

Asian Hajj Routes: The Reflection of History and Geography

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Abstract: The rise of Islam in East and South-East Asia effectively marked a turning point in the political, cultural and economic history of the entire region. Changes that took place in this area were clearly reflected in activities of day to day life and particularly in the case of land and sea trips from and to these areas which were deeply influenced by the emersion of a new travelling destination; the Hajj (i.e., pilgrimage). In the past decades, these routes were only dedicated to trade but have lately become one of the most important Hajj routes in history due to the human factor. This paper aims at collecting the bits and pieces available on this subject matter to present a comprehensive historical and geographical image for these routes which were known as the 'Asian Hajj routes.' The paper also introduces relations between this area and Arabic countries before the era of Islam, as well as, the Hajj land and sea routes to shed light on the civilization aspects of these routes.

Key words: Hajj • Routes • Malay World • China • Asia • India

INTRODUCTION

Hajj trips have long been seen as a prominent feature of the rise of Islamic civilization since Muslims from all over the world began to travel to Mecca for Hajj. These trips were historically documented alongside the numerous difficulties and risks pilgrims faced during their journey. Pilgrims headed to Mecca for the sake of Allah and out of their deep and strong passion towards the *Ka'bah* (Allah's House) and their wish and willingness to come nearer to the Prophet (s.a.w.). Hajj routes were laid out and established by a number of by Islamic states and dynasties following the rapid accelerated increase in the number of Muslims all over the world [1]. They took care of pilgrims during Hajj and showed great interest towards this religious ritual as part and parcel of their responsibilities towards their own people while simultaneously acquiring their satisfaction [1].

Truthfully enough, it might be said that that Hajj trips are to Muslims much more than an injection which leaves their body in a state of relief and liveliness. All alike, Hajj trips have enriched rural areas of the Islamic world with

large concentrations of faith and knowledge through pilgrims who consider Hajj as a tremendous turning point in their lives and a suitable place for Islamic propagation. When pilgrims return home, they share their knowledge and experience with their people [2]. Furthermore, they also come into interaction with people they have on their way to Mecca, which is just as meaningful to their experience. These routes later became civilizational indicators reflecting in part societies' respective development and level of Islamic knowledge. In order to reach a sufficient background regarding the scholarly life of Muslim societies, their social interactions and economical and social changes it is highly necessary to examine Hajj routes from all aspects; as found in its stopping points and the civilizational influence it holds on the lands it passes through, be they Mecca or far away from it [3].

Among the main Hajj routes in the history of Islam are those of the Asian Hajj routes. These routes link the East and South-East Asia with the Arabian Peninsula. In history, the most well-known Hajj routes are that of the Asian's and are known as: the Iraq route (*Darb al-Iraq*) and the Damascus route (*Darb al-Shâm*).

Due to a lack of information on Hajj routes from India, China and Malay lands, which is in sharp contrast to other Hajj routes which have had numerous books written on them, this paper is a comprehensive effort at compiling scattered information related to the Hajj routes in these areas. Moreover, it sheds light on the historical developments of these routes on a geographical basis (i.e., the places from which Hajj trips began and the places it passes through). Finally, it intends to present the different types of Hajj routes, their tracks and potential risks confronting the caravans.

Historical Relations Between East and South-east Asia and the Arabic Countries: Strong trade relations played a large role in tightening the ties among dispersed countries of the Asian continent. The movement of trade was effective long ago (estimated to predate Christ) between the Far East and Middle Asia and the far West. As such, trade passes through numerous routes paved and used by people to ensure their life's needs and to further comply with human nature of exchanging goods and work. The routes were largely varied and ramified and were totally secured for people's movements during that time [4].

