

# Communicating with Muslims: The Hui in China

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## I. INTRODUCTION

“The people (of the Mohammedans) have thick beards, the hair of which is entangled like sheep’s wool and of different colors, black or yellow in different shades. Their faces are almost entirely covered by hair—only the nose and eyes can be seen.” Wu Ki Suen, envoy of the Kiu Emperor to Genghis Khan in 1220 A.D., refers to the Hui as such (Broomhall 1966:171). Now, the Hui are the largest Muslim group in China, assimilated so deeply in the Chinese society, it is hard to imagine they were once regarded as outcasts.

This paper focuses on the methodology of how to deliver the Christian message to the Hui in China. In my study of communication in the Islamic context, I gained the impression that the messengers or communicators themselves are more important for effective ministry than the use of sophisticated methods (Smith 1992: 115; Kim 2017: 21).<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, this paper is to show that the appropriate methods for mission among the Hui consists of understanding the Hui’s culture and people and meeting their felt needs in order to open the lines of communication.

## II. THE HUI IN CHINA

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<sup>1</sup> Smith insists that “effectiveness is a matter of applying Christ’s teaching in your life...through the individual that God’s truth can be perceived.” (Smith 1992: 115) Charles H. Kraft claims that “Our credibility, trustworthiness, and other personal characteristics in relation to our receptors are crucial to the messages we send” (Kraft 1991:43). Also, see Enoch Jinsik Kim in his book, *Mission Strategy in the City: Cultivation of Inter-ethnic Common Grounds*, claiming that who it is delivering the message—in other words, the trustworthiness of the communicator—is crucial for effective communication in Asian context.

Millions of Muslims have been living in China, yet not many people are aware of their presence. Even Han Chinese, which are a major group, have little knowledge of their Muslim neighbors (Dillon 1996:1). It is true that there are not many historical records of Chinese Muslims (De Angelis 1997:151).<sup>2</sup> In Western colonial times, there are records of these Muslims for religious reasons, but they are subjective from the Western perspective. (Kwok 2007:32).<sup>3</sup>

Who are the Hui or Hui Muslims? First of all, the word Hui is an abbreviation for the term *Huihui*, the name of a racial group or to simply represent a religious Muslim. It is not always clear which meaning is intended from the source (Dillon 1996:5).<sup>4</sup> The Hui has been known as *fanke* or barbarian guests (Tang-Song Dynasty), *semu* or second caste having different eye color (Yuan Dynasty), *Huihui* (Ming-Qing Dynasty), “familiar strangers” (Lipman 1997:214), “Chinese speaking Muslims,” “Chinese Muslims” and “Sino-Muslims” (Lipman 1997:xxiv). Looking at the names given to them throughout the periods, it is clear to see that the image painted of them was not particularly positive.

Broomhall indicates that the meaning of the Chinese character *Hui* (回) implies, “to come or go back to the starting point; to return.” Therefore, they were known as “returners.” The reduplicated words, *Hui Hui* will then mean “To Return and to Submit.” The Muslims in China looked to the Qur'an (Sura 2:156), “Surely we are Allah’s, and to Him we shall return.” Thus, the exact meaning of *Huijiao* (回教) is, Islam is the Religion of Allah, to whom we will return” (Kwok 2007:65).

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<sup>2</sup> One of the reasons of this neglect is that the Muslims are largely closed to the outsiders after founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The Chinese government has not gathered statistics on religious groups. But according to the 1990 census, the Hui population was 8,602,978.

<sup>3</sup> The following are scholars who published books and articles related to the Muslim in China: Marshall Broomhall (1910), Dru C. Gladney (1991, 1998), Raphael Israeli (1994, 2002), Jonathan N. Lipman (1997), Michael Dillon (1996, 1999), David Atwill (2005), Maris Boyd Gillette (2000), Barbara Pillsbury (1981), Sachiko Murata (2000), Donald Daniel Leslie (2006), Zvi Ben-DorBenite (2005), and James D. Frankel (2011) (Rong Gui 2016:9).

According to Mansu Yang, there is a distinct shortage of books on the Hui by Chinese scholars which can be attributed to several factors, including the social disorder during the nineteenth century that led to the destruction of numerous historical accountings and relics, and the fact that the majority of the Hui arriving in China were immigrants and were most likely unable to record their history in the language (Mansu Yang 1994:184-185).

<sup>4</sup> There are ten Muslim nationalities: Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, Tadjik, Salars, Bao’an, Dongxiang (Dillon 1996:4-5).

Islam in China was also called the “Mohammedan religion,” “Hui Hui Kiao,” “Sect of the Hui Hui,” “Ts’ing Chen Kiao,” “The Pure and True Religion,” “Siao Kiao,” and “The Small Sect (in contrast to Confucianism, The Great Religion)” (Broomhall 1966:167).

