

# Local Adaptation and Cultural Exclusion: Thirty Years of Tablighi Jamaat in China

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## Abstract

Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) is a transnational Islamic revival movement that originated in India in the 1920s. Its most distinctive feature is that the secular missionary group composed of 5-10 people travels among Muslims who are considered to have “weak beliefs”, and they try to return their weakened religious practice to the right path in this way. After nearly a hundred years of global dissemination, the movement has now become a relatively successful transnational Islamic missionary movement in the world today, and has had a certain social impact in West Africa, North Africa, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and some European countries and regions. The movement has been in China for more than thirty years since it was introduced in the early 1980s, but there is no academic paper dedicated to its social practice in China. This paper adopts the anthropological fieldwork method, and conducts a long-term follow-up study on TJ activities in Northwest China, North China, Southwest China and other areas from 2011 to 2021. Part of the fieldwork data from Pakistan during 2018–2019 when I was there, it verified the specific time of TJ was introduced into China and the specific situation of its initial dissemination, in addition, this paper rationally divided three important stages of its dissemination in China and living state, at the same time, it demonstrates the specific characteristics of TJ in different periods in China.

**Keywords:** Tablighi Jamaat, adaptation and exclusion, China, Muslim ethnic group

## 1. Introduction

In the northwest of China, the TJ is called “Dawa”, “Dawa Mission Group”, and “Dawa Party” by the Muslim ethnic group. After TJ was introduced to China in the early 1980s, after more than 30 years of local adaptation, it has successfully cultivated the second and third generation of local TJ missionaries. Especially in the first decade, the TJ was well spread in China, which had a relatively large impact on some Muslim ethnic groups. But after entering the second decade, Muslim groups in some provinces and cities in China began to resist TJ more strongly, and some areas even caused physical conflicts, although local governments in different provinces in China affirmed that Tablighis played a role in the Muslim group positive effect, but the individual negative social effects derived from it have also aroused the alertness of the authorities, With the involvement of China’s law enforcement agencies, TJ in China has gradually shifted from an open state to a semi-open or underground state. The Chinese participants of TJ have also gradually turned from the religiousization of their specific life to the state of de-religion, but TJ has still not completely withdrawn from China, they still carry out their activities in relatively limited spaces.

## 2. Concise and Isolated: The Structure, Text, and Discourse of the Tablighi

In the modern Islamic discourse, the word of Tablighi or Tabligha is derived from an Arabic root which means “send Message” or “to communicate”. In some literature, “Tablighi” is regarded as synonymous with “Dawah”, and sometimes the two words are used interchangeably. In fact, the “Dawa” (Da’wa) is a deeply rooted in the concept of the Islamic classic Quran and classical tradition, it contains the internal mission (to become better Muslims) and external mission (calling on non-Muslims to accept Islamic efforts) two meanings, Sunni and Shia groups often use “Dawa” to express religious messages and the spread of religious politics. Arabic noun “*da’wa*”, is made by the verb “*da’ā*” And the active participle “*dā’ī*” composition, the former is translated as” call “or “invite “, and the latter is translated as person engaged in invitation or inviting. “Dawa”, appearing in the Qur’an (*da’wa*) Variants of the word over 200 times were given different meanings meanings (Matthew, 2016, p. 64). So, the term “Dawa” is part of the concept group used to describe “task”. Masud believes that in Islam’s missionary activities, there are two parts: “Dawa”, which is an Islamic invitation to the heart or inward, and “Tablighi”, which spreads Islamic information to the outside world (Masud, 1995, pp. 4, 162–165).

The founder of TJ is Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalvi, a scholar of Deobandi in northern India. His claims follow the ideas of Indo-Islamic revivalism and the reformist Ulama, while the Tablighis claim to be practicing the “Dawa” paradigm of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Regarding the organizational structure of TJ, in the academic world, research conclusions have been drawn from different aspects. For example, some scholars believe that TJ embodies one kind of “spiritual hierarchy” (Arsalan, 2016, pp. 96–113), “Faith Bureaucracy” (Dietrich, 2008, pp. 98–125), and some Chinese scholars believe that TJ embodies “loose organizational characteristics” (Ma, 2013), “hidden binary structure” (Wang, 2008) or “pyramid structure” (Ma, 2015). This paper argues that the structure of TJ reflects the hierarchical characteristics of the top and the loose. The group that conducts tour missions in small groups (Jamaat) is the

basis of the Tablighi global hierarchical network. These groups generally have no more than ten members. In addition, there are also groups of two or more couples, who are called “Jamaat of husbands and wives”. The Masjidwar Jama’at network is one of the most critical hierarchical structures of TJ. It is a missionary network established by “masjidwar Jama’at” as a carrier in areas ranging from small to villages and large to countries, the person in charge is called Amir, who is elected by a level-by-level consultation committee, the highest-level consultation committee members are senior elders of the TJ Mission Center in India, Pakistan and other countries. and the next-level Amir are appointed by these senior elders (See Figure 1).