Many different sea and land routes were known in the history of Arabic relations with the Far East. The most distinguished and notable one amongst them was known as the *silk route*; and was furthermore well known to many people regardless of their religious background or location of residence. The *silk route* was paved by China [5], which was eager to strengthen its land trade with South Asia, the Arabic countries, Europe and Northern Africa. The route was named following the vital

importance of the silk trade which took place between China and the West through this route. Archaeologists discovered that the *silk route* was first established during the Chinese Han dynasty during the 1st century B.C [5]. The route at that time was divided into two branches; namely the Northern route leading to Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Iran and proceeding to the West, Alexandria of Egypt and Antakya of the Levant, as well as the Southern route which passes through Pakistan, Kabul of Afghanistan, the Arabian Gulf and reaches Alexandria and Rome through the sea route [6]. Movement between the East and the West was made effectively closer due to these complicated land routes. Chinese history indicates that walnuts, cucumbers and black pepper were brought via the Western route. During the Tang dynasty (7th-9th century) [7], the *silk route* flourished due to the Chinese importing of birds, rare animals, jewelries, spices, glass utensils as well as gold and silver coins from the West. China also brought in music, dancing, food, fashion and ornamentation from West and Middle Asia [7]. On the other hand, China successfully exported crops and other Chinese products in addition to rare technology and products such as silk, papermaking, printing, plated and ceramic utensils, and the compass [8]. This import and export took place on the *Silk Route* which effectively sped up the process of international civilizational development. This in turn has paved the way for trade and cultural relations between Arabic countries and China through the goods located in al-Hirah (a city located in south-central Iraq) which was under the control of Persia and Antakya then under Byzantine rule. Prior to Islam, Persia and Antakya were frequently visited by Arabs for trading purposes [9].



The *Silk Route* in the 1st century according to the Gregorian calendar

However, the *Silk Route* was not the only route which linked the Arabian Peninsula with Asia and the Far East. Long ago, the Indian Ocean served as a highly active sea route that linked all islands and countries together [4]. The importance of the *Silk Route* however decreased substantially after the political and economic changes which took place in Europe and Asia following the 9th century. This was particularly so especially after the technological development in sea navigation that activated the role of sea in trade. The *Silk Route* lost its significance gradually, especially following the unstable conditions inherent in Middle Southern Asia due to the rise of the Mongols in Northern India and the appearance of the Safavids in Iran [10]. The Safavids were well known for their deep hatred and animosity towards the most powerful Empire in the world at that time which took control of Islamic countries; namely the Ottoman Empire. The Safavids further hampered and restricted the movement of trade used to supply the Othman Empire with goods. Therefore, the *Silk Route* dwindled in importance as a land route, especially with regards to its Southern entryways [11].

According to history, Arab international trade relations were strong with India which was more like an open shopping center receiving the Arab's ships which dominated international trade in the Indian Ocean for a long period of time. The Arabs succeeded in controlling sea trade due to the limited role of Indians in production as well as trading. The Chinese, on the other side utilized the Indian Ocean for trading decades prior to Christ. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 B.C.), the sea route in South China (beginning in Canton city- Guangzhou-) became an official passage and an international trade route [12]. Chinese ships made long trips between China and Western India ports whereas the Arabs made their trips along the Eastern side of the Indian ocean. Their ships sailed from the Arabian Gulf and shores of Yemen to Western India and Southern Indian coasts. As a consequence, they met traders from China and India and bought from them Chinese and Indian products. In return, Arabs sold them Arabian Peninsular goods such as *bukhoor* which was highly popular, perfumes, copper, chewing gum and pearls [4]. When the Chinese and Indian products reached the Arabian Peninsula, Arab traders carried them on ships and camels through special land and sea routes until they reached Persia, Iraq, the Levant, Egypt, the Ethiopian coast and Europe. This trade movement effectively took part in activating what is now known today as the Transit Trade which existed between the Far West and Far East [4]. The sea routes which linked

the two far ends were various and diverse. Al-Marwazi, who lived during the 12th century, refers to the trade route the Arabs took to reach China: "The first seaport you meet when taking the route from China along the sea is in the city of *Luqir*, then *Khanfu* city which is larger than *Luqir* and has a big sweet river flowing in the middle of the city and is equipped with bridges. On one side of the river, there are the markets of foreign traders while the opposite side is occupied by the local traders and is usually visited by Persian and Arab traders [13]."

