

A Study on Factors for Religious Faith of Muslim Youth in China

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Abstract. This study investigates the factors influencing the religious faith of Hui Muslim youth in China, focusing on internal and external elements. The study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews done in multiple mosques in Shanghai. Examined include external elements such as social integration, governmental policies, and educational environments, as well as internal factors such as personal beliefs, family influence, and community support. The results show that among young Hui Muslims, self-interest and family support are strongly associated with stronger religious faith. Moreover, the employment of digital media and virtual communities has emerged as a crucial component in fostering religious engagement, offering new avenues for religious education and community building. This study provides insights for policymakers, educators, and religious leaders to better support the religious and cultural needs of Hui Muslim youth in China.

Keywords: Muslim Youth in China; Muslim Regulations in China; Religious Piousness.

1. Introduction

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and cultural heritage of Muslim youth in China, especially among the Hui community. The Hui, being one of the largest Muslim ethnic groups in China faces unique challenges and influences in practicing their religion, and has caught the attention of various scholars. Gladney found that the Chinese government's policy plays a significant role in the self-identity of Muslim Minorities in China [1]. Nevertheless, much prior study has focused on the more general socio-political aspects that affect religious minorities; few empirical studies, on the other hand, specifically look at the religious expressions and experiences of young Hui Muslims. This study closes this gap by examining the internal and external factors influencing their religiosity. Examples of internal reasons include personal convictions, family background, and community support. Examples of external variables are laws and regulations, social integration, and educational environments. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with Hui Muslim youth across different regions in China. Statistical analysis, including descriptive analysis, ANOVA tests, and Chi-Square tests, are utilized to identify significant correlations and patterns. Semi-structured interviews yielded qualitative insights that enhanced our comprehension of how these elements interact and impact the religious life of young Muslims in Hui. To meet the cultural and religious needs of Hui Muslim adolescents in China, politicians, educators, and religious leaders can benefit greatly from this study's thorough understanding of the intricate dynamics at work.

2. Literature Review

The Hui Muslims, one of China's officially recognized ethnic minorities, have a unique history that intertwines their religious and ethnic identities. Gladney highlighted the socio-political challenges faced by Hui Muslims in maintaining their religious faith amid China's broader national policies aimed at assimilation and modernization [2]. Young Hui Muslims' religious convictions may be weakened by the restrictions placed by these regulations on religious rites. Tam's research also showed that religious practices and faith are significantly influenced by government policies on ethnicity and religion. These laws frequently restrict the public display of religious beliefs and the

availability of religious education in an effort to accelerate the assimilation of minorities into the majority Han population [3].

Lipman, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of cultural and community support in maintaining religious faith among Hui Muslims; his research in Northwest China, a province with a high concentration of Hui people, revealed that Hui youngsters in Northwest China maintained a stronger religious identity and faith than in other parts of China because of the region's community-based religious education system and preservation of cultural traditions [4]. Additionally, the educational setting has a big impact on young Hui Muslims' religious beliefs. Mackerras discovered that obstacles to upholding religious faith include the absence of religious instruction in public schools and the marginalization of Islamic teachings in the curriculum [5]. This lack of formal religious education often forces Hui Muslim youth to rely on informal community-based religious schooling.

Individual factors, such as personal beliefs and confidence in religious identity, also play a critical role. Lee and Sim found a positive association between a person's self-confidence in their religious identity and stronger religious faith in a study of young Hui Muslims [6]. Furthermore, according to data from the Pew Research Center, people who report having had profound spiritual experiences are more likely to investigate and adopt religious beliefs that align with their insights; 33% of religious Americans surveyed said they make life decisions based on their spiritual values, compared to 8% of non-religious Americans. This alignment between personal spirituality and religious teachings can lead to stronger religious faith [7].

The relationship between globalization and digital media has drawn more attention in recent years. Hui Muslim youth can deepen their religious beliefs by using digital platforms to connect with worldwide Muslim communities and a wider range of Islamic teachings. This is supported by Opal's research which showed that technology became a significant tool to spread religion as can be seen through COVID-19, where online platforms were vital to the communication of religious communities [8]. Furthermore, research from the Pew Research Center indicates that a large number of Americans use digital tools for their religious practice. For example, 21% of religious Americans use apps to read scripture, 20% of all religious Americans use video platforms to view religious videos, and 30% of religious Americans use the internet for religious research [9]. Artikel contends, however, that students may find it more difficult to set aside specific times for religious activities because of the ongoing connectedness demanded by online courses and digital assignments, which can blur the lines between study and personal time [10].