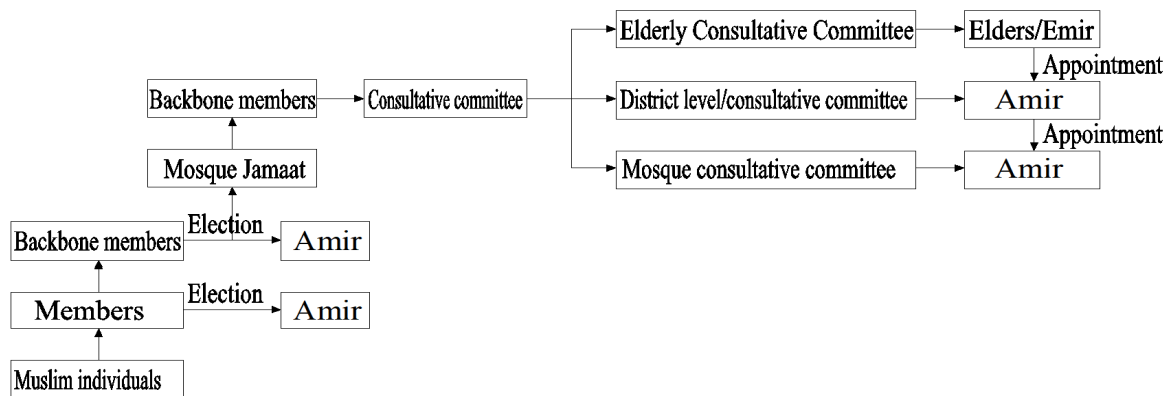


Figure 1. Hierarchical organization chart of TJ

In fact, it is a way to attach Tablighi mission plan to the entity of the mosque, and to complete the hierarchical management of members through a consultative committee. The Consultative Committee is divided into different levels, and its members are also the backbones selected through specific practices. The large-scale missionary gatherings (ijtima) held every year in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries gather the backbone members of TJ from many countries around the world. It is worth emphasizing that the network of mosques, consultative committees, and missionary conferences established by TJ objectified the institutional order of the movement through the reinterpretation of rituals and knowledge at different levels, which embodied and differentiated in daily life. Meaning is integrated at the highest level, allowing different individuals to establish meaning and value through cultural codes shared by specific groups. As the TJ movement has had a certain influence in different countries and regions, more and more people have focused their attention on its texts, discourses and ideal interpretations. The results of the research show that the unique worldview and values embodied in the foundational text of Tablighi played a key role in the development of the entire movement, as Farish A. Noor said: TJ’s foundational text happens to be a worldview, which Privileged the Prophet and the Prophet’s Companions and served as an ideal archetype for Muslims living in the present (Farish, 2012, p. 74). At present, the most widely used basic texts in mission activities are the “Six Principles” and a series of compilations *Kitab Fadhilah*

*Tabligh*, the content mainly covers the honor of the Qur'an, the honor of worship, the honor of Zikr (*dhikr*), the honor of Ramadan and the honor of Tablighi, and there is also a book *the Prophet and Sahab's Story*. This compilation is an instructional study material commissioned by Ilyas son, 2nd Emir Mohammad Yusuf, and compiled by **Zakariyya**, and the texts were translated into the languages of different countries. These texts are translated into different national languages as instruction manuals for mission activities, and remain surprisingly uniform, even the most brief one-page collapsible condensed version of the manual embodies all that Tablighi basic texts are intended to embody.

When we rationally examine the early basic texts of Tablighi, we find that the texts represented by the “Six Principles” are bland, and the rules and ritual requirements for members embodied in their texts are not complicated, at least literally, it is an emphasis on the specific practices of the Islamic faith. The “Six Principles” include: (1) Establishing faith by reciting the “There is no one to be worshipped except Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”; (2) Respectfully praying on time; (3) Gaining religious knowledge by diligently studying and always reciting Allah; (4) Treating fellow Muslims or brothers kindly; (5) Pure intentions; (6) Go out for missions and introspect yourself. On the basis of the six principles, the rules for participants can be summed up as “Four No Talks”, which especially emphasizes staying away from politics, not talking about, not participating in, not interfering in any politics, not talking about Islamic law and sectarian issues, not talking about Disagreement, not talking about what is right or wrong about other people or other groups (Masud, 2000, pp. 21–30) etc., as Noor put it: “Tablighi never reinvented the wheel like they invented Islam...their continued existence needs a space—whether verbal or physical” (Farish, 2012, p. 6).

From the “six principles”, Tablighi's “Dawa” targets are ordinary Muslims, not non-Muslims. In its so-called ordinary Muslims, it mainly refers to those who only perform and repeat Islamic rituals on the surface, they don't have a deeper belief in what they do, and they don't have a proper understanding of the rituals they perform, so the “Six Principles” provide Muslims with what they think is the right pattern of religious behavior, which all follow and the original texts of reliance still haven't left the Qur'an and the Hadith, which is perhaps what Noor said: It's not a “newly created wheel”, but a discourse of independent space”. It is also easy to explain why such a simple rule can be so widely disseminated, in other words, Tablighi created a philosophy of existence belonging to the Tablighi in a secular political environment.