## **1. History**

The Hui people are the descendants of Arab traders who came to China during the 7<sup>th</sup> century in the Tang dynasty (618-907). Descendants from Arab, Persian, Central Sian merchants, militia and officials first settled along China’s south-east coast from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then larger migrations to the north from Central Asia under the Mongol Dynasty in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were the most acculturated to the Chinese culture and society among other Muslim people groups who moved to China, using the Chinese language and intermarrying with the Chinese, as well as scattering throughout all provinces of the country (Broomhall 1966:125; Dillon 1996:5; Israeli 2002:60; Gladney 2003:454; Hattaway 2002:219).

In the Tang Dynasty (唐朝 618-907), Song Dynasty (宋朝 960-1279), Yuan Dynasty (元朝 1279-1368), and Ming Dynasty (明朝 1368-644), Islam enjoyed its golden age. During these four dynasties, the Islamic faith eventually founded in China was quite different from its homeland (Kwok 2007:62-63). They were granted religious freedom and served in high positions in the government in Ming dynasty. Zheng He (鄭和; 137-1433 or 1435), known as San Pao Tsai Chien, the Hui eunuch visited many Asian and African countries for twenty-eight years. He is known to visit Mecca with other Muslims (De Angelis 1997:154; Kwok 2007:119).

However, during the Qing Dynasty (清朝 1644-1911), described as the dark age of Islam in China, Islam declined significantly because of the Qing’s hostile policies toward the Muslims. Furthermore, they were accused as violent, rebellious people by the government and its neighbor, the Han Chinese. Differences in allegiances between the Hui led to three revolts (Yunnan known as Panthay Rebellion 1855-1873, Shaanxi also called Northwest Hui Rebellion 1862-1878, Hezhou 1895-1896) during the Qing dynasty, against not only the Qing government and Han Chinese, but other Muslims as well. This led to a total of approximately

twelve million Muslims killed in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century (Broomhall 1966:123-163; Yang 1957:3; Kwok 2007:62-63).<sup>5</sup>

Although the Hui were persecuted by the Qing government, during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945) the Hui formed armies to join in the war against Japan and expressed their loyalty for China (Kwok 2007:114).

After PRC (People's Republic of China) was established in 1949, the Chinese party allowed the minorities freedom to preserve their cultures, and religion. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), some of the Hui joined the Red Guards to follow the policy of the government. They even destroyed mosques and religious books for their sake, sparking outrage among the other Hui. Once again, the Hui were pitted against other Hui (Kwok 2007:115-116). It can be seen that through the history of China, the relationship between the Hui and others were rocky, helping each other at various points in time and fighting in the next. The Hui is evidently the most threatened in terms of "self-preservation and Islamic identity" (Gladney 2003:452).

## **2. Politics**

Chinese administrations pressured the Hui to conform to the norms of the Chinese tradition and to act more like the other Sinitic-speaking people. However, the Communist party saw an opportunity in the situation to seek favor among the nearby Hui with offers of recognition as a separate minority nationality that could result in local autonomy. After the establishment of the Chinese Communist government, a variety of Hui nationality regions began to take shape. The largest was the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in 1958 (Moser 1985:81-82).

## **3. Economics**

The government's encouragement of economic development and market-oriented enterprise among the Hui has an important impact on Han-Hui relations. Active Hui participation in trade and food businesses has led to faster economic development than their Han neighbors. Furthermore, recent economic prosperity among rural Hui as a result of favorable government policy and Hui entrepreneurial abilities has led to increased support for

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<sup>5</sup> "Up to the time when the Manchus conquered China, nearly three hundred years ago... there is no record of any Mohammedan rebellion, and everything points to the Moslem having enjoyed equal liberty with their Chinese fellow-subjects" (Broomhall 1966:163).

religious affairs (Gladney 1991:155). The Hui people are dispersed almost everywhere in China for business. The Chinese government is interested in promoting closer ties with Muslim countries to foster economic development. Here is an example:

Ningxia, the home of Chinese Muslims, expects loans from Arab countries to help develop foodstuffs and light industrial goods for the Muslim world. The government has sponsored several economic and “Muslim Friendship” delegations to the Middle East to correspond with the Hajj (Gladney 1991:165).

These exchanges of delegations with the other Muslims and visits by them to Hui villages have had a profound impact on Hui ethno-religious self-understanding. This has led the Hui to gain an international perspective on their faith and has furthered Islamic revival (Gladney 1991:168).

#### **4. Culture**

Culture includes everything: people’s worldview<sup>6</sup>, belief system, architecture and so on. It is not too much to say that understanding of culture is crucial for cross-cultural communication. However, due to the circumstances of the Hui’s unique history, I will attempt to explain their culture in terms of their assimilation, difference, and other traits within the Han Chinese culture.

##### **1) Assimilation**

The Hui have been trying to adapt to Chinese culture for survival, but they have kept their own unique traits. When the Hui first arrived in China during the 7th century, they remained as foreigners. As time went by, they have been acculturated “through adoption of Chinese surnames, clothing, food habits, and marriages” the native Hans (Pillsbury 1981:108-109; Israeli 2002:60-62).

