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## Little Mecca in Canton: representations and resurgences of the graveyard of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqās

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### ABSTRACT

The tomb of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqās, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad mythologized to have as having been buried in Canton, has attracted pilgrims from across China and beyond for the past three centuries. The repertoire on Abi Waqqās, an arriver from Mecca buried in Canton, is intriguing less for its factual veracity than the its manifold afterlives of the personage. This paper expands the scope of existing scholarship on Islam in China by directing attention to the previously unexamined textual corpus – stele inscriptions, imperial geographic surveys, mosque records, print periodicals, and recent unofficial historical surveys that date between from the fourteenth century and to the present. Transported between different mediums, Abi Waqqās as an ancestral figure has provided a powerful regenerative force for Chinese Muslims' historical consciousness that unfolds through a circular rather than linear time, and incorporates distant geographies without physical mobility. Moving beyond the textual realm, repetitions of the narrative materialized into a cemetery – a focal point that has mediated long-distance travels and donation networks; absorbed hybrid religious rituals ranging from ancestor worship grave rituals to dhikr practices; and capitalized on the Chinese state's rhetoric of silk roads diplomacy. By unearthing rediscoveries of a symbolic figure through tides of time, the article shows how a supposedly unscientific myth narrativized conceptions of dual homes, here and elsewhere, and further established a regional Islamic hub, or a "little Mecca" in coastal China.

### KEYWORDS

Islam; historiography; religion and politics; space and time; China

Genealogical histories and transnational circulations intersect in the Abi Waqqās mosque-cemetery complex in the bustling city of Canton. It is the supposed burial site of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqās, the uncle and Companion of Prophet Muhammad who is memorialized as the harbinger of Islam in China. In the walled, arboretum-like complex that sprawls more than 23,000 square feet are the shrine-mausoleum of Abi Waqqās, a mosque dedicated to him, and graves and epitaphs of people buried in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the same time, by the end of 2019, there were unmissable political icons – the flags of the People's Republic of China hanging atop the mosque and copies of the Constitution liberally distributed on tables across the complex. Following the 'four

advances' campaign implemented under the Islamic Association of China in 2018,<sup>1</sup> mosques across China had placed the flag and the Constitution on public display. Guards stood by the complex during Friday afternoon gatherings. The sacred symbols of the nation are now permanent relics visible from every angle at the heart of a religious and communal sphere.

Notwithstanding this surveillance, the mosque-cemetery complex still functions as a central place of congregation for residents and visitors in and out of China. In December 2019 when I visited the site, the grave was one of several destinations for domestic religious tourism. Dozens of Chinese Muslim pilgrims from the northwestern Qinghai and Gansu Provinces were frequenting the mausoleum daily during a two-week tour organized on the messaging platform Wechat. A middle-aged woman explained that the group had been paying homage to emblematic mosques and graves around China for eighteen days, using trains and rented buses; they had already visited the Baba Mosque (巴巴寺 Sichuan Langzhong 阆中), Luling Mosque (鹿龄寺 Shaanxi Hanzhong 汉中), the Phoenix Mosque (凤凰寺 Hangzhou), the Puhaddin tomb (普哈丁墓 Yangzhou), and were soon headed for Sanya, Hainan Island. She added that the grave of 'Gess' (*Gaisimu* 盖斯墓) in Hami (eastern Xinjiang), one of two figures mythologized as having travelled to China with Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās, has been renovated.<sup>2</sup> In the afternoon, tourists from Malaysia flowed into the mausoleum wing, as their systematized travel itinerary included a short stop at the grave during afternoon prayer hours. At Friday gatherings, hundreds of women from across China sat packed in the mausoleum wing, and a larger number of men from Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East filled the rest of the complex.

The arrival and burial of Abī Waqqās in Canton is intriguing less for its factuality than for the continuous replications and reformulations of historical narratives about the figure, the way they have adjusted to changing contexts, and the effect such repetitions have had on the building of a transnational hub. At the turn of the twentieth century, as I explain in a later section, Christian missionaries and Chinese Muslim intellectuals alike raised doubts about the veracity of the tale: after all, Abī Waqqās is known to have died in Medina. This scrutiny, however, unravelled neither the narrative nor the cemetery site. In the words of a Chinese Muslim scholar writing in 1988, the mausoleum of Abī Waqqās, together with the historic Huaisheng mosque three miles to the south he is said to have built, had become one of the two 'sacred grounds' in the city (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 2). The 'death anniversary' (*darenji* 大人忌) of Abī Waqqās – November 27 in the Islamic calendar (Dhu al-Qa'dah) – continues to be commemorated.