Generally speaking, Tablighi's ideological system is mainly composed of the following three parts:

Firstly, it mainly inherited the idea of Islamic revival and reformism led by Sunni Waliullah (1703–1762), that is, adopting an eclectic reform paradigm, advocating that in the absence of religious laws to follow, in order to overcome the rigidity of Sharia doctrine and advocate the use of reason for “ijtihad” to integrate different Sharia traditions and promote the unity of Muslims, in terms of operation mode, as a supplement to the teachings of Ummah, it adopts the method from Waliullah and his successor Shāh' Abd al-Azīz, as that could directly influencing the general Muslim population, including the writing of fatwas (shariah decrees) in the Urdu dialect. It can also start from the basic unit of society, the family, and implement the

basic idea of comprehensive religious education for Muslims, including women and children, in terms of resolving relations with other religions and politics, it follows the successor of Valiullah—the quiet, grassroots movement and Dawa approach that Shāh ‘Abd al-Azīz has adopted in the past.

Secondly, it inherited most of the action points in the mission plan made by Ashraf‘Ali Thanawi (1863–1943), and the basic proposition for the transfer of religious knowledge to civilians under the guidance of the qualified Ulama, and also these include most of the binding regulations for women’s conduct. The main points of these propaganda and education actions mainly include speaking of the clear truth, worship, paying religious taxes, fasting, visiting the Hajj, seeking knowledge, seeking Muslim unity, establishing an organization, fighting against moral evil, etc. On this basis, by emphasizing the practical significance of Dawa’s work, and making the ultimate rationalization of the value and intellectual connotation of hadith, the “death” is integrated into the realistic scope of social existence, and it is endowed with a special meaning.

Thirdly, it critically absorbs Sufism thought and practice rules. For example, the chanting of “dhikr” (or Zikr), encourages increased night prayers, encourages practice in difficult environments, does not complain about poverty, emphasizes spiritual experience in practice, and opposes non-Islamic elements in customs, especially the worship of the Holy Sepulchre. This is in line with the Deoband system in India, as most of the Deoband clergy are themselves active Sufi Sheikhs, following the Sufi tariqa.

In a nutshell, the Tablighi movement embodies a highly organized and hierarchical system of operation, inheriting the conservative dissemination methods, simplified texts and stylized principles of the original Islamic era, reflecting Islamic ideology and stylized principles, and it reflects the universality of Islamic ideology and the spread of Islamic culture, and the higher the level of hierarchy, the higher the requirements for the behavior of internal members. And its discourse embodies Tablighi’s philosophy of existence in a specific social order. It emphasizes the “Six Creeds” that are the pillars of Islam and yearns for the Muslim community founded by the Prophet and his companions in the past. This discourse is essentially is to place Islam in the real discourse of competition with other religions, divide the human world into two parts, non-Muslims and Muslims, and draw a clear and complete boundary between the two.

Among Muslims and non-Muslims, TJ have been divided into different levels according to the specific standards of faith practice, which constitute the basic dimension of Tablighi discourse, this division places the social order of Muslims and non-Muslims within a single and unified epistemology. In addition, Tablighi advocates that Muslims accept poverty and encourages Muslims to adhere to the practice of faith in difficult circumstances, it refuses to discuss other beliefs, ideologies and epistemologies, it can be seen that they construct an isolated philosophy of existence for their own discourse. Their short-term goal is to try to eliminate all diversity and difference in Muslim society, but in the long run, they take the Muslim community that the Prophet and his companions founded together-Ulama as the ideal type, and try to achieve, to restore the social order of the Ulama community, thereby restoring the lost identity and belonging of Muslims.

### 3. Chinese Soil of Tablighi Transmission

#### 3.1 *Category and Characteristics of Muslim Ethnic Groups in China*

From a historical point of view, China's Muslim community is a unit composed of minority groups who believe in Islam. It is a "custom society" determined by all kinds of Muslim ethnic groups (Zhou, 2001), it has blood, geographical and ethnic characteristics. The social relationship with impersonal characteristics established among Muslim ethnic groups who believe in Islam is called "Muslim society". According to the regional distribution characteristics and differences in Islamic cultural forms, China's Muslim ethnic groups can be roughly divided into three categories, the first category is "Huihui" in the southeastern coast of China and "Huihui" is the name of the Hui in history, Ma'Tong, a well-known Chinese scholar of Islamic studies believes that some of them are descendants of Pu Shougeng who was an official in charge of foreign trade affairs in the sea area along the southeastern coast of China in the late Song Dynasty, and the other part are descendants of a general named Jin `Ji who was stationed in Quanzhou in the late Yuan Dynasty, their ancestors were all Muslims from Persians. In the late Ming Dynasty, Ming Dynasty Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang suppressed Huihui on the southeast coast, and most of the local "Huihui" changed their surnames or moved outside. Years later, the descendants of these Arabs and Persians of only knew Huihui not to eat pork, and other taboos have been completely forgotten" (Ma, 2000, pp. 40–43). It can be seen that the Muslim ethnic culture here has completely disappeared.