Generally, the most important sea trips which took place between China, Arabic countries and countries West of Asia used to sail from Canton, Hangzhou, Ningbo and other international trading ports passing through the Southern Sea while then heading to the South along the shore until the island of Con Dao (Vietnam) [14]. The trip would then continue to the South, sailing from Phan Rang and Nha Trang (on the Eastern coast of Vietnam and Cham) until it arrived in the Straits of Malacca in the South. It would head to the North then to the West until it reached Sri Lanka which is on the opposite side of the Northern parts of India [15]. It would progress further towards the West until the Strait of Hormuz where the way would then split into two routes: the first route leading to the Arabian Gulf until al-Ablah (near the effluent of Shutt al-Arab) flowing towards the North to the River of Tigris until it reached Basra then Baghdad. The other route would continue to flow until Aden in the Far South-West of the Arabian Peninsula then towards Jeddah and other seaports of the Red Sea [11].

Culturally, through these land and sea routes, ideologies and religious thought rode the back of camels and sailed on ships to spread throughout the world. This paved the way for Islam to easily make its way to the Middle and East Asia. In addition to this, the geography of the land was paved for Muslim conquerors and traders who practiced Islamic propagation, as a result of their long experience in these routes. For this reason, Islam did not have to wait long for it to reach China when Muslims first entered China during the beginning of the 3rd decade (21st A.H.) during the period of the 3rd Caliph Othman bin Affan (R.A.) [16]. Muslims settled officially in Arakan (now known as Burma) during the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid's reign in the 7th century [17]. Muslims have also succeeded in conquering lands from Middle Asia to Northern China when led by their famous Arab leader Qutaybah bin Muslim al-Bahili who intentionally allowed Arab conquerors to settle in Middle Asia and integrate with the society there. Due to this, a new society

with an Arabic and Islamic culture was founded. Following the conquest of Middle Asia, many Arab migrants who were looking for stability and permanent residency settled there for long periods of time [4]. This resulted in an active cultural interaction based on Arabic as the dominant language. Later on, Arabic became the official language of culture in these areas. Thus, it seems that the settling down in these areas has led to the flourishing of an intellectual movement in Middle Asia. This was clearly reflected by the large numbers of Muslim scholars, poets, writers and philosophers who arose in these areas and influenced the entire Islamic world. All these changes imposed different type of trips other than trade which was dominant for ages. The new trips were mainly established to perform Hajj and to strengthen relations with the Islamic countries at that time, especially with Mecca and Medina [18].

Trade relations did not only link China, India and the Arabic countries together but also included all residents who settled on the borders of the Indian Ocean, among whom were the Malay. The Malay resided in lands where Arab traders used to pass through and therefore, they had no choice but to be in contact with the Arabs, especially following the growing importance and significance of the Malaccan straits due to a number of disturbances which left trade routes unstable [19]. For example, trade routes were closed in 266 A.H.-879 C.E. due to the Chinese revolution led by Hwang shu. The revolution broke out from the city of Canton which was the center of the Islamic-Chinese trade. Following this revolution, China's policy towards foreign traders and ports was changed, causing them to be closed [15]. As a result, many Muslim traders decided to head towards the Malay Archipelago where they were welcomed by the Malay people and where their trading procedures were eased [11]. Al-Mas'udi refers to this when he relates the story of a Samarqandi trader who travelled from his country carrying with him many goods until he reached Iraq, took some of his goods and then proceeded to Basra following which he sailed to Oman and from there to Kolah (which lies midway between China and the Arabic states) where he traded with Chinese traders:

Muslim ships from Siraf and Oman stop at Kolah then they gather with those who are leaving China. However, this was not the case a long time ago as Chinese ships used to sail from Oman, Siraf in the Persian coast, the coasts of Bahrain, Ablah and Basra [20].