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<sup>6</sup> According to Michael Kearney, “The world view of a people is their way of looking at reality. It consists of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent, though not necessarily accurate, way of thinking about the world” (Kearney 1984:41). Also, see James W. Sire’s book, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. He explains the worldview in eight propositions: (1) “What is prime reality?” (2) “What is the nature of external reality?” (3) “What is a human being?” (4) “What happens to a person at death?” (5) “Why is it possible to know anything at all?” (6) “How do we know what is right and wrong?” (7) “What is the meaning of human history?” (8) “What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?” He continually compares different worldview systems using these propositions. Finally, he explores Islamic Theism. (Sire 2009:20, 22-23, 244-277).

In the face of ordinary acculturative pressures faced by any strangers—to learn the language, eat the food, wear the clothes, become normal and familiar—they complied and resisted as their mixed culture demanded... Their story after the 1930s must await another study, but we can say with confidence that they have remained different from their non-Muslim neighbors, some only in possessing memories of Otherness, others more completely, while working to make a place for themselves in China, the only home they have ever known (Lipman 1997:225-226).

For one, the Hui speak Chinese (Mandarin) which is very different from other Muslim groups. They only use Arabic greetings and Islamic religious terms in the Mosque. (Moser 1985:80-81; Pillsbury 1981:110-111), and they altered Muslim names into Chinese names. For example, Muhammad, Mustafa, Murad, and Masoud were changed to Mo, Mai, Mu as surnames.

They accepted Chinese chopsticks and cooking utensils, and were also influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism in several ways. For instance, they called the mosques “shih” which is the Buddhist word for temple. The mosques were built in pure Chinese-temple style with no minaret tower attached to the mosques on the outside. Furthermore, incense is used on Friday and other occasions as well.

The Hui also intermarried with the Han for centuries, but could not practice “Confucian rituals and obligations” such as filial piety and ancestor cult (De Angelis 1997:156; Kwok 2007:77-83).

However, a generalization of the Hui into assimilation category is not exact. Some Hui stick to old traditional Islamic faith, while others willingly adopt majority culture. According to Bourhis, there are four stages of acculturation, called as “the Interactive Acculturation Model”: integration (comfortable both cultures), segregation (stick to ethnicity), assimilation (“strong cultural identity but weak ethnic identity”), exclusion or individualism (“neither ethnic nor cultural identities”) (Bourhis et al. 380; Kim 2017, 98-99).

It is significant to recognize “how the process of changing ethnic identity is different.” The subcultural theory<sup>7</sup> can be helpful to understand this trend (Kim 2017, 99). I once met

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<sup>7</sup> It is “a more integrative approach to defining city dwellers” and “sees a city as a mosaic of vibrant subcultural groups” (Kim 2017:101). If you are interested in different theories of formation of the cultural identity, see Enoch Jinsik Kim’s book, *Mission Strategy in the City*, especially p.84-109.

one of Hui students in X City, saying that she loved to eat pork. I asked her, “Is it okay for you to eat pork? She just simply said, “Why not?”

The assimilation of the Hui to Han Chinese culture deviates from previous arguments that stated Islam as incompatible with the non-Islamic culture and values (Gladney 2003:452; see Dillon 1997:2-8).<sup>8</sup> I also claim that the Hui followed the contextualization method to survive or adapt to the majority culture, at the time being the Han Chinese. It is no wonder that the Chinese government gives preference to the Hui unlike the Uyghur people in Xinjian province, who are being persecuted by government due to terror plots and independent movement.<sup>9</sup>

## **2) Differentiation**

Not only have the Hui assimilated of the majority culture, but they also retain its own unique difference compared to the Han culture. The first main difference is the religious faith, namely Islam.

### **(1) Religious Faith: Identity of the Hui**

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) the Hui’s connection with the outside world diminished as they began adopting Chinese culture and values. Yet the Hui tried to keep its identity as a religious minority rather than be one with the Han Chinese (Israeli 2002:60-62).

According to Dillon, the Chinese language played a vital role in implanting Islamic teaching to the Hui. Through the translation of the Arabic language into Chinese they could keep Islam alive (Dillon 1996:47).

Sufism (Islamic mysticism) began to impact the Hui in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which assisted Muslim rebellions against Ming and Qing imperial rule (Gladney 2003:454) and further strengthened the Hui’s Islamic identity, in that the Hui are Sunni belonging to Hanafi (Dillon 1999:182; Gui Rong 2016:11).

Though the Hui sacrificed much in their assimilation with the Han Chinese culture, they did not give up their religious beliefs, such as following Islamic dietary laws and donning certain garments (adult males wearing white caps and females putting on “headscarves or

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<sup>8</sup> In terms of integration and assimilation, the Uyghur are the least integrated into Chinese society. For instance, there have been many revolts against Chinese government, i.e. the 1997 bombings (Gladney 2003:454).

<sup>9</sup> In August 2018, a UN committee claimed that up to one million Uyghur Muslims were detained for reeducation programs. Roland Hughes, *China Uighurs: All you need to know on Muslim ‘crackdown,’* BBC News, Nov.8, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-45474279> (accessed Jan. 29, 2020).

veils, as is the case in most Islamic cultures”). They also kept away from drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, and prostitution (Moser 1985:80-81; De Angelis 1997:157).