The second category is the Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang. In Xinjiang, the six ethnic groups that believe in Islam are Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatar, Kirgiz and Tajik. Most of them have historical, cultural or ethnic origins with Central Asian peoples, they believe in Sunni Islam, and very few follow Shia teachings.

The third category is the Muslim ethnic group distributed in the hinterland of China. In China, the area where they live is mostly called "Si'fang" or "Hui'fang", which is a name for the Muslim settlements that have lived around mosques since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In these settlements, the mosque management committee is responsible for part of the social administrative functions, and is responsible for handling general civil disputes, and presides over religious ceremonies for Muslims during important periods such as child birth, marriage, and death, forming a set of etiquette norms, it is called the "Si'fang system". Over a long period of history, this system, as a form of conservative and relatively closed social structure, has provided a strong guarantee for the cultural heritage of Muslim ethnic groups. In this unique geographical distribution pattern, intra-ethnic/intra-sectarian intermarriage, relatively homogeneous industry structure, and the "Jing'tang education" (Note 1) system generally constitute the basic structure of the traditional Muslim society in the hinterland of China, and this tradition still affects the culture of most Muslim ethnic groups in China today.

In China, there are more than 20,000 "Hui'fangs", of which the northwest region accounts for half, and there are also different numbers of Hui communities/rural towns in the northeast, north, southwest, east, and other places. In the northwest region, there are more than 3,000 "Hui'fangs" in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. In terms of geographical distribution, these "Hui'fang" have their own characteristics, for example, the distribution of Hui

communities in Ningxia presents a “trapezoidal structure” from north to south; the Hui communities in Gansu Province are characterized by “large dispersion” and “large concentration”. “large dispersion” here means that Hui people are distributed all over Gansu Province, and “large concentration” mainly refers to the concentrated distribution of Hui people in Linxia Prefecture and Tianshui Zhangjiachuan County in Gansu; The distribution of Hui people in Qinghai Province shows that “only one side is more”, it is characterized by the fact that there are more “Hui’fangs” in the east of the Yellow River, Huangshui River Valley, Qilian Mountains and the upper reaches of the Tao River in Qinghai Province. The Hui communities in Xinjiang are mainly distributed in Changji, Ili, Urumqi and other regions north of the Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang, and the Hui communities in Shaanxi Province are mainly distributed in urban centers (Shu, 2004, p. 30).

According to the seventh (2020) census data, China has a total Muslim population of 25,900,198, including 11,774,538, Kazakh 1,562,518, Kirgiz 204,402, Uzbek 12,742, Tatar 3,544, Dongxiang 774,947, Baoan 24,434, Sara 165,159, and Hui 11,377,914 (China Statistical Yearbook-2021, Part 2–7). According to the author’s study, the influence of TJ in the first two ethnic groups is almost negligible, so this paper focuses on the influence of TJ in the third ethnic group, including Hui, Dongxiang, Baoan, Salar, etc. Among them, Hui is distributed in 19 provinces of China, but mainly in northwest, north, southwest and northeast China.

### 3.2 From Acceptance to Banned: Three Stages of TJ in China

Under the leadership of its second successor, the TJ movement spread step by step to three continents of the world. Compared with the spread of Tablighi in Southeast Asia and Europe, Tablighi was introduced into China relatively late, it entered China in the early 1980s or earlier and it has roughly gone through three stages, which are the stage of sowing and early development, the stage of growth and development and attracting attention, and the stage of adjustment after being strictly controlled. (See Figure 2)

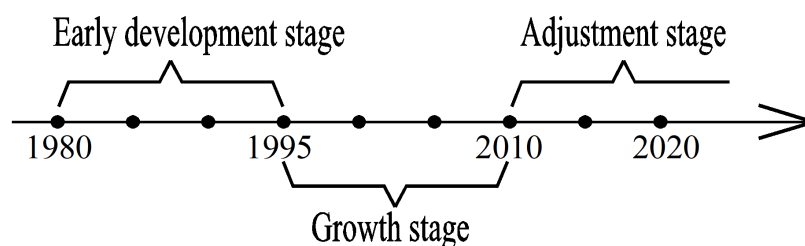


Figure 2. The three stages of TJ in China

### 3.3 Seding and Early Stages: Early 1980s or Earlier

Since the 1920s, the TJ movement has gradually completed its coverage in northern India,

and then began to spread around India, but there is no record of TJ spreading to China before the 1980s. Barbara Daly Metcalf, in “Travelers Tales in the Tablighi Jama’ at” mentions that “in the mid-1980s, a “Dawa” mission team set off from Malegang and carried out a four-month missionary activity in Northwest China” (Metcalf, 2003). According to the general logic of pre-deliberation, theoretical preparation and public preaching required in the process of TJ movement dissemination, the stage stated by Metcalf should be the stage of Tablighs public preaching in China. However, according to my research, the earliest Tablighis entered China may have been in the early 1980s or earlier, and the earliest Tablighis were not from India, but from Pakistan. They first chose to spread the target to the Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang who speak Turkic language, but soon decided to give up spreading among the Turkic-speaking Muslim ethnic groups, and chose the Muslim ethnic group who are Chinese-speaking in North China instead, and then gradually entered the northwest hinterland of China, then entered among Muslims in the Southwest and other provinces. In the mid-1980s, TJ had entered a period of intensive missionary in China, Jamaat from the United States, Britain, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Germany, and the United Arab Emirates had all visited China. An insider said:

