



## Religious Festival Celebrations in a Multicultural Context: A Case Study of Eid al-Fitr at the Niujie Mosque in Beijing, China

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines the dynamics of Eid al-Fitr celebrations at the Niujie Mosque in Beijing as a representation of the lived experiences of multiethnic Muslim communities in China. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach and case study methodology, the research highlights how Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds—such as Hui, Uighur, and Kazakh interact and engage in cultural integration while celebrating Islamic traditions amid the dominance of Chinese culture and a tightly controlled political system. As the oldest mosque in Beijing, the Niujie Mosque serves not only as a spiritual center but also as a symbol of harmony between Islamic teachings and local traditions. The Eid celebration here functions as a religious occasion as well as a site of social interaction, cultural diplomacy, and identity negotiation. The findings reveal that the Muslim community in Beijing maintains its religious identity through adaptive acculturative practices, such as incorporating local architecture, serving halal Chinese dishes, and involving multiple ethnic groups in religious activities. These findings affirm that Islam in China is not monolithic but rather flourishes in diversity and blends organically with local culture.*

**Keywords:** *Islam in China; Eid al-Fitr; Niujie Mosque; acculturation; multiethnic Muslim community; Chinese culture.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Islam has been an integral part of Chinese history and civilization since the 7th century CE, introduced through trade routes, diplomatic missions, and migration from the Middle East and Central Asia. Since then, the Muslim population in China has not only grown in number but has also made significant contributions to the country's social, cultural, and economic life (Gladney, 1996). Various predominantly Muslim ethnic groups—such as the Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, Salar, Dongxiang, and others—constitute the diverse Muslim communities in China, which have continued to exist despite the country's dynamic political and social transformations (Ma, 1979). This diversity enriches Chinese culture and remains an inseparable part of everyday life, although these communities often have to adapt to shifting governmental policies. The arrival of Islam in China can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), during which Arab and Persian merchants actively sailed and traded in China's major ports. Between 651 and 798 CE, historical records note more than 37 diplomatic missions from the Arab world to

China, indicating a strong and sustained interaction between Muslim societies and the Chinese empire since the 7th century (Weiner, 2021).

This indicates that Islam became known in the region not through warfare or confrontation, but rather through trade, cultural exchanges, and peaceful diplomatic relations. The subsequent development of Muslim communities in China continued across various dynasties, each presenting distinct socio-political challenges and dynamics. From the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE), the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 CE), to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE), Muslims became increasingly integrated into state affairs and played significant roles, particularly in commerce and administration (Wekke & Rusdan, 2018). During the Manchu Dynasty (1644–1912 CE), although Muslims faced serious challenges, including injustice and authoritarian government policies, they endured and remained part of China's ethnic and religious mosaic (Wekke & Rusdan, 2018).

In later periods, namely the Nationalist Republic (1911–1949 CE) and the People's Republic of China (1949–present), Muslim communities continued to encounter various obstacles, especially in terms of religious freedom and social integration (Chua, 2004). One notable figure in this historical movement was Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese Muslim revolutionary who opposed the authoritarian policies of the Manchu Dynasty. He advocated for political reform and played a crucial role in establishing a modern, democratic Chinese republic (Ding, 2005). The presence of Islam in China is far from monolithic. Each ethnic group contributes its own cultural distinctiveness, creating a unique harmony between Islamic teachings and local customs. A concrete example of this cultural syncretism can be observed in the religious celebrations of Muslims in China, particularly during the observance of Eid al-Fitr (Ho, 2013). Amidst a predominantly non-Muslim society, Eid remains a significant occasion for Muslim communities to reaffirm their religious identity while fostering interethnic social cohesion. The Niujie Mosque in Beijing stands as a prominent symbol of Islamic presence in China. Established in 996 CE, it is not only the oldest mosque in Beijing but also serves as a cultural center and hub for multicultural interaction among Muslims. Located in the Xicheng District, home to a large Hui Muslim population, the mosque functions as the religious heart of Beijing's Muslim community. Its architectural design—blending Islamic motifs with classical Chinese elements—exemplifies the harmonious fusion of two great civilizations (Hagras, 2024).