They normally get up in the early morning so as to perform the morning prayers, and go to bed right after their evening prayer. Even though the Hui do not know the Qur’an too well, they like to obey and worship Allah in sincerity. During the Ramadan, they keep fasting for one month and on the final day, they gather together in the Mosque.

While other groups, such as the Chinese Jews and the *Kitan*, disappeared or were completely assimilated in China from history, the Hui survived as a group of people through 1,200 years of history in China. The Hui refused to marry their own women to outsiders, but they were willing to accept a woman from Han Chinese, thus ensuring ethnic consistency (Gladney 1991:256).

## **(2) Qing Zhen: Expression of Hui Identity**

If people are to understand the Hui’s Muslim identity in China, they must understand the concept of *Qing Zhen* (清真 pure and true).

But our Pure and True Faith, the Correct Religion, arose and gradually reached this land from the Sui and T’ang dynasties onward. The statement of the recognition of the Lord (derived) from Adam was not yet lost. Moreover they obtained the most Holy Mohammed’s very detailed account of the plain commands of the True Lord... Thus you will almost get hold of the correct Doctrine of Purity and Truth (Broomhall 1966:304-305).

During my involvement in the Hui ministry in China, I attended a team meeting. The leader of my team suggested that I change all cups and utensils in my house for new ones because the Hui would not drink or eat anything if they knew that the dishes and cups were not religiously clean. (I wasn’t Hui, therefore I didn’t follow their dietary laws.)

Wherever the Hui traveled, this concept of *Qing Zhen* has followed. The concept reveals two aspects of Islam in China central to the Hui community’s interests and self-understanding: purity (*qing*) in the sense of ritual cleanliness and moral conduct, and truth (*zhen*) in the sense of authenticity and legitimacy. This wider meaning of *Qing Zhen* goes beyond the Arabic term *halal*—as *Qing Zhen* is sometimes translated as—for it involves much more than food ritually prepared according to Islamic dietary prescription (Gladney 1991:13).

## **(3) Liminality**

Liminality is the sense of being in-between, of living in a “hyphenated space.” While liminality may sometimes be psychologically stressful and limiting, it can also be used to make connections across borders. (Ybarrola 2012:84-85). In this sense, the Hui has liminality as a migrant people group or diaspora. As stated:

[The Huihui *minzu*] is not one of those native peoples that has always lived on the ancient soil of China (like the Han, Miao, or Qiang), nor one of those purely immigrant groups that came to China from abroad (like the Koreans or Russians), nor one of the peoples of a border region who have long lived in contact (like the Kazaks or the Dai). Rather, it relied upon the tremendous unifying power of Islamic culture, which concentrates Muslims of different countries and different languages into a single entity, causing a *minzu* to form from a blend of foreign elements and partially domestic inhabitants, creating a new species. On the vast, broad land of China it planted roots, sprouted, bloomed, and produced fruit, becoming an important component of the indivisible, great *minzu* family of China. (Lin and He 1992:1; quoted in Lipman 1997:212 )

From the text, it is shown that the Hui have been identified as a Chinese minority by the Han people; they are no longer foreigners, but one of the nationalities of China. At the same time, they have been trying to keep the identity of Islam by adopting many practices of Islam, such as believing in Allah, keeping the *Qing Zhen* dietary rule, adopting endogamy, and others. Through these efforts, they differentiate themselves from the Han Chinese. In the Christian history, Christians also have taken similar principles: Indigenizing Principle and Pilgrim Principle (Walls 1996:7-9).

### **III. CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION**

In the mission of reaching out to people groups, with the diverse array of their own unique worldviews and cultures, Christians rely on communication to build connections. Delivering the message in the right manner with the right context lays the foundation for effective communication. Effective communication therefore underlies successful relationships. The current situation requires not only cross-cultural Christian workers, but also people who work in the secular world to know how to communicate effectively.

Through communication, communicators can gain an idea of who they are from the way others define them. Engel writes that “communication is the process whereby audience understanding is created when a message is sent by a communicator through appropriate

media (channels)” (Engel 1989:17-18). Therefore, it is important to understand the theoretical elements of communication.

An understanding of how communication works is essential when Christian communicators go out to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19 NIV) by initiating relationships with peoples of differing cultural backgrounds. The missiological question is “How does one learn to interact with people in culturally appropriate ways that will earn a hearing for the gospel?” Communication theorists have developed a series of models based on three fundamental components in the process: the sender, the message, and the receptor (Van Engen, Whiteman, and Woodberry 2008:68-69).

## **1. Five Key Elements in Communication**

There are five key elements to understand in communicating with others. First, the communicator is a person (or a group) with a message to be sent to others with an intended effect or result (Engel 1989:18). Engel insists that a Christian communicator should be “obedient for world mission with credibility, humility and knowledge for the word of truth so that the whole gospel is communicated to the people with messages designed to attain expected consequences” (Engel 1989:33). The role of the communicator is absolutely crucial.

