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THE SOCIAL STATUS OF ISLAM IN XI'AN

Jordan Hughes

Mentor: James Wertsch

I use the city of Xi'an in the Shaanxi province of China as a case study to investigate the social status of Islam in peaceful regions of China. The focus is on young adults and especially students. Research was conducted largely in two parts of the city, the ancient Muslim quarter and the campus of Xi'an Jiaotong University. Research was gathered qualitatively and anecdotally with an emphasis on nuanced comprehension of personal histories. Interviews with students, staff, and community members on and around the university campus provide the bulk of the knowledge found, in addition to conversations and personal observations with local shopkeepers, families, and a group of tourists from Pakistan. My findings suggested no significant social taboo or intolerance of Islam. While a lack of understanding and cohesion between the majority and minority communities exists clearly within young people, it does not appear to be coupled with major animosity of one group towards the other. Significantly more research is warranted, but these findings support a hypothesis that China's national governmental crackdown on the propagation of Islam has had little explicit impact on the perceptions of educated young people, a hypothesis which carries national security implications for both China and the United States at a time when Islam is spreading rapidly throughout East Asia.