

## MOSQUE IN CHINA: ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

The history of the spread of Islam in China goes back more than 1300 years. During this time Islam was able to fully adapt to the national culture of the Chinese people, preserving their ancestral traditions and at the same time, as already mentioned, incorporates some specific features of Chinese culture [1]. This is clearly appeared in Muslim religious buildings – mosques.

Currently there are more than twenty thousand mosques in China [2]. The usual designation for mosques in Chinese is *tsinzhentsi* that literally means «temple of purity and perfection.» The vast majority of Chinese mosques are in Arabic style. It is a visible symbol of Islam, «pure land» of all Muslims, a place and a centre of Islamic community religious life. Mosque in China performs various religious and social functions [3].

Mosque in China is primarily a venue for liturgical rituals. This function is associated with another concept that is used in Chinese to refer to the mosque – *libaisy* that literally means «temple for the calendar of worship». According to the ancient tradition that is honored by Chinese Muslims, every follower of Islam must adhere «five virtues» (*u-gung*) in daily life. One of these virtues is worship services held in accordance with the calendar cycles, which in Chinese means concept of *libay*. Calendar and cyclical aspect of this concept is clearly recorded by Chinese culture, as evidenced, for example, the fact that the word *libay* in spoken language is set to «such a day of the week.»

Liturgical practice designated in Chinese language with *libay* concept includes several cycles of prayer: firstly, five daily prayers; secondly, the weekly collective prayer; thirdly two annual prayer committed the entire Muslim community. The five daily prayers can be read in any clean place, but the weekly Friday collective prayer and two annual community ritual feasts, accompanied with prayers must be obligatory read in the mosque. For these purposes, there is a ritual hall in each mosque, which is the main functional part of the Muslim worship places. It is noteworthy that even in the days of weekly and yearly ritual celebrations Islam adherents can worship even outside of a courtroom, but only in case it can't accommodate everyone (and besides, worshippers must perform ritual prayer next to this room within the mosque or outside the mosque, but close to it).

The second function performed by the Chinese mosque, is a place for bathing and cleansing.

The Chinese mosque is different from Arabic. One of these differences lies in the fact that in Chinese «temple where is purity and perfection», is bound to have a bath and a bucket of water and a kettle for hand washing. These items are intended to everyone could bathe before performing prayer ritual, and to stand before the prayer in the bodily and spiritual purity. It is noteworthy that everyone is allowed to bath in ordinary days, even when community rituals in the mosque are not conducted.

Another function of mosques is training of new clergy.

During Ming dynasty (1368-1644) there was appeared a Hall for expalining of canon (*grin grin tan*) in Chinese mosque where students could gather to listen to explanations of religious doctrine and liturgical practice. Akhun (Chinese mulla) conducts the lessons for students. Usually, he explains the Qur'an and various comments of it, teaches Arabic or Persian language and the history of Islam, and other disciplines that future Muslim clergy need to comprehend.

The fourth function of the mosque in China is organization of community members' physical training. In the Chinese mosque, members of the Muslim community, as well as their children and relatives have the opportunity to play sports. For example, very popular section on national gymnastics held in mosques is *wushu* and *taijitsuan* among Muslims living in the North-Eastern regions of China from Qiqihar to Shandong province. Mentors on the sports activities can be a high-ranking Muslim clerics and ordinary members of the community, having the necessary preparation. This kind of practice is common for Chinese mosques. For example, akhun of Tsujenmosque (county Yangoo, Shandong province) Guisyan, who has trained wusu for children and adolescents more than ten years, was awarded the title of honored coach for success in sports and pedagogical activity [4].

In addition, prior to 1949, Chinese mosques performed the function of educational institutions, primarily for children from low-income families or for adults who have not had the opportunity to obtain primary education. Prior to the founding of the PRC in many mosques there were opened primary schools, teachers were not only akhuns, but the Confucian scholars and scribes[5].

Moreover, the function of mosques as education centres persists in modern China. The content of training in modern schools at mosques includes not only discipline of the dogmatics field, the history

of Islam or its ritual practices, but purely secular disciplines as Chinese language, mathematics, geography, history, science, the Constitution of the PRC, etc.

Another function of Chinese mosque is the rites of the life cycle for members of the Muslim community. Chinese Muslims conduct wedding and funeral rites in mosques. During marriage ceremony, for example, akhun in mosque writes out a marriage license and performs the whole cycle of wedding ceremonies, provided with the Muslim Canon, including reading of the Quran.