The task of a Christian communicator is to attempt to understand the message intended by the Holy Spirit and then to explain that message “in a way that is meaningful and persuasive to respondents in the context of their culture” (Hesselgrave 1991:109). Kraft suggests five practical steps: (1) “try to understand our receptors,” (2) “empathize with our receptors,” (3) “identify with our receptors” which “put us with that person within their frame of reference,” (4) partake in the life of our receptor, (5) and do “self-disclosure” (Kraft 1991:151-152).

Second, the message is the content which is transmitted in the form of various signals such as the spoken word and gestures (Engel 1989:18). People communicate information. It may be their comprehension, knowledge or ideas. People have cultural backgrounds, which are unique personal qualities and experience. Since meaning is so intimately related to context, the contexts of messages must be considered (Hesselgrave 1991:53).

Not only is the Bible wrapped in culture, but the worldview of that original context also influences the way the text interacts with all subsequent contexts. People see what God has said from a perspective influenced by the worldview in which it was initially proclaimed and their own cultural perspective (Shaw and Engen 2003:46-47).

Third, the medium is the channel used, such as face-to-face interaction or mass media—which have more than one person in the audience (Engel 1989:18). Communications use various channels for the messages that are conveyed from sources to respondents. Christian communicators must avoid the idea that “the gospel message as decoded by respondents is the same irrespective of how it is conveyed to the world” (Hesselgrave 1991:48-50).

Fourth, the audience or receptor is the person or group who is the target of the message (Engel 1989:18). People have filters, used to select certain messages, which are composed of worldview, experience, beliefs and attitudes, and personality. As such, there often is a difference between what the communicator intends to say and what the receptor actually understands (Engel 1989:43).

Finally, feedback is the signals used by the receptor to indicate their response to the communicator (Engel 1989:18). Effective Christian communicators learn to preach dialogically in the sense that “they anticipate audience questions and reaction; are alert to feedback in the forms of attention, restlessness, and adjust their sermonic communication accordingly” (Hesselgrave 1991:52). Christian communicators should check feedback of local people when they have completed their mission projects; otherwise, they will be unaware of people’s real situation and needs.

## **2. Communication Models**

There are a variety of communication models. First, there is the linear model. Here, the sender encodes and the receiver decodes, making it one-way communication (Adler and Rodman 2006:12-13). This is the method used by earlier Christian mission for the Muslims (Huffard 1985:37).

Second, there is a transaction model. This is a two-way exchange in which the communicator and recipient send and receive messages at the same time. This model shows that “communication isn’t something we do to others; rather, it is something we do with them” (Adler and Rodman 2006:14-15).

Finally, there is an inference model. This focuses its attention on the importance of context by emphasizing and developing the notion of a “cognitive environment.” This model considers “how an audience perceives an author’s intent” (Shaw and Engen 2003:110). Kraft contends that the interpretation of the receptor is crucial and final (Kraft 1991:99).

In contrast to early code models, the forms of communication are not the only determinants of meaning. Rather, the audience’s contexts, or sets of assumptions and life experiences, influence the interpretation of the message and play as important a role as the text. This model has become significant in Bible translation where the focus is on “presenting a message that assists the receptor’s interpreting, or inferring, the intended meaning of the author” (Van Engen, Whiteman, and Woodberry 2008:70; Kraft 1991:26-27).

Among the different models of communications, I prefer to choose the inference model, which is a more receptor-oriented method in communication.

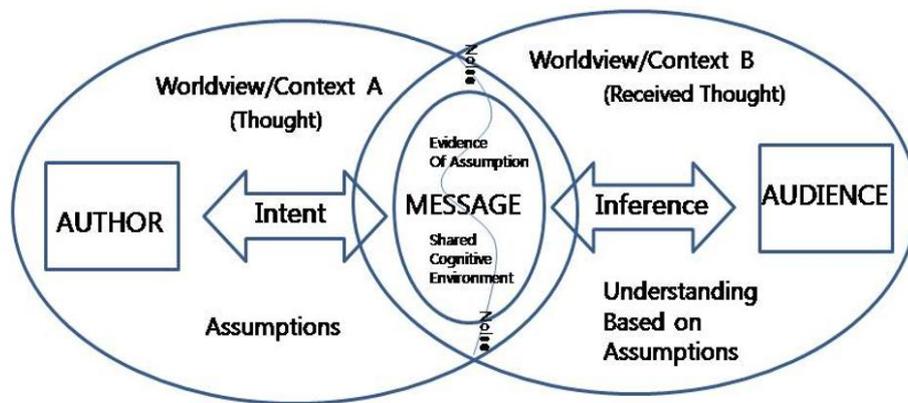


FIGURE 1

INFERENCE COMMUNICATION MODEL<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Communication Principles

Following the theoretical aspects of communication, I will now focus on the more practical principles of communication that are relevant to this discussion. It is not possible to examine all the principles, and so I will emphasize on areas that Christian communicators should know of.