Each year, particularly during Eid al-Fitr, the Niujie Mosque becomes a living testament to the vibrant celebrations of Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Thousands of worshippers, including local Hui and Uighur communities, as well as international students, diplomats, and migrant workers from Muslim-majority countries, gather at the mosque to perform Eid prayers and participate in a series of religious and social activities (antaranews.com, 2025). The Eid celebration at Niujie Mosque is not merely a religious event, but also a representation of rich cultural interaction. Islamic traditions such as congregational prayers, sermons (khutbah), charity, and the sharing of halal food blend seamlessly with Chinese cultural elements, including the serving of traditional local dishes, the wearing of ethnic attire, and familial codes of social conduct. This phenomenon demonstrates that Islam in China has not only endured but has also adapted to the local socio-cultural context (Liputan6.com, 2025). In a multicultural society like China, the Eid al-Fitr celebration serves as a crucial moment to affirm the presence and contributions of the Muslim community. Amidst the dominance of Han culture and state policies that often emphasize ideological uniformity, the peaceful and open celebration of Eid illustrates the existence of cultural tolerance and negotiation. It evidences that Islamic identity can coexist harmoniously with Chinese national identity.

It is important to note that the Eid celebration at Niujie Mosque is not merely a religious ritual but also a form of social communication across ethnic groups. Through acts of sharing food, exchanging greetings, and holding family gatherings, Muslims not only strengthen their internal community bonds but also introduce Islamic values to the broader public. This serves as a form of informal “cultural diplomacy” that reinforces the position of Muslims as a legitimate part of Chinese society.

The process of acculturation evident at the Niujie Mosque demonstrates how Islam and local culture can merge without compromising their respective core values. For instance, the mosque’s architectural style—reflecting traditional Chinese design pays homage to local heritage while preserving its religious function as a place of worship (Ridgeon, 2020). Similarly, communal meals featuring Chinese-style dishes prepared according to halal principles illustrate a harmonious alignment between two great traditions. Such forms of acculturation are not instantaneous; rather, they are the result of a long process of intercultural interaction that has shaped a unique pattern of adaptation within Chinese Muslim life. In this context, the Niujie Mosque functions as a “social laboratory,” offering a compelling case study of pluralism in practice one that is not always formalized, but unfolds organically in the everyday lives of the Muslim community (Hagras, 2024). Like Muslims in other parts of the world, Chinese Muslims regard Eid al-Fitr as a day of triumph. However, within the context of being a minority,

this sense of victory takes on a broader meaning. It is not only a spiritual victory following a month of fasting, but also a triumph in preserving Islamic identity and traditions amidst a socially distinct environment. The Eid celebration at Niujie Mosque thus serves as a symbol of both cultural and spiritual resilience for Chinese Muslim communities.

On the other hand, these celebrations are not without challenges. In recent years, issues surrounding religious freedom in China have attracted international attention. While the Hui community tends to maintain a relatively more conciliatory relationship with the government compared to the Uighurs, there are still restrictions on religious practices that must be negotiated (Friedrichs, 2017). As a result, certain aspects of the Eid celebrations have been adjusted such as the scale of public gatherings, the language of the sermon, and the visibility of Islamic symbols in public spaces.

Nevertheless, the determination of the Muslim community in Beijing to celebrate Eid al-Fitr with joy and significance demonstrates that Islamic identity cannot be easily erased. Traditions passed down through generations, along with strong social bonds among families and communities, serve as vital resources in maintaining the continuity of Islamic values amid the pressures of modernity and cultural homogenization. The presence of Muslims from various countries during Eid at Niujie Mosque further enriches the multicultural dimension of the celebration. Students from Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as from the Middle East, such as Egypt and Yemen, participate in Eid prayers, share meals, and engage in dialogue with local communities. This creates a space for intercultural dialogue and reinforces global Muslim solidarity within a uniquely local cultural framework (Zulyadi, 2019).