A mosque prepare a special «clean water», intended for washing the body of the deceased in order to conduct funeral rites. The whole ceremony is also headed by Akhun, he accompanies the funeral procession to the cemetery, where performs all the relevant ceremonies. Chinese mosques are also a place where community members commemorate deceased relatives. A considerable number of Chinese mosques have their own cemeteries, and some cemetery is located within the area of the mosque. In the days of veneration of the dead, or the anniversary of the death, the Muslim community members visit not only the graves of their relatives, but also come to the mosque, where the Akhun holds a memorial service for them. During such rituals, Akhun reads the corresponding part of the Quran or other Holy books. An essential part of the funeral service is a story about the good deeds of the deceased and publicly acknowledge of blessed memory.

Throughout history of Islam in China the mosques became centers of armed struggle against foreign aggressors or internal anti-people regimes, military factories, ammunition depots, medicines or even the centers of revolutionary activities. In Chinese history there are many cases when akhuns led the rebel troops or revolutionary groups [6].

The mosque is service place of Akhun, Imam and other members of Muslim religious and economic hierarchy, and therefore there are respective offices for each of them in the mosque. Nevertheless, neither Akhun, nor Imam generally do not live in the mosque, their houses are usually outside of the mosque.

In addition, the mosque is also a place of social gathering to resolve some important community issues. For example, these gatherings are conducted in those cases when it is necessary to elect a new Akhun, to resolve the issue of the school opening at the mosque, to organize the repair of religious buildings, etc.

For members of the Muslim community mosque

in some cases performs the function of the court, when it is not contrary to the laws of the PRC and does not apply to acts, the adjudication of which is regulated by the Criminal code of the PRC. For example, in case of disputes or disagreements among Muslims, they may contact Akhun in the mosque, who acts in such cases as the arbitral Tribunal or a magistrate.

These are the functions of the mosque in China. In general, they are equally characteristic for all the Muslim religious centers of China. We can say that the main activity of the mosque is connected with the satisfaction of religious needs of parishioners and the organization of the activities of the Muslim community [7]. Nevertheless, a mosque could become the center of social organization of the population, that is especially characteristic for turning points of history. For example, after the Japanese occupied the Hulan County the local mosque became a center of life organization [8].

For all these reasons, compact residence of Muslims is characteristic for the Northeastern regions of China, areas of settlement which are often located in close proximity to Muslim religious buildings. For example, the area centered around the mosque Chantola in Changchun (Prov. Liaoning) is a place of compact residence of ethnic *Hui* Muslim. The same can be observed in Jilin city: areas around three mosques in this city are also places of compact Muslims residence. In Harbin this compact residence of Muslims is on the 12th and 13th South streets of the Daowai district. A place of compact residence of Muslims are not only separate streets or quarters of the big city, but entire villages.

Rural settlements with a Muslim population are typical phenomenon for the North-Eastern China. For example, the places of compact residence of Muslims are village Lunsin of Longjiang County, Heilongjiang province. In Jilin province national rural administrative territories are the village Huijia near the Jutai city and village Shuanyin, County Chuanyan.

After the formation of the people's Republic of China the mosques functions change a little, and their main activities are concentrated around the proper organization of religious life for members of Muslim communities. However, due to the difficult situation in the country the mosques at this time continue performing social functions. In the fifties the mosque provided food for Muslims, served as a hotel for visiting Muslims, employed the Community members. For example, a mosque in Yichun city has helped more than a hundred Muslims, who came from Hebei Shandong provinces to find a job at the

local forestry enterprises. Before the beginning of the eighties of the twentieth century mosques often organized the local Muslim community for the decision of socialist construction tasks [9].

In economic terms, all Chinese mosques are independent economic units. They take the funds needed to maintain the normal functioning and organization of religious life, from the following main sources:

- Receipts for leased buildings and squares; every mosque has its own inalienable property, which includes both the shops and land; income from rent is the main source of Chinese mosques' income;

- fees for the use of the mosque; they are usually monthly, fee for fasting ritual once a year, etc.;

- Every time after bathing the mosque parishioners donate a small amount monthly which, even in the major mosques does not exceed 100 yuan;

- payment for the killing of cattle; every time Muslims are asked to slaughter cattle, they make it for a certain fee, of which 60% goes to the mosque and 40% direct to the contractor.

These revenues constituted the economic basis for the existence of Chinese mosques, which were managed by Akhun. However, it should be noted that after 1957 the land rent, as well as some other types of income, were banned [10].