In summary, the existing literature highlights a complex interplay of socio-political, cultural, educational, and individual factors affecting the religious faith of Hui Muslim youth in China. Support from the family and the community is still crucial, but there are many challenges because of external factors like the political and educational systems. In addition, the advent of digital media offers opportunities as well as challenges for religious engagement. By examining specific factors impacting the religious beliefs of Hui Muslim adolescents in modern China, this study seeks to expand on these findings and provide a deeper knowledge of the dynamics at play as well as the lived experiences of the participants.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Participants

The participants in this questionnaire survey are 135 visitors of three different mosques in Shanghai (Xiaotaoyuan Mosque, Huxi Mosque, and Songjiang Mosque). Xiaotaoyuan Mosque was selected because of its location within the Shanghai metropolitan area; Songjiang Mosque was selected because of its historical significance as Shanghai's oldest mosque, having been built during the Yuan Dynasty; and Huxi Mosque was selected because of its advantageous location between these two mosques. The attendees of the three mosques were surveyed on Saturdays and Sundays. A total of 135

respondents were divided into three age groups: 45 respondents were under 20, 29 respondents were between 20 and 60, and 61 respondents were beyond 60. Each participant answered a set of questions related to their experiences and practices at the mosque to gauge the level of their religious faith. The under-20 age group is followed up with another questionnaire survey, and randomly selected participants were then followed up with an interview to ask more nuanced and personalized questions to understand their motivation behind coming to the mosque.

3.2. Measures

Table 1. Question Design.

1. Preliminary Questions:
1. What is your age? 2. Are you a student?
2. General Questions (Yes/No)
1. Do you enjoy here? 2. Is your stay here more than 2 hours? 3. Did you come here more than twice in 2023? 4. Did you come here voluntarily? 5. Are you clear about the dietary rules of Muslims? 6. Do you know the main festivals of Muslims? 7. Have you heard the Quran? 8. Have you read the Quran? 9. Can you recite more than 5 sentences of the Quran? 10. Do you know the names of the 6 prophets? 11. Did you donate money in 2023? 12. Will you donate money in the future?
3. Under 20 group Questions (Multiple Choice)
1. My religious faith is encouraged by my family members 2. My religious faith is encouraged by the societal recognition of Islam 3. My religious faith is encouraged by my study/work schedule 4. My religious faith is encouraged by political institution’s policy on Islam 5. My religious faith is encouraged by the level of self-interest and curiosity in Islam 6. My religious faith is encouraged by my life, moral, and spiritual values

Table 1 shows the participant's age, the initial questions asked during the questionnaire survey, and whether or not the participant is still enrolled in school. These inquiries are utilized to classify the participant according to their occupation and age group. Section 2 illustrates 12 questions related to the religious faith of a Muslim in the first part of the questionnaire survey. Section 3 illustrates six multiple choice questions in the second part of the questionnaire survey (only followed up for “age < 20” category) focused on Muslim youth, with choices in numbers represented in the following ways: 1: I strongly disagree, 2: I disagree, 3: I slightly disagree, 4: I slightly agree, 5: I agree, 6: I strongly agree. For the six multiple choice questions, 4 is on external factors that affect religious faith (Family, Social Expectations, Work/Study Schedule, Political Policies) and 2 is on internal factors (Self-Interest + Curiosity, Life, Moral, Spiritual Values).

Eight randomly chosen interview subjects participated in the discussion of the eight questions in greater detail, in addition to a self-response that the interviewee was allowed to respond to as they pleased. The average duration of each interview was roughly ten minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Mandarin Chinese to allow the conversation to be more fluent and accurate.

3.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 27.0 was used to analyze the effective data that was gathered to examine the reliability and validity of measures. The data in the motivational regulation strategies scale were analyzed by

Descriptive analysis to show the specific use of motivational regulation strategies. The connections between religious faith performance and motivation factors were analyzed by Chi-Square analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 2 illustrates the results from the questionnaire survey. The highest level of enjoyment and participation is among those over 60, with most questions receiving 100% positive responses. This shows a more internal drive for coming to the mosque. However, despite being the second-largest demographic at the mosque, young people (under 20) typically report the lowest levels of enjoyment, suggesting that there may be an outside reason why they visit the mosque. In many cases, 100% of respondents in each age group indicate that they are aware of the major holidays and dietary regulations. This suggests that all groups have a basic understanding of religious rituals. In addition, a higher percentage of people over 60 in the group have read, heard, or recited the Quran than in the other two age groups. This shows that the older age group has a greater understanding of the more nuanced parts of Islam beyond the basic customs as demonstrated through their understanding of the Quran.