In the context of cultural and religious studies, the Eid celebration at Niujie Mosque offers a vital space for reflection on how religion is practiced within a pluralistic social setting. It illustrates that diversity is not a barrier to unity, but rather an opportunity to build deeper cross-cultural understanding. The mosque functions not only as a spiritual center but also as a social and cultural symbol that encapsulates the history, adaptation, and future of Islam in China. Therefore, studying the Eid celebration at Niujie Mosque is relevant to understanding Muslim identity in China, the dynamics of multiculturalism, and the relationship between religion and culture in a state with a rigid political system. It also provides a critical reflection in the global context affirming that Islam, as a universal religion, possesses the capacity to take root and flourish in diverse cultural settings. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to answer two key research questions: first, how do ethnically diverse Muslim communities in China celebrate Eid al-Fitr? Second, how

are Islamic traditions and Chinese culture intertwined in the religious and social practices of Muslims in Beijing? This research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing from literature reviews and field data obtained from various reports and observations of Eid celebrations at the Niujie Mosque.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on phenomenological inquiry (Taylor et al., 2023), aiming to explore and deeply understand the meaning of Eid al-Fitr celebrations among multicultural Muslim communities in Beijing, particularly in the context of the Niujie Mosque. This interpretive approach seeks to capture the subjective experiences of cultural actors in giving meaning to their religious traditions. The study not only describes the various forms of celebration conducted by Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds in China, but also uncovers the values, symbols, and narratives embedded in these practices as expressions of religious and cultural identity negotiation within a diverse social space. The type of research applied is a case study, with the Niujie Mosque serving as the primary site (Robinson et al., 2024). The selection of this mosque is based on its historical and contemporary significance in the life of the Muslim community in Beijing. As the oldest and largest mosque in the city, Niujie Mosque has long served as a center of interaction for Muslim communities from various ethnic groups, including the Hui, Uighur, and Kazakh, as well as international Muslims. Its presence makes it a strong representation of the multicultural face of Islam in China, offering researchers the opportunity to closely observe how Islamic traditions are practiced and interpreted within the local context of ethnic and cultural diversity.

The research strategy employed is phenomenological (Smith et al., 1999), emphasizing an in-depth understanding of how Muslims experience and interpret Eid celebrations within a predominantly non-Muslim cultural environment. The study investigates how Islamic and Chinese cultural elements are interwoven in religious practices such as Eid prayers, festive meals, and other symbols of acculturation. Furthermore, the research pays close attention to the dynamics of ethnic and religious identity, as well as how state policies shape the space for Muslim religious expression in Beijing. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how Islamic traditions are lived, adapted, and transformed within the multicultural context of Chinese society.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **a. Ethnic Diversity among Muslims in Beijing and Its Representation at the Niujie Mosque**

The Niujie Mosque in Beijing serves as a spiritual center for the city's diverse Muslim communities. Built in 996 CE, the mosque is not only a place of worship but also a powerful symbol of the long-standing presence of Islam in China. The Muslim community surrounding the mosque comprises various ethnic groups, including the Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, and migrants from other Asian countries (Hagras, 2024). The Hui, who form the majority of the Muslim population in Beijing, play a dominant role in the mosque's religious activities. They are known for their ability to integrate Islamic practices with Han Chinese culture, thereby developing a localized and unique expression of Islam. In contrast, the Uighur and Kazakh communities maintain their own distinct traditions—such as language, clothing, and cuisine—which enrich the cultural diversity within the mosque (Friedrichs, 2017).

Eid al-Fitr celebrations at the Niujie Mosque highlight this diversity. Worshippers from various ethnic backgrounds gather to perform Eid prayers, share food, and celebrate together. The presence of Muslims from different countries further adds an international dimension to the event, making the mosque a vibrant multicultural meeting point (Ridgeon, 2020). The harmony among different ethnic groups within Beijing's Muslim community is reflected in their collaboration in organizing religious and social activities. Despite cultural differences, they are united by a shared sense of Islamic faith and communal spirit. The Niujie Mosque provides an inclusive space that fosters interaction and cultural exchange among these communities.