According to statistics, currently in northeastern China there 280 officially functioning mosques. In Liaoning province in 1985 there were more than 100 officially registered Muslim religious buildings, and from 1985 to present 94 buildings were opened. In Jilin province from 1985 90 mosques were opened. In Heilongjiang province in 1985 there were more than 120 mosques, and at present timenow 96 have been officially opened.

The most ancient mosque in the northeast of China is located in the Beijing county of Liaoning province which was built in 1522, Another ancient monument of Muslim architecture is the mosque in the Huangdi district near Kaiyuancity, which appearance in historical records dates back to 1523. This worship place was built according to the canons of classical Chinese architecture. But the mosque in Jinzhou city of (Liaoning province), which also applies to 1523, was made in Arabic style.

In general one can say that architecturally all the mosques in China can be divided into two groups. The first is structures that were made in the Chinese style (fig. 1), the second are the cult buildings, repeating the Arabic architectural style (fig. 2).



Figure 1 – Mosque in Chinese style



Figure 2 – Mosque in Arabic architectural style

For mosques, built in Chinese style, the main building material is wood. Mosques of this type are particularly prevalent where ethnic Hui representatives reside. Mosques in the Arabic style, which built with stone, are characteristic for the territories inhabited by Muslim Uighurs.

Because the majority of Muslims in Northern China belong to the Hui ethnic community, and their

religious buildings in this region were often made in the style of traditional Chinese architecture. Such, for example, mosques in Shenyang, Changchun, Qiqihar, Plan, Achene and Ninjana.

Mosques in the Arabic style are more characteristic for the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region of China, where the titular nation are the Uighurs. They occur in North-East China, but it is either relatively ancient religious buildings, or very recent construction. Examples of such buildings are mosques in Yingkou, Haicheng cities of Liaoning province.

The proclamation of People's Republic of China in 1949 had a positive impact on the situation of Chinese Muslims. In the Constitution of the PRC the democratic rights and freedoms were enshrined. The Muslims of China gained their civil and political rights. The creating of the Xinjiang Uygur and Ningxia Hui Autonomous regions, which the majority of residents were Muslims in the 50-ies of XX century played important role in the preservation and further development of spiritual culture, national and religious minorities of China. The PRC government in conducting social and economic reforms respected domestic and religious tradition of Chinese Muslims. In China the system of Islamic education was established. Muslims have an opportunity to influence the political and cultural life of the country through their own social organizations and the media; to communicate with their co-religionists from other countries; to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

Thus, it is necessary to conclude that the mosque in the Muslim community of China is the focus of different (religious, social, political, economic, cultural) aspects of life and activities of Muslims. The architectural appearance and arrangement of mosques in China incorporates both features, inherent to religious buildings of Islam and some features of Chinese national culture.

#### References

- 1 Li Sin. Islam in China: Features of dissemination in modern China. – Krasnoyarsk, 2007. – 106-109 pp.
- 2 Cultura of Islam in China (Chjungoisylandvenkhua) / Ed. Scientific research center of religions, Office for religious Affairs of PRC. – Beijing: Chjunhuashutsiui, 1996. – 168-183 pp.
- 3 Islam in China. – Inchuan: People's publishing house of Ningxia Hui Aut. district, 2000. – 43-59 pp.
- 4 Explain the history of Islam in China (Tsyamin chzhungo isylantsyao shi). – Inchuan: People's publishing house of Ningxia Hui Aut. district, 2006. – 133-152 pp.



- 5 On the vicissitudes of historical fate of the mosques (Tsinchzhensybayniansansan) // [Resource remote access]. – China. Inkou. – <http://www.yingkou.gov.cn/yk/index.jsp>.
- 6 A brief sketch of the religious organization of China Muslims belong to the Hui ethnic group / Ed. MyanVeilin. – Inchuan: People's publishing house of Ningxia Hui Aut.district, 1983.
- 7 Shu Tsinsyan. The process of spreading Islam in the district of Heyluntszyan and its specific features. – Harbin, 2003. – №5.
- 8 The religious life of Chinese Muslims (Chzhungomusylyndytsuntyaoshenho). Ed. Islamic society of China. – Beijing, 1956.
- 9 Chan Guanlin. Muslim in China (Chzhungoisylantsyao). – Beijing: Uchzhouchubanyshe, 2005.
- 10 Van Chzhene ei. General sketch of the economic system of Islam. – Beijing: Mintsuchubanyshe, 2004.