This stoppage of trade was a highly important incident in the Islamic history of this area as relations between Malay people and Islam was officially established. Arab traders, especially the Hadhramis, came to settle and trade in this area [21]. This effectively marked the beginning of the smooth spread of Islam in Malay lands. History indicates that the official existence of Islam in the Malay Archipelago dates to the 7th century (A.H.). The local museum of Jakarta presents an ancient stone taken from a tomb on which Arabic carving was found [22]. The carving records the death of the first Muslim ruler in Northern Sumatra which was in 696 A.H./1297 C.E. and who was residing in the city of Pasay. According to the carving of the stone, the Muslim ruler was known as the 'Good King'; that being his surname. On the other hand, Aceh (now a present-day state in Indonesia) played a rather vital role in international trading and cultural communication [23]. Moreover, the closing of all Chinese seaports for the second time in the 8th century (A.H.) by the Ming Dynasty effectively strengthened Arab-Malay relationships. Later on, Malay lands became a solid part of the Islamic world, which paved the way for the establishment of what was known following Islam as the Hajj trips [11].

Asian Hajj Land Routes: Pilgrims went through various routes to reach Mecca, the city to which their hearts were attached and their sights were directed. They could not hide their eagerness to see the city and experience its uncountable blessings. On the other hand, political and economic conditions played a role in activating Hajj routes [3]. Historical and geographical traces of Asian Hajj routes show a great deal of overlapping and integration between human activities, in addition to a number of vicissitudes, which almost united the aims of Hajj trips. The continuous trading journeys throughout the year have covered many details regarding Hajj routes as the travelers and geologists who recorded these details have often accompanied trade convoys or were traders. Hajj routes from Eastern and South-East Asia did not experience such a logistical change as with that of the Arabian Peninsula. Caliphs and Muslim rulers established new routes only for Hajj. They dug wells alongside routes and built institutions, caravansaries and hotels to ease the Hajj journey for pilgrims coming from Iraq, the Levant, Turkey, Egypt, North Africa and other places [24]. On the other hand, Hajj routes from China, the Malayan Archipelago and India did not witness the same thing as these routes were established long before Christ by ancient civilizations in the area to strengthen their

relationships and to ease the movement of trade from and to their markets. This is best represented by the land and sea Hajj routes. In addition, to this, these Hajj routes were very flexible and varied due to political and economical reasons. For example, the Iraqi, Levant and Egyptian Hajj routes experienced many changes throughout the Hajj season of Hajj. The Levantine and Egyptian Hajj routes were changed and have remained unstable for about two centuries due to crusader occupation of some of the cities in Levant [25]. The occupation involved Karak (a city in Jordan now) which lies on the borders of the Arabian Dessert from the side of Tabuk (a city in Saudi Arabia) which is considered one of the most important stations of the Hajj routes [26].

The situation in Near Eastern Asia however, is different due to a number of reasons. The most influential reason here is the absence of united Islamic polities such as those that rose in Iraq, the Levant and Egypt. These polities officially undertook the security of Hajj routes and paid great attention to facilitate Hajj trips for pilgrims. The complexity of travelling at that time in addition to the difficulties and risks faced during Hajj trips necessitates religious political interference to secure the way and to pave new routes suitable for Hajj caravans, as well as afford accommodations, supermarkets and cafes which absorbed thousands of pilgrims and their livestock. With exception to the Mongolian Government in India, we may rarely find a government in these areas that gave great attention to Hajj trips as one of its official priorities. Therefore, Hajj trips were arranged through individual efforts rather than officially by the State. Muslims from these areas went to Hajj separately and in groups, on the basis of personal arrangements. Due to all this, tracing trade routes became a necessity for everyone intending to perform Hajj as there were no alternative routes. This integration between Hajj and trade routes led to the overlapping which we have previously stated between the two to the extent that Hajj trips may not be discussed as separate from trade convoys. The *Silk Route* is a good example of this as it was established before the appearance of Islam and before the birth of Jesus (a.s.) by five full centuries. The route remained active for more than 1500 years since that time and its importance was not limited to trade relationships among countries as it had then become by the time as an influential cultural and social passage in the areas around it [27]. Furthermore, the importance of the *Silk Route* went beyond trading purposes and extended to human values [28]. Religions were conveyed through this route as was the case with Buddhism and Islam in Asia [29]. The *Silk Route* was not