Table 2. Results of the Questionnaire Survey.

	Age < 20(45 people,33%)			Age 20-60 (29 people, 22%)			Age > 60 (61 people, 45%)		
	Xiaotaoyuan Mosque(52 Xiaotaoyuan Street,Shanghai),15 persons	Huxi Mosque (Lane 1328 Changde road, Shanghai),15 persons	Songjiang Mosque (43 Gangpe Xiang, Shanghai),15 persons	Xiaotaoyuan Mosque(52 Xiaotaoyuan Street,Shanghai),9 persons	Huxi Mosque (Lane 1328 Changde road, Shanghai),10 persons	Songjiang Mosque (43 Gangpe Xiang, Shanghai),10 persons	Xiaotaoyuan Mosque(52 Xiaotaoyuan Street,Shanghai),21 persons	Huxi Mosque (Lane 1328 Changde road, Shanghai), 20 persons	Songjiang Mosque (43 Gangpe Xiang, Shanghai),20 persons
Do you enjoy here(Y/N)?	5 Ys(33%)	3 Ys(20%)	7 Ys(47%)	4 Ys(44%)	5 Ys(50%)	7 Ys(70%)	18 Ys(86%)	19 Ys(95%)	20 Ys(100%)
Is your stay more than 2 hours(Y/N)?	7 Ys(47%)	5 Ys(33%)	9 Ys(60%)	2 Ys(22%)	3 Ys(30%)	5 Ys(50%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)
Did you come here more than twice in 2023 (Y/N)?	5 Ys(33%)	5 Ys(33%)	9 Ys(60%)	5 Ys(56%)	7 Ys(70%)	9 Ys(90%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)
Did you come here voluntarily (Y/N)?	10 Ys(67%)	8 Ys(53%)	12 Ys(80%)	1 Ys(11%)	2 Ys(20%)	4 Ys(40%)	9 Ys(43%)	6 Ys(30%)	8 Ys(40%)

Are you clear about the Dietary rules of Muslim(Y/N)?	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	9 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)
Do you know the main festivals of Muslim(Y/N)?	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	9 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)
Have you heard the Quran(Y/N)?	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	15 Ys(100%)	9 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)
Have you read the Quran(Y/N)?	2 Ys(13%)	0 Ys(0%)	2 Ys(13%)	3 Ys(33%)	3 Ys(30%)	2 Ys(20%)	15 Ys(71%)	16 Ys(80%)	14 Ys(70%)
Can you recite more than 5 sentences of Quran(Y/N)	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	1 Ys(7%)	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	5 Ys(24%)	3 Ys(15%)	6 Ys(30%)
Do you know the name of 6 Prophets(Y/N)?	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	1 Ys(7%)	2 Ys(22%)	1 Ys(10%)	0 Ys(0%)	5 Ys(24%)	6 Ys(30%)	6 Ys(30%)
did you donate money in 2023(Y/N)	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	0 Ys(0%)	6 Ys(67%)	6 Ys(60%)	5 Ys(50%)	15 Ys(71%)	16 Ys(80%)	20 Ys(100%)
Will you donate money in future(Y/N)?	10 Ys(67%)	10 Ys(67%)	12 Ys(80%)	9 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	10 Ys(100%)	21 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)	20 Ys(100%)

When comparing the three distinct age groups, a One-way ANOVA test was used and the P-value is 8.792e-8, yielding a statistically significant result under $\alpha = 0.05$ and demonstrating that the average religious faith score—that is, the total number of yes responses in each category for an individual—varies throughout the three age groups.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistical Results of the Use of Motivational Factors.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Family	1.000	6.000	3.04	3.15
Moral	1.000	6.000	3.49	3.32
Social	1.000	6.000	2.24	2.27
Work/Life	1.000	6.000	3.36	2.70
Self Interest	1.000	6.000	3.31	3.06
Political	1.000	6.000	3.22	2.97

According to the results shown in Table 3, the average value of the seven motivational regulation strategies from high to low is Moral (M=3.49), Work/Life (M=3.36), Self Interest (M=3.31), Political (M=3.22), Family (M=3.04) and Social (M=2.24).