The grave of Abī Waqqās brings into sharp relief how understandings of the past are inextricably linked to the making of sacred places that, in turn, shape social practices and mediate trans-local circulations. Scrutinizing congregational sites where genealogical narratives and sojourners converge widens the social space of the so-called 'Muslim minorities' in China beyond their interlocked relationship with the state as a minority ethnicity, and further incorporates Chinese-language Muslims into an expansively defined framework of Islamic history (Thum 2019). Since 1949, the PRC state has classified the heterogeneous Muslim communities dispersed across China into ten different minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族) – including Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Salar, Kyrgyz, Bao'an – that constitute fifty-five minority ethnicities apart from the Han majority. Pre-twentieth century imperial China recognized and manipulated differences between

religious groups and borderland populations (Elliott 2001; Crossley 2000; Tackett 2017), but the rise of anti-Manchu Han majoritarian nationalism toward the end of the Qing Empire rigidified the boundaries between ethnic categories. Ironically, Sun Yat-sen proclaimed China as a republic of five nationalities (Han, Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus, Hui) following the outlines of the Qing Empire to retain the imperial borderlands (Duara 1995, 65–82), with ‘Hui’ meaning all Muslims residing across China and present-day Xinjiang. But even then, who exactly constituted the Han and Hui, whether the two should be separated, and how to define the category of Uyghur –Turkic-speaking Muslims concentrated primarily in Xinjiang, which Qing China had conquered in the mid-eighteenth century – was intensely debated among intellectuals and politicians in the first half of the twentieth century (Brophy 2016; Cieciura 2016).

As scholars have noted, the minority ethnicity paradigm positions non-Han populations as culturally subservient (Gladney 2004; Jacobs 2008). In post-socialist PRC, where class struggle or the fight against the Japanese empire/Nationalist Party has lost ideological leverage, the onus is on minorities to prove past and present loyalty to China as an organically defined nation through affective investments. The logic of new minority nationality historiography is such that minorities are ‘endowed with a ‘motherly’ instinct to protect and nurture China, rather than desert it, let alone conquer it’ (Bulag 2010, 154).

Minoritization, in the words of Engseng Ho, ‘is about assigning one-dimensional meanings and valuations to identities, creating unambiguous ethnic signs in discourse. Parochialization helps accomplish this effect by reducing possibilities of spatial mobility’ (Ho 2002, 15). Extending the time frame of analysis across the premodern and modern divide reveals Chinese Muslims’ rhythms of historiographical productions, and the lasting impact such narrations have on the ebbs and flows of Islamic enclaves in Canton. The article treats self-ascriptive Muslim communities’ conceptions of the past as a legitimate subject of study, repositioning Chinese Muslim ideational and social formations as dynamic arenas in which inter-Asian mobilities and imaginaries have converged and been reproduced. As Engseng Ho notes, inter-Asian connections may ‘disappear in one place only to reappear in another, that can recede into the past but reappear in a future time’ (Ho 2017, 908).

In the past decade, an increasing number of studies has taken a trans-local, transnational approach to Chinese Muslim communities (Wang 2020; Hammond 2020; Sager and Zeyneb 2016; Mao 2007; Al-Sudairi 2016; Chen 2014; Harris and Ha 2021). I seek to build on and expand this literature, which moves the field toward investigating overlapping Islamic networks across China and Asia at a scale wider than a specific province or region. This scale has defined the field – out of a legitimate desire to avoid essentializing an immensely heterogenous population (Lipman 1997; Frankel 2011), but the two aims need not be separate, nor should the approaches employed by historians and anthropologists. In the emerging studies on trans-regional Sino-Islamic connections, historians tend to centre questions of empire, construction of the nation-state, or the making of transnational nationalism, and ethnographic studies tend to attribute Chinese Muslims’ migrations and interactions across provinces and countries to increased post-1980s global contact. While these are important, there is a deeper history to Chinese Muslim networks in and outside of territorial China, and to cultural representations that create and remake hubs across time. Abī Waqqās’ grave serves as a gathering point for trading

communities across China, South Asia, Central Asia and Africa including Uyghur migrants (Matthews, Linessa, and Yang 2017, 168), and for what anthropologists Xiang Biao and Ma Qiang (Ramadan) call the return of Islamic ‘mobility assemblages’ in Guangzhou, whereby ‘historically shaped mobilities of various types come together contingently and in turn create something new’ (Biao and Ma 2019, 54).