It is important to note that such diversity also presents challenges, particularly in preserving the unique identities of each ethnic group while fostering communal solidarity. Nonetheless, through dialogue and cooperation, Beijing's Muslim community has succeeded in cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support (Davis, 2008). The mosque also serves as a center for education and religious outreach, offering programs that cater to the needs of its multi-ethnic congregation. These include Arabic language courses, Qur'anic studies, and religious lectures delivered in various languages to ensure accessibility for all members of the community. Thus, the Niujie Mosque functions not only as a

religious institution but also as a symbol of diversity and harmony within Beijing's Muslim population. Its success in facilitating multicultural interaction offers a valuable model for Muslim communities in other cities across China and around the world.

b. Rituals and Festive Traditions: The Fusion of Islam and Chinese Culture

The Eid al-Fitr celebration at the Niujie Mosque exemplifies the fusion of Islamic traditions with Chinese cultural elements. The Eid prayer is performed solemnly, followed by a sermon delivered in both Mandarin and Arabic—reflecting the adaptation of Islam within the local sociolinguistic context. After the prayer, congregants greet one another in various languages, showcasing the diversity of the community (Ke, 2003). The attire worn by worshippers also reflects cultural acculturation. Many Hui Muslims wear traditional Chinese garments such as the *changshan*, paired with the classic white Muslim skullcap (*kufi*), illustrating how Islamic and local cultural identities are integrated into a unique form of religious expression.

The food served during the celebration also embodies cultural fusion. Dishes such as *jiaozi* (halal dumplings), beef noodles, and Uighur kebabs are presented—representing the ethnic diversity of the Muslim community. These foods serve not only as festive meals but also as cultural symbols and instruments for strengthening social ties (antaranews.com, 2025). Moreover, social practices such as sharing meals with non-Muslim neighbors and inviting them to join in the festivities reflect a spirit of inclusivity and tolerance. Such actions reinforce intercommunal relationships and demonstrate how Islamic traditions can contribute to social harmony in multicultural settings (Tradisi Ramadan di Beijing, 2025).

The Eid celebrations at Niujie Mosque also feature artistic and cultural activities, including performances of traditional music and exhibitions of Arabic-Mandarin calligraphy. These artistic expressions function as mediums through which Islamic identity is conveyed within a Chinese cultural framework (Tradisi Ramadan di Beijing, 2025). It is important to note that this cultural synthesis does not diminish the core teachings of Islam; rather, it enriches the religious experience by incorporating compatible local elements. This reflects the flexibility of Islam to adapt to different cultural environments without compromising its theological essence. In this light, the Eid celebration at the Niujie Mosque stands

as a compelling example of how Islamic tradition and Chinese culture can harmoniously interact—producing a unique and inclusive expression of religious life.

c. Social and Cultural Dimensions of Eid al-Fitr Celebrations

The Eid al-Fitr celebration at the Niujiie Mosque serves not only as a religious ritual but also as a vital social event that strengthens communal bonds. Worshippers from diverse backgrounds gather to share joy and reinforce social ties, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity within Beijing's Muslim community. Social activities such as sharing meals with non-Muslim neighbors and inviting them to join the festivities reflect a spirit of inclusivity and tolerance. These practices strengthen intercommunal relations and demonstrate how Islamic traditions can contribute to social harmony within a multicultural society (Gladney, 1996).

The celebration also provides an opportunity for the Muslim community to express their cultural identity. Through clothing, cuisine, and art, they take pride in their heritage and share it with others. This cultural expression enhances the diversity of Beijing and reinforces the Muslim community's presence and recognition within the broader society. Moreover, Eid celebrations at Niujiie Mosque serve as a platform for religious education and da'wah. Sermons and religious discussions held during the festival offer congregants the chance to deepen their understanding of Islam and strengthen their faith. The event also attracts media attention and outside visitors who are interested in learning how Islam is practiced within a Chinese context. This provides the Muslim community with an opportunity to improve their public image and clarify their identity (Garmana, 2025).

d. The Assimilation of Islamic and Chinese Traditions: The Face of Chinese Islam in Eid Celebrations

The assimilation of Islamic and Chinese cultural traditions among the Muslim communities in Beijing—particularly at the Niujiie Mosque serves as a compelling example of dynamic and harmonious cultural integration. Universal Islamic traditions undergo contextual adaptation without compromising their core religious values. During Eid al-Fitr celebrations, this synthesis is not merely symbolic, but also embedded in deeper social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions (D, 2011). Symbolically, the mosque itself exemplifies this cultural synergy. Its



architecture reflects classical Chinese style, featuring curved roofs, dragon motifs, and a blend of Han-Arabic calligraphy. Even during the Eid sermon, the *khutbah* is delivered in Mandarin with tonal inflections resembling classical Chinese oratory, followed by concise translations into Arabic and Uighur. This approach not only facilitates interethnic comprehension but also reinforces an inclusive local Islamic identity (Liputan6.com, 2025).