#### 1) Communication is Receptor Oriented.

The receptor is most important in communication. Kraft explains that “communication needs to be seen as a process in which the meanings ultimately perceived by the receptors are negotiated” (Kraft 1999:55). He insists that, “Jesus’ approach was ‘receptor-oriented and

<sup>10</sup> Roberta King, *Communication Models*. Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007.

personal,' a model that should be our goal as we attempt to communicate in Christian ministry." In other words, he humbled himself into the receptor's context in order for him to follow the Jewish customs and way of life. If Jesus were to go the Hui community, he would communicate as the Hui communicate, using stories to illustrate particular truth, sitting with them, asking them questions about their experience, culture, traditions, and beliefs. I believe that Jesus' message would also be relevant to the Hui culture, customs, and needs (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003:62; see Kraft 1991:23).

## **2) Communication is Involvement.**

People that we do not know can look different and somewhat daunting to have a fellowship with. However, people can understand each other and share their lives through involvement by learning the other's language, culture and belief system. When Christian communicators serve local people in the mission field through their skills, they have an opportunity to know the local people quite well and have interactions with them (Smith 1992:23). Communication does not occur in isolation but in relationships between Christian communicators and local people.

To be involved means to first learn the language of community to which the receptor belongs. Teenagers may use the same words as adults, but their content and meaning may be quite different. Second, involvement means sharing an experience such as having a conversation, attending a funeral, or meeting for Bible study. Third, involvement means participating in the culture of the people to whom the communicator ministers. For effectiveness, Christian communicators should deliberately learn the living patterns of those with whom he or she wants to be involved for mission. Finally, involvement means understanding people's worldview (Smith 1992:31-34).

Jesus completely involved himself with human beings and thus communicated well with humanity. The foundation for Christian involvement in ministry is "the life, death, and continuing life of Jesus Christ" (Smith 1992:39).

## **3) Communication is Process.**

Because the sender and receiver have different cultural backgrounds and ways of understanding them, it takes much time to overcome these differences and build commonness. As such, communication is a process (Smith 1992:41) through which people share their ideas, beliefs and culture over a period of time. An effective communicator is determined to know

of the barriers and puts in the time to overcome them. Credibility in communication is established when the receptors feel that the communicator indeed relates to their situation and felt needs (Stadell 1981:39).

According to Kraft, “communication is more properly defined as a matter of stimulus to action than as the mere transmission of information” (Kraft 1979:182). The receptor becomes very active in the communication process.

Communication as a process is also seen in how God communicates with human beings despite their rebellion against the Creator. God continued to communicate by breaking their hearts of rebellion through sowing his seed of truth. God’s work is not completed instantly. Every step leading to the harvest is part of a long and continuing process by which generation after generation learns of him, responds, and then tells the next generation (Smith 1992:48).

The Christian communicator realizes that the rejection of a message could stem from a rejection of the messenger or the way in which the message takes shape. In order to communicate effectively, the communicator must first build a mutual bond (Huffard 1985:17).

#### **4) Communicator Modifies the Form of a Message.**

A single story can be transmitted differently according to those who communicate it because the character and the experience of the communicator shapes the message. According to Smith, “the communicator’s personality and experiences modify the form of a message” (Smith 1992:104). As such, those who apply Christ’s message to their lives can effectively carry the message to the others. A good analogy Smith uses is that “the communicator is the container, and the container inevitably shapes the message.” “The personalities of the storytellers make the difference.” The physical, social, and psychological experience of the communicator shapes the message (Smith 1992:105).

From the Bible verses (2 Corinthians 4:2)<sup>11</sup>, it is evident that effectiveness in communication is a matter of applying Christ’s teaching in Christian life. “It is through the individual that the message is made visible, and through the individual that God’s truth can be perceived” (Smith 1992:115).

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<sup>11</sup> “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2 NIV).

## **5) Communication is Empathy.**

From examining Jesus' ministry in the Bible, there are many instances that demonstrate that Jesus always tried to have empathy in his heart toward the poor, the sick, and the lower class of that time.

According to Kraft's definition of empathy, it can be said that empathy is putting ourselves in another's position in order to understand them well."

Empathy is the attempt to put ourselves in the place of those to whom we are trying to relate. It involves us in attempting to look at the world in the way that their receptors are looking it. We may have to say to ourselves, "If I assumed the world to be what they assume it to be, how would I think and act?" If we properly understand and empathize, then, we should come to a fairly good understanding of what their definition of human beingness (Kraft 1999:43).

Empathy has three dimensions. First is perspective dimension, the ability to take on the viewpoint of another person. Second is the emotional dimension, which allows us to experience the feelings that others have. The third dimension is a genuine concern for the welfare of the other person (Adler and Rodman 2006:42). Christian communicators should not judge the culture of the local people, but try to take on the position of the local people. They should understand the joy, sadness, and other feelings of the people whom they serve. Finally, they should have a real concern for the wellbeing of the local people.

Many researchers report that the ability to put ourselves in the shoes of others is a significant relationship skill and promotes effectiveness in intercultural understanding (Dodd 1995:232).

## **6) Communication Is to Satisfy Felt Needs.**

A.H. Maslow, a psychologist, suggested a classification of felt needs ranked in an order from lowest to highest. When survival needs such as food, water, and safety are satisfied, concerns about love and acceptance become more important. According to this theory, those seeking to provide help to others should meet them where they are (Maslow 1943; Engel 1989:87). Felt need is only an indication of real needs. Christian communicators start with meeting a felt need but must bring Christian truth to bear on the real needs and the issues under the surface. They should start from the perspective of surface level needs to deep level

needs, which is “the needs for someone to care or for some ultimate cause to be involved in” (Kraft 1991:68; Engel 1989:90-93).