The worldviews and circulations shown through Abī Waqqās in this article are partial segments of diverse, wide-ranging Sino-Islamic geographies and imaginaries that have been shaped by Arabic and Persian texts and lexicons and engagements across northwestern China-Tibet-South Asia (Hille and Horlemann 2015; Atwill 2018) and northwestern China-Xinjiang-Central Asia nexuses (Fletcher 1995; Ma 1986). Rather than purporting to present a holistic view, this article uses a site of Chinese-language Islam to show the reinforcing interplay between cross-spatial genealogical histories and the (re-)makings of a religious hub that transcends provincial, national, and regional geographic divisions. It offers an approach to studying Islamic congregational places elsewhere in China and beyond. More narrowly, the article complicates the existing scholarship on Abī Waqqās in China, which has focused on his appearances in the anonymous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts *Origins of the Huihui* (Benite 2002; Ma 2007). For the steles and epitaphs, I rely on the versions compiled, deciphered, and printed by Chinese Muslim scholars in the 1980s, in addition to those on the walls of mosques in Guangzhou. Scholars have studied Persian, Arabic and Chinese engravings erected by Muslim diaspora communities in coastal China in the medieval period that reflect cosmopolitan trade networks of the period (Chen 1984; Lane 2018). Steles and epitaphs of the subsequent centuries, however, have been understudied. Despite the limitations of the printed versions in terms of potential inaccuracies and exclusions, they present a new kind of material that yields rich social and cultural history.

The paper first explicates processes through which Abī Waqqās was engraved into different textual mediums as a collective ancestor from the fourteenth century onward, mediating creative imageries on the distant homelands of Mecca and Medina. In other words, accretions of meanings onto Abī Waqqās catalyzed fictive connections between dual homes of China and the holy cities – a linkage that enabled imagined travels. Repetition of such narratives on paper and stone, as shown in the second section, materialized into a replication of Mecca in Canton in the form of the grave that since the eighteenth century has been sustained by hybrid death rituals and circulations of pilgrims and patronages from near and far. In the last section, we see how the cemetery survived the radical turns of the twentieth century, emerging as a symbol of unity and authenticity in the early twentieth century, and then, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), again becoming a pilgrimage destination and a symbol of historic maritime silk roads from which the state has derived a language for cultural diplomacy.

### The travels and afterlives of Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqās in China

We may conceptualize Abī Waqqās as a collective ancestor who materialized into a locus through diverse kinds of recollections on travels and burials. In his seminal *To Take Place*, Jonathan Z. Smith spoke of Australian aborigines Tjilpa’s imageries of ‘totemic ancestors’ who, after journeying from place to place, ‘returned’ to the earth after the peregrinations. Their presence in the terrestrial domain is a metamorphosis that makes them ‘forever

available.’ (Smith 1992, 5) The ancestor, ‘through being displaced from his ‘self’ and being emplaced in an ‘other’ – in an object, person, or mark ... achieves permanence. He becomes forever accessible, primarily through modes of memorialization’ (112). Movements of ancestors are inscribed in a fixed time in the past; myth thus ‘begins with absolute duality,’ of ‘then’ and ‘now’ (112). In Tjilpa worldview, sacred places can be discovered in – rather than built on, as in the Temple of Jerusalem or the Church of Holy Sepulchre – distinctive topographical features through acts of recollection and sudden revelation.

Smith contrasted Tjilpa myths with formations of spatial and temporal ritual sequences in Jerusalem that could be replicated elsewhere, free from place. In parts of the Islamic world, however, ‘traces of ancestors’ were not only discovered and recovered in their death places, but simultaneously became liminal spaces of memorialization that generated exportable ritual and consumption practices (Ho 2006, 83–91). The sites could draw force from emic textual narrations regardless of the existence of material remains of the ancestors, at times incorporating bodies of ordinary people or mosques alongside the saintly figure’s tomb.