used to spread Islam in the East through Muslims' victorious horses only, but was also used for Hajj trips in the West towards the Holy city of Mecca where Islam was first established. Since the 2nd century after Hijra, Middle Asia became one of the main stations for Hajj trips. Islam reached places even further than this such as Western and Middle China. As a result, the Chinese city of Kashgar became totally Muslim and established relationships with the Islamic World through Samarqand [30]. Despite the lack of sufficient historical data on the start of Hajj trips during this date, the link between historical narrations and the fact that pilgrimage is considered the fifth pillar in Islam leaves no doubt that Hajj trips took part in these areas since the first centuries of Islam. This assumption is reinforced by the strong religious feelings accompanying newly converted Muslims who have without any doubt, performed the ritual of Hajj for many generations. However, this issue requires deeper research and analysis.

The *Silk Route* was not a single distinct route beginning in from China and linking it to other ancient civilizations lying on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Rather, the *Silk Route* is a web of routes beginning from China and each heading to different places. The two noticeable branches among them all were the Northern and Southern routes. Beginning with China, the Northern route passes through the Northern borders of Middle Asia to Bulgaria (in Georgia), passing by Eastern Europe and Crimea until the Black Sea, Marmara Sea and the Balkan Peninsula and finally to Venice [31]. The Southern route passes through Antakya (Northern Levant) and some cities in Iraq to the Zagros Mountains, Hamadan, Maru, Balkh, Samarkand, Kashgar and Turkistan in Northwestern China where the silk markets are located. The South route continues heading towards the south entering Chinese lands to Hsian where silk is manufactured [32].

According to historical records, the Northern and Southern routes of the *Silk Route* played an essential role in cultural exchange during the 4th and 5th century (A.H.) when the Seljuk Dynasty had control over most of these lands. During their dynasty, the area witnessed the peak of its intellectual and cultural interaction which grants us a clear background on Hajj trips which often accompanied scholarly trips all over the Islamic World. Nevertheless, this trade and cultural interaction was distracted during the 8th century due to Tibetan raids on oases in the North. In the 9th and 10th century, the route was found to be stable again after the Tibetan people converted to Buddhism [33].

The route linking China with the Islamic World was economically, socially and culturally active throughout its length. Beginning with Kashgar to Samarkand, Balkh, Maru and Hamadan, human activity in all its various forms took place. Due to several reasons, the Persian Oasis Cities were established. These cities were inhabited islands continuously facing Turanian raids and therefore were surrounded by huge baileys to secure the land and crops in a similar manner to the baileys surrounding Bukhara, Samarkand and Darband during the Sassanid dynasty. In addition to these security procedures, Muslims built other centers on the borders of Eastern and Northern Middle Asia to secure their lands and use them for military purposes by Muslim's armies in the region [33]. At the beginning, these centers were built for purely military purposes but were later turned into places of knowledge and Islamic propagation in Middle Asia. This clearly shows the connection between trade and Hajj routes in these areas and gives us a deeper look into how Hajj trips used to begin within the spread of Islam and the control of Muslim rulers of these respective routes [33]. It is worth noting here that the security and stability imposed on these regions by Islamic, scholarly and military centers effectively secured land-based Hajj trips to a large extent and eased the long journies by affording hostels, caravansaries, markets, water wells and many other facilities to make the trip relatively comfortable for pilgrims and traders. The hostels built along the Hajj routes were equipped with bookstores, schools, reception rooms and centers to protect pilgrims and passersby from disturbance and robbery and to provide them with security and comfort to continue their way to Mecca and other Islamic countries prior to returning to their hometowns. This encouraged many Muslims to perform Hajj. Ibn Jubair who is a voyager from the 6th century describes the large number of pilgrims coming from the Middle and East Asia during his Hajj trip with Iraqi pilgrims: "This Iraqi Hajj caravan was joined by many pilgrims from Khurasan, Mosel and many others who came along with the leader of the caravan that it made them difficult to count [34]."

