coalition building.

Why is democracy so resilient and tenacious among Muslims? A large part of the answer is that many Muslim societies have cultivated what Alexis de Tocqueville called "the art of association"—the myriad forms of collective action that allow people to cooperate and overcome problems that would otherwise seem beyond their control (de Tocqueville, 1954).

I first experienced the vitality and diversity of associational life not in the United States, where Tocqueville thought it was most remarkable, but in the towns and villages of Turkey where I lived and worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s. I was amazed by the sheer number and variety of group offices and headquarters that surrounded me wherever I traveled. Their bright signboards flashed a jumble of special words for occupational and civic organizations derived from Turkish and Ottoman as well as French, Arabic, Italian, Persian, and English. They represented every social class and countless community activities from religion and welfare to folklore and sports. Virtually all of my colleagues and neighbors were active members of several groups at once. These were not big city residents or wealthy people with time to spare. They were farmers and

shopkeepers, civil servants and wage earners, students and domestic workers—all with families to feed and fields to tend. Every time I visited another provincial capital, I found a different mixture of headquarters and meeting places—and during election campaigns; they had overflow crowds of voters who grilled all of the parties' candidates about their platforms.

Once I grasped the importance of these associations, I realized they deserved in-depth study. Eventually, I returned to Turkey for a year of fieldwork that set the stage for my first book on interest group politics (Bianchi, 1984).

Nothing I had read before living in Turkey prepared me for the level of political sophistication and independence that I encountered among average citizens in all quarters. Indeed, the conventional wisdom in American universities held that democracy in Turkey was handicapped by authoritarian tendencies that were supposedly inherent in the country's Ottoman heritage and Islamic customs. In time, I became convinced of the opposite—Turks' historical and religious backgrounds enrich their modern culture and institutions in many ways that promote economic development as well as democratic values.

While living in Egypt during the 1980s, I witnessed an even greater display of popular power propelled by the art of association. In the year leading up to his assassination, Anwar Sadat turned against every independent group that dared to criticize him and his ruling party. Nearly every week, he arrested another union leader, journalist, professor, judge or preacher. No legal category or social sector escaped the onslaught—voluntary organizations, business groups, professional syndicates, labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, churches, and mosques (Bianchi, 1989).

Sadat himself was responsible for politicizing Egypt's associations because he had already throttled free expression through elections and the media. Deprived of independent political parties and legislatures, Egyptians turned their neighborhood and occupational groups into

debating societies where contending factions could test one another's strength indirectly instead of venting their frustration in the streets. Yet even this kind of fragmented and muffled opposition infuriated Sadat and he was determined to crush it entirely no matter how many enemies he created.

When Hosni Mubarak first took power, there was a temporary relaxation of tensions because no one knew what to expect of him. For a year or two, many factions competed to win him over, thinking they could exploit his inexperience and apparent isolation. As long as Mubarak seemed open-minded and pliable, debate could flourish and the associations could resume their guarded role as sounding boards for public opinion. But when Mubarak grew more confident, he insisted on taking personal charge of party, military, and business affairs at the same time. Religious extremists strengthened his grip on power by taking up arms and providing a convenient excuse for a police state that was buttressed by virtually permanent emergency laws.

Compared to the tumult of Sadat's final year, Egyptian public life felt like a graveyard under Mubarak. Would-be opponents seemed resigned to watch the ailing dictator retire eventually—until he decided to establish a family dynasty by naming his son as successor. That prospect sparked outrage and mass resistance on a scale that even Sadat had never generated. When Egyptians saw the victory of the Tunisian revolution, the throngs were fearless and unstoppable, first, in Cairo and Alexandria and, then, across the entire nation.

Many of my colleagues in the community of Middle East scholars were unhappy to see the Arab Spring unfold. Not only were they caught off guard by events, but they had explicitly ruled out revolutionary possibilities in most of the region. Many claimed that these revolts were unpredictable or random occurrences—like "black swans" that defied all experience and intuition (Taleb, 2010; Yahya, 2012).

In fact, no one who lived through Sadat's final year and his

assassination would have reason to think of tyranny as stable or immune to revolution. Anyone who has witnessed the durability of Egyptian social networks and the resourcefulness of their members would appreciate their ability to stand up to dictators and eventually replace them.

The Muslim Brotherhood was, by far, the strongest of Egypt's independent social movements and the most capable of filling the vacuum of power after Mubarak's fall. For the supporters of the old authoritarian regime, that was exactly what made them so dangerous. In the elections and referendums held during the first two years of the revolution, the Brotherhood's candidates and initiatives won every time. It stood out as the only movement with nationwide support among middle-class and working-class voters in the cities and the countryside (Bianchi, 2014: 67).

Increasingly, this perceived imbalance of power worked against the new governments' efforts to consolidate democracy. Mubarak's cronies steadily encouraged military officers and disappointed politicians to join them in portraying the Muslim Brotherhood as a religious dictatorship in the making—the exact opposite of the Islamic modernists and democrats the Brothers claimed to be. Using this tactic, the Brotherhood's enemies launched a counter-revolution that seemed intent on physically eradicating the group instead of merely nullifying their electoral victories. But the Muslim Brotherhood is merely one branch of transnational Islamic modernism and its persecution will have little effect on similar groups in Egypt and beyond.