Abī Waqqās became fixed in time akin to a communal ancestor, but through cross-referential textual records. On mosque steles and dynastic geographic surveys from the fourteenth century onward, a time when China’s maritime primacy began to wane, Abī Waqqās appears as a precursor to Muslims in China – a sage who originated from the ‘homelands’ of Medina or Mecca, and then, upon arriving in Canton, oversaw the building of the Huaisheng mosque (懷聖寺) or ‘remembrance of the Prophet mosque’ on the bank of the Pearl River. The prominence of Canton in such narratives reflected its role as a major medieval emporium for Muslim diaspora trade networks, bolstered by the commerce-oriented Abbasid Caliphate, the pro-trade policies of Tang-Song-Yuan China, and the rise of Srivijaya, Java, Champa, and Chola states as maritime powers (Chaffee 2018, 23–65; Wade 2009). Known as Khanfu to Arab travellers such as Suleiman al-Tājir of the ninth century and as Šīn Kalān to the fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Battuta, the city hosted a flourishing community of Muslim traders who formed enclaves (*fanfang* 番坊) with their own headmen (Chaffee 2018, 2, 21–27, 35–36; Al-Sirafi 2014, 31). The Huaisheng mosque’s 35-meter-tall minaret, called Light Tower (*Guangta* 光塔), may have functioned as a lighthouse (Steinhardt 2015, 61).<sup>3</sup>

Important for the textual afterlives of Abī Waqqās was an inscription written in Quanzhou, also known as Zaytūn, an entrepot that superseded Canton between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Quanzhou hosted merchants from Korea, Buddhists from Srivijaya and India, Tamil-Hindu temple builders, and Muslim seafarers from southeast and west Asia (Chaffee 2018, 90–91). A merchant from Siraf in the Persian Gulf built the Qingjing mosque (清淨寺) in Quanzhou in 1131 (Chen 1984, 16–18; Chaffee 2018, 108–9). In 1350, Wu Jian 吳鑒, a scholar from present-day Fuzhou, was asked to compose a text to commemorate the mosque’s repair. Although Wu Jian’s original composition was effaced, the writing remained in the gazetteer *Annals of Quanzhou* (*Qingyuan Xuzhi* 清源續志) that he edited. In 1507, the words were copied from the gazetteer and again inscribed onto a tablet, now kept in Quanzhou’s Aṣhāb mosque (Chen 1984, 18).

Wu Jian gives a detailed description of the Quanzhou mosque and influential religious persons who were involved in its reconstruction, as well as his perceptions of the country of Arabs (*dashi* 大食) and the core tenets of Islam, referred to as the ‘pure teachings (*qingjing zhi jiao* 清淨之教)’. In the middle of the passage, Wu Jian mentions Waqqās in Canton:

'In the reign of Emperor Kai Huang of the Sui Dynasty, a Sahabat Sayyid Waqqās (*Sahaba Sanade Wogesi* 撒哈八撒阿的幹葛思) reached Guangdong (廣東) by sea from *Dashi* and erected a mosque (*jian libaisi* 建禮拜寺) at Canton (Guangzhou 廣州) which the emperor soon gave the honorary title of Huaisheng Si' (Chen 1984, 14).<sup>4</sup>

Besides Wu Jian's cosmological interpretations and observations about Quanzhou's Muslim community, which are outside this paper's scope, his composition is captivating for how it has been exported. Notwithstanding chronological inaccuracies – the Kaihuang reign of Sui Dynasty was between 581 and 600 and Muhammad did not receive divine revelations until 610 – excerpts were rewritten in the *Records of the Unity of the Great Ming* (*Da Ming Yitong Zhi* 大明一統志), an imperially-commissioned geographic survey of the Ming Empire and outer domains published in 1461. The 90-volume collection recorded geographies, environs, persons, customs, academies and histories of provinces of Ming China, devoting the last two books to foreign countries. Its section on 'the country of Medina' not only repeated Wu Jian's characterization of the Prophet Muhammad and the scriptures, but described Medina as the 'homeland' (*zuguo* 祖國) of the 'Huihui' people,<sup>5</sup> from which 'Ṣaḥaba Sa'd Waqqās' had come during the Sui Dynasty. Medina was also described as adjacent to 'Heavenly Square' (*Tianfang* 天方), or Mecca (Li and Wan 1461).