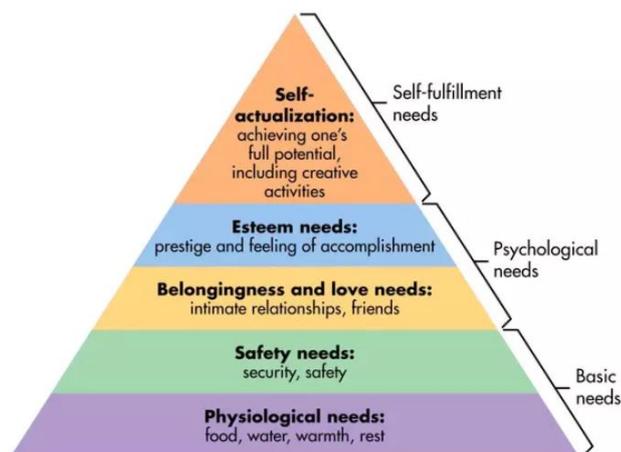


FIGURE 2  
MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS<sup>12</sup>

Kraft elaborates that “Message is first established through interaction at a fairly superficial level. In the interaction, then, the receptor enters a process by means of which he/she both discovers deeper needs and develops greater confidence in the messenger” (Kraft 1999:49-50).

Christian communicators should initiate dialogues to clear up the misunderstandings between Christianity and Islam. When Muslims understand that Christians care for them as human beings and not simply as souls to be saved, then they will begin to welcome Christian communicators, which in turn will enable the Christian message to be relevant and important to their lives. If a message is to be relevant, it generally must have something to do with the receptor’s felt needs. The communicators can be allowed to a deeper level (the more private areas of people) after fulfilling the lower and shallow level of needs (Kraft 1991:69; Engel 1989:86).

Jesus begins the process of thought with the needs of the people. This is seen best in the way his miracles come about: Jesus’ miracles never start with an idea launched by himself; rather, he always respond to the people’s needs—to people being hungry, to a boat being

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<sup>12</sup> Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a theory which puts forward that people are motivated by five basic categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow 1943). Saul McLeod, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, SimplyPsychology, updated 2019, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> (accessed Jan.30, 2020).

threatened by a storm, to a mother who weeps over her son at his burial, to blind, lepers, paralyzed or hunch-backed individuals who suffer and need help. Much of Jesus' preaching is done by these acts of genuine concern (Wijngaards 1978:58).

#### **4. Communication in the Bible**

Eugene A. Nida, in his book, *Message and Mission*, claims that "In our faith it is God who takes the initiatives in communication, and through the Incarnation, both by word and by life, communicates to men. Man, in turn communicates with God" (Nida 1990:239).

Each of passages of the Bible is witness to a dialogue between God and people. God had a relationship with people in language and thought forms that were most meaningful to the people of those days. The God who spoke then still speaks now. What is essential is the recognition that the unceasing dialogue of God with people in Israel reached of its climactic and decisive moment in Jesus Christ (Smart 1964:134-136).

Christians can find communication methods in the Bible. God is the author of the communication process, showing people the need to create understanding through the miracle of the incarnation—the coming of Jesus Christ into this world in human form (Engel 1989:21).

Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first, in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth. A theological foundation for mission, says Kramm, "is only possible if we continually refer back to the ground of our faith: God's self-communication in Jesus Christ" (Bosch 1991:9).

God who is infinite, sinless, and omnipotent wants to communicate with humans who are finite, sinful, and weak. In the Bible, God began making the world through speaking. He is shown as a communicator from the very beginning: "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3b); "Let the earth produce" (Gen. 1:11b). Creating "mankind was not his final activity; it was just the beginning of the story of a communicating God" (Kraft 1991:11).

#### **5. Theological Basis of Communication**

According to Kraemer, there are two approaches to communication: "common ground" approach and "point of contact" orientation (Kraemer 2009). First, the common ground

approach was used in the letter of Pope Gregory the Great to Mellitus and Augustine, working in England in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It has been in matters of ritual and symbols and Roman Catholics accepted pagan symbols. Protestants took over pagan belief as a parallel to the Christianity.

The second, the point of contact approach, is to emphasize the parallelism not as ease the transitions, but “provide one with an intelligible basis for communication, without involving any initial field of agreement.” Eugene A. Nida prefers to the second approach because he thinks that “it is not possible to take any element of belief of its context and still have the same belief” (Nida 1990:15-18).

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The Hui began as outsiders in China with a somewhat negative characterization, but throughout the centuries, they’ve integrated into the Han Chinese way of life, as closely as seen from the outside appearance. In economics, politics, and other areas of development, they have largely paved their own paths and become an asset to the government. Yet despite this adaptation, they retained their own religious beliefs, thus forming a new unique identity among Muslim groups and differentiating themselves from the Han Chinese.