Islamic modernism is a popular movement of religious and social reform that has helped to democratize religious knowledge in nearly every Muslim society during the past century (Rahman, 1982). Islamic modernists have become mainstream actors shaping the economic, political, and intellectual lives of Muslims and non-Muslims everywhere. Their common goal is to encourage universal education so that citizens can think for themselves instead of relying on traditional religious authorities (Rahman, 2009). Their

forerunners—both laymen and religious reformers such as Muhammad 'Abduh in Egypt, Ahmad Dahlan in Indonesia, Muhammad Iqbal in India, 'Ali Shari'ati in Iran, and many others—were nationalist leaders who pioneered the merger of science and religion in school systems that became incubators for women and men who form much of today's middle-class, including prominent professionals, entrepreneurs, and interest group leaders (Kurtzman, 1998).

The associations and political parties of Islamic modernists share political power with many other factions in forming coalition governments, parliamentary oppositions, and civil society networks (Binder, 1988). They have contributed to the defense and expansion of democracy, human rights, women's' equality, and the rule of law in countries where Muslims comprise both majority and minority populations. Their influence and popularity increasingly overshadow the traditionalist and extremist factions that frequently capture the headlines, particularly in Western media. Even when they do not govern directly, they usually guide and limit debate on domestic and foreign policy in the major countries of the Islamic world.

In its myriad forms, Islamic modernism promotes a powerful combination of private business, associational pluralism, religious reform, and democracy. Islamic modernists are both the leading agents and the greatest beneficiaries of Muslims' growing participation in the transnational mainstream of contemporary life—they are the backbone of Islamic Globalization.

IV. Diplomacy and Great Power Politics

In international relations, Muslim states are thoroughly integrated into the fabric and norms of global society. There is no separate Islamic international system and no effort to create one that might rival the United Nations framework. The major international organization of Muslim countries, the Organization of Islamic

Cooperation (OIC), explicitly acknowledges acceptance of United Nations authority and submits to its binding decisions. The OIC has repeatedly rejected proposals to set up an Islamic version of the International Court of Justice—also known as the World Court—because it does not want to create the appearance of challenging United Nations supremacy or of encouraging forum shopping by Muslim states that seek to adjudicate international disputes.

In conducting politics among nations, Muslims employ and contribute to the same diplomatic norms, multilateral organizations, and international law that everyone embraces. For five centuries, the Ottoman Empire was an integral member of Europe's international society and a skilled practitioner of balance of power politics on three continents simultaneously (Hurewitz, 1961: 141). The Westphalia system of sovereign nation-states developed in large part as a response to changing perceptions of Ottoman power—at first, the empire's expansion and, later, its disintegration and dismemberment. The "Terrible Turk" and the "Eastern Question" shaped Europe's ever-shifting alliances as much as the religious conflicts of the Reformation or the democratic and nationalist revolutions that culminated in the Napoleonic Wars (Goffman, 2002).

Nearly all Muslim countries experienced some form of European colonialism and subjugation. Like most other non-Western peoples, they regained independence in exchange for their willingness to accept international rules and regimes that Europeans and North Americans had forged after World War II. In recent years, Muslim diplomats have joined colleagues across Asia, Africa, and Latin America in pressing for a more inclusive and egalitarian international order. They have allied with the BRICS countries and with several G-20 members in proposing wide-ranging reforms of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization.

Like China, most nations in the Islamic world want to preserve

and strengthen the existing global order while also broadening its leadership beyond the traditional dominance of Western powers. As the coalition for reform gains strength, there is growing concern that North American and European states might disinvest in the project of global governance or even withdraw into regional shells of exclusive security and trade arrangements.

From this perspective, it is important that Muslim diplomats have avoided—and hopefully will continue to avoid—creating such institutional shells for the Islamic world. The new international regimes that manage the hajj and Islamic finance are promising experiments. Both regimes are tailored to meet the special needs and sensitivities of Muslims in many different cultures, but they use the same structures and best practices that guide global governance everywhere. In this way, Islamic Globalization can acquire a modern and universal identity even as it serves particular tastes and traditional customs.

V. China and Islamic Globalization

China's destiny is intimately tied to the Islamic world and their mutual dependencies are deepening every day (Ehteshami and Miyagi, 2015). All of China's ambitious New Silk Roads—both overland and maritime—crisscross dozens of Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. Some Chinese writers have even described the routes as "Islamic corridors" because they connect millions of China's own Muslim citizens to markets and cultures in every corner of the Islamic world (Zou, 2015: 32). In fact, both Chinese and Islamic civilizations are gradually becoming pivotal members of a transcontinental and transoceanic mega-region that encompasses all of Afro-Eurasia.

More and more Chinese scholars are exploring the implications of these developments for China's foreign relations as well as its domestic development. Readers accustomed to such terms as "geo-politics" and "geo-economics" are now learning about

"geo-religion" and its role in enhancing China's "soft power" (Xu and Zou, 2013: 26). China's Muslims and their heritage are increasingly viewed as natural resources rather than as imported or marginal accretions. Increasingly, Chinese Muslims are seen as followers of a great world religion with valuable knowledge and ties that benefit China's new global presence (Xu, 2010: 69). "Chinese Islam" is viewed as a unique creation–similar to Chinese forms of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity—that allows China to share in the exchange of universal ethics while enriching them with a distinctive contribution (Allès et al., 2003: 7).

At a time when much of the world fears that China's rising strength might upset the international order, Chinese leaders are expressing a greater interest in soft power; eager to identify with visions of civilizational exchange and global governance. Islamic Globalization embodies a combination of economic, social, and diplomatic change that allows modern Muslims to join the mainstream of international life and to reform it at the same time. These are also China's goals—avoiding the Great Games of superpower confrontation while peacefully competing for greater influence and respect in world affairs.

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