From about 1983 to 1984, China’s ethnic and religious policies were relatively loose. A Pakistani Jamaat brought by Maulana Aksamul-Haq came to Beijing. They went to Kashgar, Xinjiang to do TJ work, and there was an internal conflict at that time. When they came back, they saw an English-language newspaper in Hong Kong saying that TJ was responsible for the chaos in Xinjiang at that time. Later, one of them checked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and explained that it was not the case. In order to avoid misunderstandings by the government any more, they never went to Xinjiang to leave Jamaat and even if they passed through Xinjiang, they never went to Xinjiang again.

In 1987, when I was 10 years old, I met Jamaat from the United States in Beijing. After 1993, I started to go out. I have been to Tianjin, Mengcun Hui Autonomous County of Cangzhou City, Hebei, Kunming, Yuxi, Zhengzhou, Shanxi Changzhi, Ningxia Tongxin and other places in Yunnan. We usually live in mosques, but mosques in big cities do not allow it. I accompanied Bangladesh Jamaat to propose for 40 days, first to Jinghai County, Tianjin, and Mengcun Hui Autonomous County of Hebei Cangzhou. I have followed Bangladesh Jamaat, UAE Jamaat, Sri Lanka Jamaat and Germany Jamaat to many places in China, I remember Jamaat from the US only sent one in 1987, but they were just doing TJ work in Beijing. The United Kingdom (center) sends a Jamaat to China every year, and India basically sends a Jamaat to China every year. The most is Jamaat from Pakistan. In the 1990s, 3–4 Jamaats were sent to China from Pakistan every year, and Jamaat from Saudi Arabia also visited 1–2 (Note 2).

Another person familiar with the matter said that in the mid-1980s, two groups of about 150 “Hajj-to-be” from different Chinese provinces who were going to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj stumbled across TJ after passing through Pakistan, and they visited at the TJ Mission Center in Lewind, Lahore, Pakistan, some of them immediately expressed their willingness to engage in Tablighi Jamaat. After completing the Hajj, about 20–25 Chinese Hajj participated in TJ after returning to Pakistan (Note 3). In fact, around 1988, TJ activities



had already appeared in Yunnan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Ningxia and Qinghai, etc. During this period, TJ had completed the first stage of sowing and breeding in China, and produced the first batch of Chinese native missionaries

Due to the frequent activities of missionaries from abroad and the efforts of local missionaries in China, in the early 1990s, TJ established reception points in Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei and Shanxi in China, Xinjiang (Hui inhabited areas), Shaanxi, Shaanxi and Ningxia developed the main force of local evangelism, and then spread to Qinghai, Yunnan, Gansu, Hainan and other provinces (cities/townships), Among them, TJ activities in Tongxin County, Ningxia, Changzhi City, Shanxi Province, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, Xinjiang (Hui community) were more active. A TJ learning site in Ningxia alone attracted about 2,000 Muslims to participate in the activities (Note 4).

In short, in the first ten years of Tablighi entry into China, its propositions have spread to most provinces and regions in China except Tibet and the three prefectures of southern Xinjiang. The people involved in this activity include religious people, high-level intellectuals, State civil servants, businessmen, students and the unemployed.

#### *3.4 Stage of Development: Between the Mid-1990s and Around 2010*

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, in addition to Ningxia, TJ activities also became very active in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Xinjiang and other places. From 1996 to 1997, TJ activities in Changzhi City, Shanxi Province were very active. With the participation of TJ activists, Muslims in Changzhi City voluntarily participated in public community health activities, persuaded marginalized Muslim individuals, and attracted more and more people to join TJ. It is said that they have been affirmed by the local government in persuading deviant individuals and participating in voluntary labor that is conducive to social morality. The effects of TJ in Changzhi, Shanxi have inspired Tablighis in other provinces in China. In addition, a Muslim in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province used his house as a mobile station to provide convenience for Tablighis from other provinces and cities in China.

After 2000, TJ activities in Xinjiang have also become active. It is said that by around 2005, there were TJ reception points in Urumqi, Yili, Turpan, Hami, Altay, Tacheng, Bazhou and other places in Xinjiang. Activities in Heijiashan, Bagang, and Bahuliang in Urumqi are relatively frequent. TJ members in Xinjiang have contacts with well-known TJ members in Ningxia, Shaanxi and other places. Among the members from outside the province who came to participate in the mission in Xinjiang, there are Muslims from other areas in the northwest, as well as Muslims from North China and Southwest China. When the activity was most active, there were about 100 participants at one activity site in Midong District, Urumqi. In 2009, at another activity site, 20 to 30 children were found to be receiving training (Note 5). Apparently, China's native TJ network was fully established during this period.