Notwithstanding the decline of trans-regional networks of Muslim diasporas after the Ming succeed the Yuan, figurative home places remained in textual forms.<sup>6</sup> Separate entries had existed for Mecca in travelogues and dynastic histories from the thirteenth century on – either as transliterations (i.e. *Majia* 麻嘉; *Mojia* 默加), or as the conceptual spatial translation of *Tianfang*, interpretable as Heavenly Abode, Heavenly Square, or Heavenly Direction.<sup>7</sup> At some point, however, Mecca also began being referred to as the homeland of Muslims. For instance, *Informative Records on the Countries Faraway* (*Shuyu zhoushulu* 殊域周諮錄), a 1583 encyclopaedic compilation on foreign countries, noted in its entry on Mecca that 'some say that Heavenly Square (Mecca) is the homeland (*zuguo*) of Muslims (*Huihui*)' (Yan 1583, juan 11). Likewise, the 'western regions' section of *History of Ming* compiled during the Qing Empire designated Medina as the homeland of Muslim (*Huihui*) people and as being close to the Heavenly Square (Mecca) (Zhang n.d., 1672-1755, 'Modena').

'Homeland' in this sense may be understood as a non-place; it lacks geographic specificity and remains a timeless site of origin, perhaps akin to Jerusalem for Jewish diasporas prior to its twentieth century re-territorialization (Ezrahi 2000). Possibly through textual references or word of mouth, different imageries of Sa'd Waqqās and the 'Heavenly Square' or the 'country of Medina' were inscribed onto mosque steles in eastern and central parts of China in the sixteenth century. The reconstruction inscription for the Fuzhou mosque in Fujian Province (1549), for instance, starts by stating that 'the construction of the mosque was to worship the teachings of the Heavenly Square (*Tianfang*).' It then describes Sa'd Waqqās as having sailed the seas and to Fujian (Min), instead of Canton; from then, 'the teachings spread out and permeated China, and mosques (*si*) were constructed everywhere' (Yu and Lei 2001, 70).

Abī Waqqās' arrival turned everywhere in China and beyond into potential homes. Hebei's Dingzhou mosque stele, which most likely dates to the 15th or sixteenth century (not its proclaimed date of 1348), identifies the 'country of Heavenly Square' (*Tianfang guo*) in the 'western regions (*xiyu*)', where lies an abode of worship surrounded



by four sides, as the origin place of Huihui teachings. As China was situated east of the 'western regions,' believers of the teachings turned westward.. The stele adds a twist to the Abī Waqqās narrative by stating that 'Ṣahāba Sa'd Waqqās ... started to transmit the teachings into China,' instructing 'forefathers to regard ten thousand countries as homes (*yi wanguo wei jia* 以萬國為家), worship the heavens as the roots, and not construct any images' (Yu and Lei 2001, 15).

If the coming of Abī Waqqās signified the elevation of any place in China as a potential abode for Islam, the Heavenly Square, Medina, and 'western regions,' were on the western end of the spatial spectrum. Articulated from afar, these were transcendental, utopic distant home places that emerged out of transmitted understandings of ancestral pasts. Such places did not have to bear specific names. An intriguing example comes from a tablet for a mosque in Beijing (1624), which portrays a site where the 'human ancestor' Adam appeared, followed by the birth of Sage Muhammad in the period of the Tang dynasty. This was where the teachings of *Qingzhen* – a historic term meaning clear and pure – had originated. Without giving any geographic denomination, it describes 'this country' as having 'scriptures consisting of 30 volumes and 6,600 chapters,' where 'peace, quietude, and noninterference (*qingjing wuwei* 清淨無為) constitute the law ... Sincerity makes up the mind, loyalty for the sovereign and filial piety constitute the Way ... people live and work in peace and contentment, and no evil plots and punishments for crimes exist.' 'Ṣahāba Sa'd Waqqās' from 'that country,' the text continues, started to 'transmit the teachings into China (*zhonghua* 中華) during the Kaihuang reign of the Sui dynasty. Thereupon, China had mosques of worship (*libai qingzhensi* 禮拜清真寺)' (Yu and Lei 2001, 6).<sup>8</sup>

The portrayal is reminiscent of the idealization of Europe among Chinese Christian converts after the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century. Certain Chinese Christian writers used Confucian understandings of an ideal society to represent Europe as lands far to the west endowed with fertile and rich soil, a place of 'peace and virtue where people did not pocket money they found on the street ... where seventy states coexisted in harmony' (Sachsenmaier 2018, 137). While spatial imaginaries of universalized religions in China shared similarities, for Sino-Muslim communities, genealogical notions and symbolic personages established tighter conceptual diasporic ties between China and distant home places in the west.