After establishing a base understanding of the Hui, Christians are to take note of the basic elements for effective communication in order to build lasting relationships with others. They must understand the different models used for communication, and how each affects the message differently. Communication focuses on the recipient, and a holistic approach is more open to be accepted. Communication goes beyond merely speaking to the recipient, but includes a call to action, identifying and addressing felt needs of people. It is also important to know that the communicator molds the shape the message takes form (this being one’s own life), which affects how the recipient perceives the message.

#### **V. MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

In light of the considerations above, let us examine the relevant missiological approach for this Muslim group. Incarnational communication needs to be practiced for the Hui in China. These are important guidelines for evangelism of the Hui in China.

First, the role of the Christian communicators is vital in delivering the Good News. The communicators’ “personality and experiences modify the form of a message” (Smith 1992:104). Spiritually, they should be men of prayer for the Hui. Conversion is a spiritual

issue and emphasizing on prayer is the most important factor for making converts. The Holy Spirit is able to guide and show us how to speak and respond in an appropriate manner. They also should have an attitude of humility toward the Hui, credibility and integrity, and knowledge of the Bible and other intercultural studies.<sup>13</sup>

Second, as communication is receptor-oriented, the understanding of culture and Islamic faith of the Hui is needed. Christian communicators should know the deep level of culture (worldview) of the Hui. In addition, the understanding of the origin of the Hui, their historical events, and the situations that they are currently facing need to be attained. Also, there is a strong tension between Han Chinese and other minorities in China. In rural areas especially, hostility among the Han Chinese and others blocks the gates of communication. Therefore, Han Chinese Christians do have more difficulty than foreigners in approaching the Hui. There is another element we need to understand: urbanization. Many Hui live in cities, where people find common ground among different ethnic groups based on status, rather than a distinct separation between ethnicities (Kim 2017:173). In this case, it is much easier for Han Christians to communicate God's love to the Hui.

A third implication is the need to build up a good relationship with the Hui. For Chinese, as well as the Hui, relationships are everything. Christian communicators should do whatever they think is available, to which would make it wholistic ministry. As communication is involvement and process, Christian communicators should take part in diverse cultural events of the Hui for involvement. Also, the Hui ministry takes long periods of time (process). Therefore, many people say that the Hui ministry is to cultivate the heart of the Hui.

We can draw from Jesus' example in the Bible. In Luke 2:46-47, Jesus is in the temple at the age of twelve, talking with Jewish leaders. "Sitting among them" might mean that Christians visit the Hui people in their homes, spending time with them socially, and "listening" means that Christians should get to know and understand the Hui as friends (Chapman 2003:23). If possible, Christian ministers should go to the local context and live

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<sup>13</sup> According to Woodberry's research of what is important for the conversion process, the lifestyle of Christians ranked first because it contrasted with the broad perception in many Muslim societies that Christians are immoral. The second ranked consideration is answered prayer, followed by miracles and the power of God. Dissatisfaction with Islam or Muslims they had experienced was fifth on the facilitated receptivity to the Gospel. The sixth ranked consideration was dreams and visions significant at various times in the conversion process. Martin Accad and J. Dudley Woodberry, *Current Trends in Islam* (MR556\_07W1), Winter 2007.

together with their target people group. Building trust, credibility, and goodwill with the Hui in a practical way is crucial for effective communication.

Fourth, as communication involves empathy, Christians need to help the Hui in practical ways. Many Hui people who have problems in their lives come to the Lord more easily than others. For example, I helped one Hui Christian woman by giving her some money monthly until she graduated from the university. Her mother was bedridden, while another sister had to work to support the family. Their father had passed away when she was only seven years old. I went to her house one day with one of my Chinese friends, where her mother prepared a big meal for us. When she saw me, she said, “Even our relatives did not help us, but you—a foreigner—helped a lot.” She continually cried, holding my hands. This example demonstrates that one of the ways to open the hearts of the Hui is by providing for their necessities, showing love through action.

Finally, there needs to be a conscious effort made not to criticize or to ridicule the beliefs or customs of the Hui. Chinese society has been influenced by Confucianism which focuses on the morality and ideals of human relationships. The Hui also adopt the Chinese culture of face and shame. The best way to approach the Hui is to ask adequate questions in a respectful, gracious manner and bring them think about why Jesus is the only way to stand before God.

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## **Abstract**

Earlier Christian response to Islam was essentially polemical and defensive. The Christian workers from the West did not understand the local culture and people, so they just delivered the Christian message to the Muslims without a contextualized method, such as an inference model in communication. We need to change the way of communication method from source oriented to people and context oriented in a way that people can truly understand.

This writing project attempts to examine how to communicate to a Muslim people group, specifically the Hui, who are resistant to the gospel. In doing so, this study employs two methodological perspectives: communication theories, and the Hui in China.

This study strives to approach the human elements that lie beneath the surface level of Islam. The paper is to show that understanding the Hui's culture and people and meeting their felt needs in order to open the lines of communication are the appropriate methods for mission among the Hui in China.

**Keywords**

Hui, communication methods, receptor oriented, culture, assimilation, Islam, felt needs