In the southwest region, TJ members successfully integrated their ideas into local municipal planning and construction, promoted Islamic education and Tablighi's ideas by

participating in charity, environmental protection and relief activities, and even played a positive role in mediating conflicts among Muslims. It is said that the director of the management committee of a large mosque in Yunnan is a “high-level TJ backbone member”. Under his leadership, the Muslim community where he belongs has maintained a state of religious harmony for a long time, and the coordination with the government is also quite excellent, he himself enjoys a high reputation in the community. In particular, the Muslims in the community responded and Participated to the local government’s initiative to “build a tourism town with Muslim characteristics”, achieving good social effects. In order to reflect the role of Muslim cultural characteristics in the development of township tourism, in 2006, this mosque launched a “Temperance Movement” in the local area. They formed a prohibition against alcoholic drinks team of more than 20 people, and raised funds and publicity. From the beginning of preparations to the acceptance of the masses, to the willingness of the masses to cooperate with the movement, the TJ initiative’s propositions of “dedication”, “kindness” and “purification” were implemented into practical actions, and the whole process was praised by the local people.

However, with the advancement of the “Temperance Movement”, some negative effects in the community have also attracted the attention of the local government. For example, during the movement, the Patrol team also banned other non-Muslim-run karaoke halls, Internet cafes, etc. in the community, which squeezed the living space of other non-Muslims in the community, several Yi owners who opened Internet cafes were verbally threatened by the inspection team, it has triggered dissatisfaction among the local Han and other non-Muslim ethnic groups. What is more noteworthy is that after Yunnan, Muslim communities in other provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have also seen “prohibition movements”. At one time, in Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai and other provinces, there were many “no wine restaurants”, and some women working in government agencies also began to wear headscarves. The concept of “halal” stipulated in Islam extends to almost all areas of life, many Muslims have even begun to boycott the use of soaps, condiments and other daily necessities available in the market, believing it is not halal. In this way, the cultural boundary between the Chinese Muslims and the Han has gradually become apparent, and the local government believes that if it goes on like this, will inevitably affect the unity between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In addition, members of the management committee of a mosque in the Muslim community in other provinces spontaneously formed the “Abandoning Evil for Good Society” and began to interfere in the daily behavior of Muslims. The most influential incident is that one association in a county in the northwest, they went to the market to recycle the Alcoholic products being sold and planned to burn them to warned Muslims not to drink anymore by this way. As the proportion of Muslim population in the county is as high as 98%, many government staff are also Muslims. Some people analyze that if this behavior continues, the alcohol products used by the government for daily entertaining guests need to be purchased in other counties and cities. But the incident did not cause significant waves, as it was quickly stopped by the local government.

Besides, some Tablighis did not allow their children to participate in national education,

but chose to send them to Pakistan or Middle East Arab countries for religious education. Some wives complained that their husbands borrowed money to go to Pakistan to do TJ, despite there are not many cases, but they have attracted the attention of local governments in China. Therefore, since 2005, local governments in China have begun to increase their control over TJ. TJ activities in Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu, Shaanxi and Shanxi have been affected by with strict supervision, individual states, counties and districts gradually adopted compulsory measures. By around 2010, TJ activities in various provinces and cities in northwestern China were fully controlled, and TJ in China entered a semi-underground state.

### *3.5 Adjustment Stage After Strict Regulation: From 2010 to Now*

After 2010, with the emergence of the “prohibition movement” in the Muslim-inhabited areas of certain northwestern provinces, voices of different sects in some Muslim communities against TJ also began to appear, and some small articles dedicated to refuting TJ appeared from time to time on the internet. TJ as if being put under the spotlight and began to be scrutinized, especially the cases of people rejecting TJ in Xinjiang and Gansu. One case from Xinjiang have made the local government even more vigilant. A transcript of inquiries provided by Xinjiang law enforcement officers shows that after returning from abroad, individual Tablighis once “encouraged other people”. encouraged some people to fight against the government, because they heard that TJ in Kyrgyzstan made the government compromise by fighting against the government, and the living environment of local Muslims has improved. At least in the areas where Muslims live, there are no pork sellers, and TJ also Gradually permission was granted (Note 6), however, this claim has not been corroborated by local Tablighs.

On August 8, 2013, the Administrative Office of the Turpan region in Xinjiang classified TJ activities as “cults or illegal religious activities with a cult nature”. Following Xinjiang, in 2016, the law enforcement agencies in Ningxia took coercive measures against Tablighis under their jurisdiction from the past supervision and management, the case was later transferred to the judiciary and a lawsuit was filed. It is alleged that this case was initiated by a key member of TJ in Ningxia, who organized more than 100 Muslims to receive TJ training in his own home, of which more than 90 were underage children and 45 were adults. Most of the children are from Ningxia, and there are also children from Qinghai, Shaanxi, Shanxi and Gansu. According to follow-up investigations by law enforcement agencies, religious education for children has challenged China’s existing Education Law and disrupted the existing educational order, and violating China’s Religious Affairs Regulations. Since then, law enforcement agencies in other provinces and cities in the northwest have also begun to take coercive measures against TJ.