As seen in the texts' frequent emphasis on the importance of mosque building, mosques were material testaments to the 'teachings' arrival in China, and in a sense, miniature local reconstructions of the Heavenly Square. Constructing mosques could at times substitute for visiting Mecca in person. The stele that commemorates the reconstruction of Hebei's Zhangjiakou (1523) describes the duty of the hajj as 'paying homage to (*zhanli* 瞻禮) the five-colored jadeite square in the west.' This, however, could be substituted by establishing mosques (Yu and Lei 2001, 19). A similar notion is repeated in the Shanxi's Datong mosque reconstruction stele (1622), which, after explaining the four pillars of Islam, writes that since China could not 'pay homage (*zhanli*)' in multitude to the west, mosques would be constructed instead (31).

Abī Waqqās' purported building of the Huaisheng mosque thus reflected and reinforced the importance placed on mosque construction, which could turn anywhere into an autonomous sacred space. Secular writings of geographic surveys and dynastic histories combined with communal legendary narratives on Abī Waqqās to create a



repertoire that could be transferred between and modified in different sites. This raises a question: what consequences did re-inscriptions of Waqqās have in Canton itself?

### The burial and return of Abi waqqās

Turned into an ancestral figure through accumulated genealogical narratives, Abi Waqqās came back to life through his burial. His graveyard is situated approximately 2.5 miles north of the old Huaisheng mosque, near what had been the old north gate of Canton city (Broomhall 1910, 111). One of the earliest epitaphs unearthed from the communal cemetery dates to 1349 and is for a person named ‘Ramadan,’ a darughachi (達魯花赤; officially designated administrator and commander) from Korea (高麗人氏) stationed in Guangxi Province.<sup>9</sup> While records are scant for the next three and a half centuries, surviving stelae and epitaphs suggest that local and overseas travellers flowed into the cemetery grounds, and that the complex operated on endowments from those commemorating the ancestral figure of Abi Waqqās and their acquaintances buried beside him (Figure 1).

A 1751 trilingual Sino-Arabic-Persian epitaph, for instance, commemorates a certain ‘Hājji Maḥmūd ibn al-Hājji Muḥammad Afandī Rūmī’ (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 97). The epitaph begins with the Quranic verse: ‘Every soul will taste death. Then to Us will you be returned’ (29:57), followed by a hadith: ‘whoever dies a stranger or in a strange land dies a martyr.’ While details on the buried figure are unavailable, the adjective ‘Hājji’ and the surname adjective (*nisba*) ‘Rūmī’ – a term indicating the physical and cultural zone of the former Byzantine realm that Turkish speakers reworked into their vocabulary in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Kafadar 2007) – indicates that Hājji Maḥmūd was a traveller from Ottoman domains who had been to Mecca. The inscription indicates that he had performed the pilgrimage (*ziyāra* زياره) to Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqās, and stayed in ‘Masjid Darkahah (مسجد درگاهه).’ He died two years after arriving in Canton. The one Persian sentence says ‘Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqās (may God be pleased with him) deceased in the month of Dhul Hijjah, on the twenty-seventh.’<sup>10</sup>

The resurgence of the cemetery coincides with the revival of Canton as a focal point for oceanic exchanges. The Ming court’s bans on maritime trade and assimilative policies for non-Han populations who had aided the previous Mongol empire likely strained the vibrancy of Canton’s Muslim quarters. Moreover, as the Qing dynasty took control of Beijing in 1644, intermittent wars engulfed Canton for nearly three decades (Spence 1999, 49–53). Although the Huaisheng mosque and other Ming-era mosques remained intact, the wars may have damaged any remaining epitaphs and steles. In 1682, Qing China selectively lifted the imperial ban on foreign trade following the defeat of maritime threat posed by Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) in Taiwan, and in 1757, it restricted external trade with Europe to Canton. Through the eighteenth century to the end of the First Opium War (1842), Canton was the clearinghouse where British, Portuguese, Swedish, and Dutch companies paid dues and underwent custom checks through extensive arrangements known as the ‘Canton System’ (Dyke 2005).<sup>11</sup>

With the return of Canton as a maritime hub, Abi Waqqās cemetery attracted pilgrims, donations, scholars, and merchants from within and outside the city. In a 1785 stele that commemorates the granting of donations, we learn that a person named ‘Tani تنی’ who had been ‘residing abroad’ (*ju haiwai* 居海外) came to Guangdong (Yue 粵) by chance. His