4.1. English Performance and Motivational Regulation Strategies

Religious faith in this research is gauged with 12 questions related to the person's religious experience and practices. Each person's score is determined by adding up the "Yes" responses to each question, and it is then divided into three categories: "Yes" answers fall into three categories: Low Level (1-4), Medium Level (5-8), and High Level (9-12). The questions pertaining to each category were then processed by Gen Variable, which produced a variant. To examine the variations in tactics among English performance to uncover some rules, the level of religious faith was set in x and each motivation factor in y for the Chi-Square analysis.

Table 4. Chi-Square Analysis between Religious Faith Level and Motivation Factors.

	p		p	
Family	0.037	Moral	0.450	Family
Social	0.505	Work/Life	0.399	Social
Self-Interest	0.028	Political	0.312	Self-Interest

The above Table 4 shows the significant difference in the relationship between the seven motivation factors and Religious Faith Level from high to low is Self-Interest (p=.028), Family (p=.037), Political (p=.312), Work/Life(p=.399), Moral (p=.450) and Social(p=.505). Only the enhancement of self-interest and family have a significant difference in English performance when compared with the standard of significant difference (p<0.05). This indicates that, among other things, those who are close to the youth—that is, themselves and their family—have a higher capacity to influence their religious faith.

The historical context of Chinese policies on religious education explains the largest disparity between Self-Interest and Religious Faith levels. First of all, Chinese nationals under the age of eighteen are not allowed to study in mosques. Since most young people (those under 18) do not have access to outside educational institutions like mosques, it is necessary for the youth to have a strong interest in Islam in order to be motivated to learn more about the practice. As a result, self-interest becomes a deciding factor when it comes to religious faith.

Family has the second most significant difference with Religious Faith Level, and the reason for this is that family is very important in promoting religious belief at an early age, which has a significant impact on the formation of religious belief later in life. The strong Islamic culture in the family and community of Hui adolescents growing up in Gansu and other northwest regions of China tends to make them more devout [4].

4.2. English Performance and Motivational Regulation Strategies

In this section, the results were used in quantitative analysis and topic-based analysis to summarize whether there are extra factors apart from the six motivation factors. Numerous respondents

mentioned that they were able to learn about Islam and strengthen their religious beliefs with the aid of internet forums. The transcripts listed below have been translated from Chinese to English..

Transcript 1. Response to Digital Motivation Factors

Interviewer: What other factors helped you develop your religious faith?

Student A: I developed my religious faith a lot through online forums. I often go on to Zhihu or Baidu Tieba to ask questions on Islam, and I received many responses from those people from the forum, which is very helpful considering how little resources I have on Islam education in my life. This definitely boosted my understanding of Islam which in turn elevated my religious faith.

Student B: I like to watch videos about Islam on the Internet like Bilibili(A video streaming website in China). These videos are more fun than books. They demonstrate Islam more vividly and helped me to develop my interest in Islam greatly.

Student C: The Online community helped me a lot. Although coming from a Hui family, my parents are much assimilated to the Han Chinese and have little knowledge regarding Islam. Additionally, I know a few Hui people in real life, but I can't find a community of Hui people in real life. Thanks to the internet, though, I was able to connect with Hui people from different states of China through Tieba and other online forums. I feel like I finally have a community where I belong, and that motivated my learning of my religious faith.

Students are inspired to grow in their religious faith by the comments made by students A, B, and C in the transcript 1 internet forum and community. An online community and forum can assist young Hui people with their questions, present Islam in a more engaging way, and make them feel like they belong. These serve as inspiration for their religious beliefs.

5. Conclusion

This research highlights the complex interplay of factors influencing the religious faith of Hui

Muslim youth in China. It is clear from a thorough examination of internal and external variables that self-interest and family support are crucial for the development of religious religion. Family plays a major role in fostering religious identity from an early age, while self-interest plays a role in emphasizing the necessity of individual participation and curiosity in religious rituals.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the incorporation of digital media and online networks has a significant role in strengthening religious faith among young Hui Muslims. For people who don't have access to official religious instruction or community support in their local surroundings, these platforms facilitate access to a variety of religious teachings and promote a feeling of belonging.

The findings of this study suggest that a multifaceted approach is necessary to support the religious and cultural needs of Hui Muslim youth. To ensure that laws regarding religious education do not impede the formation of a person's religious identity, policymakers ought to take these consequences into account. Religious leaders and educators should make use of digital media to offer interesting and easily accessible religious content.

In conclusion, this study broadens our understanding of the factors influencing religious belief among young Hui Muslims in China and offers useful data to a variety of stakeholders interested in the religious and cultural growth of this population. In a society where social structures are changing quickly, religious faith can be nurtured and sustained through the combination of traditional support networks and contemporary digital technologies.

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