All of the above have formed a huge deterrent to Tablighi activities in China. Since 2010, TJ activities in various provinces and cities in China have entered a low ebb adjustment stage or an underground state. For example, many TJ members in the northwestern provinces voluntarily gave up wearing TJ clothes, the number of women masking has plummeted, and the number of members who follow TJ has also decreased. In stark

contrast to the northwest, TJ has gradually formed a microclimate in two Hui communities with a population of less than 10,000 people in Sanya, Hainan, the southern city of China. It is said that the first batch of people engaged in TJ activities in Sanya, Hainan was about 300 people. Since the return of the first batch of 19 Imams who completed TJ missionary activities abroad in 1997, TJ activities in Sanya have developed rapidly. In 2012–2013, the number of participants reached more than 1,000, and around 2016, it reached more than 8,600 (Note 7).

But in general, around 2010, TJ in China entered a comprehensive transformation stage. Although no one in China denies TJ persuasive role to some marginalized individuals and its outstanding performance in social welfare activities, with the increase in people's awareness of TJ, the Muslim community's boycott of TJ took the lead to arouse relevant local government departments. At the same time, the tension between the get away from secularity advocated by TJ and the secularity in China's real society gradually emerged. As a result, the trade-off between the protection of the traditional culture of Chinese Muslim communities and China's "Constitution", "Education Law", "Public Security Administration Punishment Law" and other laws has been put on the agenda. Since China's law enforcement agencies intervened, although some Muslims are still engaged in this activity and go abroad to participate in overseas TJ activities in various ways, the number and frequency have been significantly reduced, and the outflow of internal members is obvious. The attitude is cautious and restrained. Overall, by 2021, China's TJ activities have basically entered a dormant state.

#### **4. From Acceptance to Rejection: the TJ in the Eyes of Others**

Throughout the more than 30 years that TJ has spread in China, the attitude of Chinese Muslims towards TJ has experienced a process from initial acceptance to gradual rejection. Although it cannot represent the response of all Muslim groups, it has influenced TJ a certain extent to development trend in China. Just as in the late 1980s, when Muslims in northwest China first saw Pakistani missionaries in white robes, they showed excitement, respect and unconditional acceptance, a Chinese Tablighis said, "(1987) At that time, the mosques in Linxia City especially welcomed these Pakistani elders, and everyone lined up and rushed to "ZhanJi" (Note 8). Another interviewee said, "In 1993, Pakistani Tablighis came here, and I was an interpreter at the time, and I took them to all the Mosques here...Actually, we all thought they were sent by the Pakistani government, and I was proud of being their translator" (Note 9). Another Pakistani Tablighi man described: "We were doing TJ work in 1996–1997, we gave them hadiths on the first day, and the next day we could see their change, because the second day, many people would appear at the mosque to pray. Also, our Jamaat went to Shandong in the first year, and we went again the next year, when we finished TJ work there and were about to leave, many Muslim women wearing headscarves took the tractor and came to see us off from a long distance (Note 10). It can be seen that the Chinese Muslims' initial response to Tablighis acceptance contains the most simple worship of Islam by the Muslim ethnic groups. It is not so much that TJ initially attracted Chinese Muslim individuals, but Pakistanis who looked like Arabs attracted Chinese Muslims. The fact is that most people have an inherent and irresistible tendency to show compliance and trust in organizations that are

praised, Chinese Muslims are no exception.

However, with the boycott of TJ in China and the interference of local governments, TJ has never become a new element rooted in Chinese culture, and the strongest exclusion comes from Chinese religious professionals, who represent different sects or a certain the interests of Muslims in a particular region, some people believe that there is no clear difference between Deobandi and Wahhabism, a mosque in Xinjiang believes that “TJ is qualitatively the same as Wahhabism, in the same way, their “not talking about sects” on the surface is precisely to downplay the sects, and behind the downplaying of the sects are the four major jurists who do not recognize Islam, and will eventually move towards anarchism. From this reasoning, the spread of TJ in China will definitely cause damage to the existing religious pattern in China, which will be detrimental to the stability of Chinese society (Note 11). During my research in Xinjiang, I also learned that another Imam organized a special person to translate a book brought from Turkey with the title of *The truth about TJ* was distributed among Muslims in Xinjiang, which eventually led to a phenomenon of almost universal boycott of the Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang (Note 12). However, this resistance did not completely disappear the TJ from the Chinese land, and the chain of missionary in other provinces and cities in northwest China was still secretly maintained.

Subsequently, two relatively violent anti-TJ incidents occurred in Gansu Province and Qinghai Province. In Gansu Province, several Tablighis went to a mosque to do TJ, but they were collectively beaten by Muslims who came to worship at a mosque, and were also pulled out beard, someone recorded the incident with a mobile phone and posted it on the Internet. After that, the mosque listed 7 rules and posted them on the walls around the mosque:

- From October 17, 2015, we mosque follows the ancient religious doctrine of Islam, and all learning contents shall not be increased or decreased.
- No new sects shall be introduced.
- All believers belonging to this mosque are not allowed to interact with the Dawa cult organization. If anyone violates the system, others will cut off all relations with him, and cut off water and electricity.
- After discussion, our mosque’s Jemmati decided to invite Ma Youbu, Gahu (the name of the local TJ participant) to come to the mosque within 7 days from October 17, 2015 to bow his head and confess his guilt to everyone, otherwise, this mosque refuses to participate in all religious ceremonies for them and their families at birth and death.
- Please sign the signature of believers who agree to this system. If you disagree, please choose voluntarily.
- From the date of implementation of this system, it is forbidden for anyone to discuss. If he (or she) do not listen to the dissuasion, will bear the consequences.
- From today, the mosque is not allowed to set up girls’ schools, and the existing girls’ schools are forcibly closed.