Historical sources mention that even pilgrims from India which held no link with the Arabic countries other than that of the sea began to travel by land due to the high security of these routes. Indian pilgrims went to Mecca through Iran and Iraq but had to take the sea route [35] again due to significant political changes in India and Persia which influenced Hajj trips at the beginning of the 6th century. The Safavids took over Persia and imposed the twelve schools of *Shi'a* over the lands they

conquered which placed them in political and ideological confrontation with the Ottomans [36], who represented the Sunni Islamic World in general at that time and overlooked the management of the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina. Consequently, the Safavids hampered transportation within the Islamic World and restrained the facilities made by Ottomans for Hajj trips from India due to their ideological and political animosity towards the Ottomans. Since then, Indian pilgrims had no doubt that the land route through Persia (a *Shi'i* empire) was no longer safe for their Hajj trips, with their sea routes becoming better alternatives [37]. On the other hand, the Mongols succeeded in conquering Northern India in the twenties of the 16th century and established the Islamic Empire by Zahir al-Deen Muhammad Babir, an individual of Tamerlane ancestry who conquered Punjab in North India and continued his conquest until the rise of his empire in 1526 B.C. During the rule of his two antecedents; Muhammad Hamayun Badshah and Jala al-Deen Muhammad Akbar, the Empire became the most strongest political and martial Government in North India [38]. Throughout the rule of India by the Mongols, the area experienced a period of peace and calm, which effectively enabled India to strengthen relations with Islamic centers in the Arabian Peninsula [39]. The Mongolian Empire considered organizing and facilitating Hajj trips as one of its responsibilities in a similar manner to the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman Empires. Therefore, the Mongols appointed leaders for Hajj convoys and provided them with all that they required in addition to security. Mongolians competed in sending presents and masterpieces to the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina. Some of the sources refer to Hajj trips during the Mongol Empire as a turning point, for the reason that since then Mongols have taken great care of this particular religious ritual and sent soldiers along Hajj routes to protect pilgrims [39]. For example, history books state that when the Mongolian king, Babir (1418-1530) won the battle of Banipet in 1526, he sent valuable gifts to Mecca and Medina to exhibit his thankfulness to Allah for this victory. Moreover when King Himayun (1508-1556) defeated his brother Camran after several battles, he sent him to Hajj and allowed him to perform Umrah and sent with him many presents and masterpieces. In addition to this, when Bairam Khan lost the battle against the Mongolian King Akbar (1556-1605), he asked for permission to go to Hajj. It is related also that Madam Calyun Bigham and Salimah Sultan from the Mongolian family went to Hajj in 1575 B.C. as Sultan Akbar sent them off with presents and gifts [39].

The attention paid to Indian Hajj convoys continued even following the weakening of the Mongol Empire. For instance, although Sultan Muhammad Bahadırshah (1775-1862) did not hold strong control over the areas he ruled, he nonetheless took on the responsibility of sending three full ships of pilgrims every year, fully laden with presents and masterpieces to Mecca and Medina [40].

It is worth pointing out that Indian trips to Hajj were often made through sea routes, but many pilgrims nonetheless chose the land route due to the closeness of India to the Arabian Peninsula, especially for those residing in Sindh (present-day Pakistan) which was under Mongolian rule. Therefore, pilgrims from Sindh had to go through Persia only to reach Arabic lands. However, land and sea Hajj trips setting off from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were also judged by politics which controlled people's movements in these areas [40]. Whereas the conquest of Safavids led to the constriction and deactivation of land routes for Indian pilgrims, the appearance of pro-crusader Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and along Arabic shores in the beginning of the 16th century helped in deactivating sea trips and thus influenced sea Hajj trips. Due to these changes, a number of Indian pilgrims preferred to take the land route for Hajj through Iran despite its riskiness.