**Figure 1.** Entrance to the Abi Waqqās Mausoleum. (Photo by Author, December 2019)

son, per his father's suggestion, purchased a building to be owned by the Huaisheng mosque. Every year, some of the rent was to be used for death anniversary ceremonies of the 'highly sage' (*gaoxian* 高賢), or Abi Waqqās, to give prayers (*du-a* 睹阿; *du'ā*) before the tomb (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 75). By then, the tomb of Abi Waqqās was known as 'Xiangfen (響墳),' translated as 'Tomb of the Echo' for the sound believed to reverberate from the tomb, or as 'Tomb of Offering (饗墳)' (Liu and Mason

1921, 276, note 8). The mosque's leaders and elderly (*shizhang*, *xianglao* 師長, 鄉老) were entrusted to decide the exact amount to be taken each year for the building Tani's son bought and endowed (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 102).

The donations show the hybrid rituals that developed around the tomb of Waqqās. Like Tani (or his son), others chose to use their endowments to hold death anniversary ceremonies for Waqqās. In 1825, 'Ma Chaosong, a Muslim (*mumin* 穆民) of Canton's Nancheng' bequeathed a building whose rent went to the joint coffers of the city's four mosques to be used for communal purposes. He added that some money be used to burn incense on every death anniversary of the Sage (*Xianxian* 先賢, referring to Waqqās), for which 'both the living and the dead will be grateful' (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 111)

From this we see how Chinese Muslims developed grave rituals for a symbolic figure whose scope of relevance far exceeds that of ancestors of a particular lineage group. Funeral rites have long been a central aspect of Chinese society, protecting the living by comforting and taming potentially volatile spirits into ancestors. Grave rituals, as anthropologist Ruby Watson puts it, are 'part of the process in which new orders, new status, and new power arrangements, are created' (Watson 1988, 204). Though 'the dead continue to be individuals' in the funeral rites, 'the longer the ancestor remains in the grave ... the more depersonalized he becomes ... in the end he becomes a symbol not a person' (205). As an expansive symbol connoting the transmission of Islam, the tomb of Waqqās absorbed local grave rituals while generating continuities beyond a particular kinship group or generation.<sup>12</sup>

Donors could commemorate Waqqās' death anniversary and have their families, acquaintances, or themselves remembered, or support institutions for education and lodging. In 1815, a man established a stele for his uncle from Changsha of Hunan Province, who died in Guangdong at 71 after spending twenty years there for studying. As the nephew could not stay in Canton, he purchased a store in the city, entrusting its monthly rent to the managers of the four mosques' public coffer for the Tomb of the Echo (*xiangfen sifang zhinian gongxiang* 響墳四方執年公箱). He asked that on every death anniversary of the Sage (*Xianxian*), one silver yuan be drawn from the public coffer to buy incense for the ceremony. He also asked that on the death anniversary of his uncle, another silver yuan be drawn to pay the year's manager to visit his uncle's grave, read scriptures and offer prayers (都阿du'ā) (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 113).

Women who lost husbands or children gave endowments for the upkeep of Islamic social institutions and the performance of grave rituals for their relatives. In 1840, Mrs. Yu Ma endowed two buildings left by her late husband to the Nancheng mosque and the Sages Ancient Mosque (*Xianxian Qingzhen Gusi* 先賢清真古寺), which had most likely been built in the seventeenth century to accommodate the graveyard's caretakers and visitors, to be used for education and communal purposes. She wanted to commemorate her husband's admiration for those who had given their properties for mosques and the Sages Ancient Mosque (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 117). The next year, Mrs. Jin Zhang combined properties left by her late husband and her savings to buy a building, designating the monthly rent of two silver yuan to be directed to the Sages Ancient Mosque. She requested that two silver yuan be drawn annually to burn incense on her husband's birthday and death anniversaries (120). In the late nineteenth century, a



widow who had lost her married daughter endowed an inherited building to the four mosques, ordaining that the monthly rent be used for the Companion's death anniversary ceremonies and other communal expenses. Because her husband had no male issue, she asked that after her passing, the donations also be used to visit graves and burn incense on the death anniversaries of her husband, parents in law, her daughter, and herself (Yu and Lei 2001, 284).