The voices against TJ in Qinghai Province can be seen in a short article that appeared on the Internet in 2017, which accused TJ of being a “cult” and “an executioner who destroys the sect.” The original text is as follows:

On March 21, 2017, an incident occurred in Huangzhong County, Shangwuzhuang Town and Nabzang Village in Xining City, Qinghai Province, where “Dawa” cult members openly provoked the Imam of the mosque. They spoke out the viciousness of destroying unity speech. They said: (Your Imams should go to teach in Buddhist monasteries because you are not worthy to teach in mosques). This statement aroused strong dissatisfaction among the majority of patriotic and religious Muslim believers, and aroused public anger among Muslims outside the country. They Tablighis were from different places. In the end, they were taken away by the police, let us wait for the processing...! In recent years, the so-called Mission (Tablighi) organization, also known as the “Dawa” group, has emerged. They are the executioners who destroy our sect. Wherever they go, where Jamaat is not united, and the villagers are not in harmony (Specially advise those so-called Imams in Nabzang who support “Dawa” (Note 13).

When we faced Muslim individuals with different occupational backgrounds, different family backgrounds and even different knowledge structures, we found that some of them cared more about the meaning of Tablighi rituals, while others saw the meaning behind its rituals “reference value”, while some people completely break away from religious reference and interpret it from the perspective of social value. Although its content is completely uniform and stylized, it has different effects among different Muslims, with some accepting it, some doubting it, and some harshly criticizing it, but what is certain is that the core values advocated by TJ seem to be more inclined to the religiousization of social life—We can get the answer from the following: “living like a true Muslim”, “walking the path of the prophets”, and how to eat? Which hand do you eat with? What time of worship? Which foot should be used to enter the mosque etc. Although all this is based on the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in Islam, and behind this reference is a tradition that has been followed for thousands of years. But in fact, modern Muslims do not fully agree with the imitation of such details, and are even criticized for paying too much attention to the surface but ignoring the core, but it has a strong support in the traditional value system of Islam.

In China, among the Muslim individuals participating in TJ, there are both high-level intellectuals and deviant behaviors. It is irrational to fully understand the motives and goals originally set by the founder of TJ only from their respective ritual expressions. When we observe the performance of TJ among Chinese Muslims, we are reminded of the duality of interactive rituals mentioned by Goffman in “*The Theory of Drama*”, because some Tablighis costumes, language system and all parts of life quickly become “religious” after receiving short-term training by TJ. For example, men’s “Pakistan clothing”, women’s veils, daily prayers, etiquette of speaking, etiquette of interpersonal communication, etc., all look very “Muslim” and all impressions presented are stereotyped, because when an individual presents himself to others, his performances tend to pander and gravitate toward those values that are formally recognized in society. In fact, all his actions have no such value. Erving Goffman, translated by Feng Gang (2021, p. 29). After a short period of practice, many people immediately moved towards de-religion, and some even began to de-Islamize, trying to find a

way of redemption from Buddhism and Chinese Confucian traditions, such examples appear among high-level Chinese intellectuals (not discussed in this article). Therefore, in the more than 30 years TJ has been in China, although it has obtained the soil for dissemination, it has also exported its core ideas to a small group of Muslims, from the boycotts within the Muslim community, at least it can be seen that TJ has a certain impact on the existing Islamic religious pattern in China, and this issue needs to be studied in depth.

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## Notes

Note 1. *Jingtang Education* is a mosque education model founded by Hu Dengzhou (1522–1597), a Shaanxi Hui scholar, in the late Ming Dynasty in China.

Note 2. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Islamabad, Pakistan, on February 13, 2019.

Note 3. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Islamabad, Pakistan, on July 24, 2019.

Note 4. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Ningxia, China, on August 19, 2020.

Note 5. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Xinjiang, China, on August 2, 2017.

Note 6. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Yili, Xinjiang, China, on August 8, 2017.

Note 7. Anthropological Fieldwork Note, in San'ya Hainan, China, on January 16, 2017.

Note 8. Chinese Muslims believe that touching *the holy relics of Islam* with their hands will bring them good luck, including shaking hands with the Sheikhs of higher rank, which will also bring good luck to them.

Note 9. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Islamabad, Pakistan, on February 13, 2019.

Note 10. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Islamabad, Pakistan on February 13, 2019.

Note 11. Anthropological Fieldwork with the Imam of a mosque in Yili, Xinjiang, China, on July 12, 2017.

Note 12. Anthropological Fieldwork Notes, in Yili, Xinjiang, China, on July 12, 2017.

Note 13. The short essay has been deleted from the network.

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