Pilgrims coming from China and nearby countries who converted to Islam were less lucky, as performing Hajj for them was a trip of a life time where one may not insure his safe return home due to the long distance between them and Mecca and due to the risks they face on their way. Only a few of them would make it back home safely as according to al-Mas'udi, they required more than four months to reach Mecca [20] and the same amount of time to return home.

Although scarce information is available on Chinese Hajj trips in the past decades, one may deduct a number of facts from the very few trips which continued to nonetheless set off. When Chinese Muslims intended to leave for Hajj, they had to move prior to Hajj time by at least six months and pass through the Kunlun Mountains amidst China and India. There were two routes to cross the Mountains; one of them which afforded water wells and had villages on its sides and required three months to cross it. The other, which is the harder choice but shorter, had no signs of life and needed one month to cross it but was fraught and full of danger. If the Chinese pilgrim chose to take the second route then he had to prepare two horses, one for him to ride and the other to carry his goods. This route lacked any facilities and a

passerby may only get the chance to meet some of dead bodies belonging to pilgrims who passed away during their Hajj trip. After crossing the mountains, pilgrims reached Kashmir in Northern India. They continued their journey until Sindh where they had the option to sell their horses and some of their goods, then leave to Karachi or Bombay in India towards Jeddah taking the sea route to reach Mecca [41]. The whole journey takes six months and sometimes a whole year. Many of these pilgrims would reach Mecca late, for one reason or another and miss out on the season of Hajj. In that case, they would settle in Mecca waiting for the next season of Hajj the following year. However, this was not the only land-sea Hajj route for Chinese pilgrims. History has recorded for us one of the rarest journeys by Chinese pilgrims known as Mafaju's journey to the Holy lands. In his journey, Mafaju took a different route other than that which was those mentioned before due to the political reasons that influenced the area at his time.

The small number of records on Chinese Hajj trips raises difficulty in perceiving a clear outline of the features of Chinese Hajj routes. However, one can outline two main routes used by Chinese pilgrims; the land route which we came across previously and the sea route. The sea route begins from the coasts of the China Sea in Southern China. Despite the difficulties mentioned regarding the Hajj land route, it seems that more pilgrims choose to take this route rather than that which the sea presented. This was due to the Islamic geographical distribution in China, as the population of Muslims increases in the West-North borders, known in history as Turkistan. This area is quite far from the Chinese sea ports of the South with one needing to cross thousands of kilometers to get there. This added more burdens on the movement of Chinese pilgrims to reach the Arabian Peninsula [42]. Pilgrims found it easier to go through Middle Asia by passing through Samarkand until Sindh and then travelling sea or continuing their way to Persia and Iraq which were inhabited by the Turks who shared the same race of the Chinese people of Turkistan, thereby lifting many of their difficulties [42]. On the other hand, Hajj trips from Chinese seaports are found to have been less active due to the small number of Muslims in Middle and Southern China. Muslims in these areas mainly settled in large trading cities and in some areas established earlier by Arab and Muslim inhabitants. Therefore, the presence of Islam in these areas may not be compared with that of Western China nor the amount of its respective number of pilgrims.

CONCLUSION

The ancient trade roads played a significant role in shaping the commercial and intellectual relations between the Arabic Peninsula and the far east of Asia, it is rooted back centuries before Christ, the silk road which was paved by China was the most prominent one. Culture religion tradition and trade moved freely during centuries creating a case of unique oriental harmony. After the rise of Islam as cross-cultural religion in western part of Asia the trade roads took a considerable part in transforming it to the eastern part in the first years of Islamic expansion, However the same road after just a year's became the main road to bring back a new bloods to the Arabic peninsula as pilgrims from China and Central Asia, the way of the pilgrims was not paved as it the another ways of Hajj in Iraq and Egypt, it may be due to the lack of the central governments in that areas and the number of the pilgrims itself which is probably didn't exceed tens or a few hundreds every years.

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