In daily practice, such acculturation is visible in how Hui Muslims observe fasting and celebrate Eid. While adhering to Islamic principles such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and dietary laws, they express these values through cultural norms aligned with Chinese ethics—such as harmony, cleanliness, and filial respect. This demonstrates that Islam in China is not a foreign entity, but rather an intrinsic part of the nation’s historical and cultural fabric (Ding, 2025). For Chinese Muslim communities, Eid is also a moment to revive Confucian values that align with Islamic teachings, such as filial piety, hard work, modesty, and social solidarity. Eid greetings often include the Mandarin expression *Kai zhai jie kuai le* (开斋节快乐 Happy Eid al-Fitr), respectfully exchanged across generations. Though rooted in distinct cultural origins, these values intersect and reinforce one another.

Food plays a vital role as a cultural bridge during Eid. Dishes such as halal beef noodle soup (清真牛肉面), halal dumplings (清真饺子), dates, and traditional Arab sweets are served side by side. These meals symbolize not only abundance and festivity but also act as cultural communicators. It is through taste and mealtime rituals that the fusion of Islam and Chinese tradition becomes most palpable—serving as a medium to strengthen social cohesion (Wang et al., 2022). The role of community institutions is also instrumental in shaping “Chinese Islam.” Local religious organizations, such as the Beijing Islamic Association, actively promote interfaith dialogue and Islamic education tailored to the Chinese context. During major festivals such as Eid, they invite non-Muslim local leaders to participate in the celebrations, organically fostering interreligious communication (Frankel, 2016).

This phenomenon is also significant from both geopolitical and sociological perspectives. In contrast to global narratives that often portray Islam as incompatible with Eastern traditions, the rooted practice of Islam within

Chinese culture challenges such stereotypes. It presents a vision of Islam that is harmonious, localized, and peaceful (Abt (欧克德), 2015). In conclusion, the study's two central questions can be synthesized as follows: The ethnic diversity among China's Muslim communities—such as the Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, and others—enhances the multicultural expression of Islam during Eid celebrations. Diversity is embraced as a collective strength rather than a source of division. Meanwhile, Islamic tradition and Chinese culture do not merely coexist; they converge into a new identity: Chinese Islam—an expression of faith grounded in *sharia* yet breathing through the rhythms of local culture.

Looking ahead, the model of Eid celebrations at the Niujié Mosque offers a valuable case study for the development of inclusive Islam within multicultural societies—not only in China but also in other nations facing similar challenges in integrating religious values with cultural pluralism. This study affirms that Islam possesses an inherent capacity to adapt, engage, and coexist harmoniously within a wide range of cultural landscapes.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the Niujié Mosque in Beijing stands as a significant symbol of Islamic presence within China's multicultural society. As the oldest mosque in Beijing and the central hub of religious activities for the Muslim community, Niujié Mosque functions not only as a place of worship but also as a social and cultural space where the dynamic process of acculturation between Islam and Chinese traditions takes place. The Eid al-Fitr celebration at this mosque offers concrete evidence that ethnic diversity—including Hui, Uighur, Kazakh, and international Muslim communities—can coexist and mutually enrich one another in the spirit of solidarity. In the context of a predominantly non-Muslim society and under a tightly controlled political system, Muslims in Beijing have shown resilience in maintaining their religious identity while adapting to the surrounding social and cultural environment. Islamic traditions such as Eid prayers, charitable giving, and sharing of halal food are harmonized with local customs through the use of language, attire, architecture, and uniquely Chinese social etiquette. These forms of acculturation reflect an ongoing and peaceful negotiation of identity.

Moreover, the Eid celebration at Niujié Mosque also serves as a platform for intercultural and international dialogue, strengthening global Muslim solidarity within a

distinct local cultural framework. This illustrates that Islam, as a universal religion, possesses the flexibility to take root and flourish within a wide range of cultural contexts, including a country like China. As such, the Niujie Mosque and the traditions surrounding it stand as a concrete representation of pluralism, cultural resilience, and the integration of religious values with local traditions in the lives of Chinese Muslims.

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