Textual records of Abī Waqqās, transported, circulated, and reconfigured on stone and paper, facilitated the streams of pilgrims' arrivals to the Companion's tomb. For instance, an 1815 stele celebrating the reconstruction of the Sages Ancient Mosque (Ma 2006) portrays pilgrims flocking to Abī Waqqās, a 'Sage' (*xianxian*) from the Heavenly Square. 'Among believers from within and outside who visited the grave ... there was none who did not recite the scriptures out of respect.' The situation had not changed for over a thousand years. The visitors' arrivals are referred to as 'hajj' (*hanzhi* 罕知). The course of the 'hajj' was such that the believers had, from a variety of texts, found out the presence of Islam and scriptures in China that had started from the Sage (Waqqās). These texts included *Records of the Most Venerable Sage from the Heavenly Square* (*Tianfang zhisheng shilu* 天方至聖實錄), which was a biography of the Prophet Muhammad (1721), 'various geographical surveys written during the Sui-Tang dynasties, collections on history, and books such as *Records of the Unity of the Great Ming*' (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 107).

As the stele shows, rediscoveries of textual records and biographic narrations strengthened the grave's position as a 'hajj' destination. The biography of the Prophet that the 1815 reconstruction stele mentions was composed in 1721 by an influential Chinese Muslim scholar from Nanjing, Liu Zhi (劉智 1660-1739). Liu included in the biography the widespread legend of the arrival of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās to Canton and his construction of the Huaisheng Mosque. Liu would have referred to, among other sources, the aforementioned fifteenth-century geographic survey *Records of the Unity of the Great Ming* (Broomhall 1910, 74-75). The 1815 stele designates the Heavenly Square as 'the homeland (*zuguo*) of Muslims (*Huihui*), [where] the light Adam had been passed on for fifty generations. The noble saint Muhammad was born, his spirits (*shenling* 神靈) were sincere and agile, the western regions submitted [to him] in earnest, and venerated him as Heaven's messenger' (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 107). The different texts describing Abī Waqqās as the origin point of Islam in China generated flows of visitors and donations, refashioning his supposed burial site as sacred.

Canton's incorporation into global British shipping networks in the aftermath of the Opium Wars (1839-42; 1856-60) seems to have increased the geographic range of Muslim sojourners flocking to the port. Already in the interim period between the two Opium Wars, in 1848, Ma Dexin, an influential scholar from Yunnan's Dali, had transited in Canton on his way back home from the eight-year pilgrimage journey to Mecca. After a nine-month-long stay in the new British port of Singapore, he reached Canton via a ship operated by a non-Muslim Bengali shipmaster and stayed in the Haopan mosque (濠畔寺). He returned to Yunnan through transits in ports along Pearl River tributaries.<sup>13</sup> (Ma 1861).

The Pearl River had long connected Canton with provinces farther west, providing transport for state officials, merchants, and diaspora families to form long-distance networks (Miles 2017). British victory in the two Opium Wars, however, backed by new artillery,

steamships, and the logic of free trade, crumbled the Canton system and transformed coastal China. After the First Opium War (1839~42), the Treaty of Nanjing (1843) designated Canton, Amoy (Xiamen), Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai as five open treaty ports. Once historic centres of maritime commerce and migration, now these ports were bridge-heads for European businesses' navigation and trade protected by extraterritoriality.

Epitaphs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggest that Canton's incorporation into modern imperial transport networks brought in Muslim scholars and pilgrims traversing between China's western regions and the Hejaz (western coasts of the Arabian Peninsula). 'Abdullah ibn Sha'bān al-Makkī, for instance, was a 'follower of Shāf'ī madhab and a propagator of Ṭarīqah Shādhilī' (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 149) a student of Al-Azīz al-Rashīd Muhammad Qāsim al-Makkī who passed away in Canton in 1889 at 46 and was buried in the graveyard of the Companion Waqqās.<sup>14</sup> His epitaph states: 'The place of his birth and home had been in honourable Mecca, and the place of his death and burial was in the strange land of China.' The Arabic inscription states that he had arrived through land, and reached Canton, Nanjing, and Gansu to spread his teachings; the Chinese version on the other hand describes him as a 'sage (xianxian 先賢)' from 'western lands of Mecca (xiyu manke 西域滿克)' who came through the seas (rather than overland) from 'western lands (xiyu)' to Canton in 1886, from which he travelled around Jiangnan, Henan, Shaanxi, and Gansu to spread the order. Returning to Canton in 1888, he is said to have garnered great respect and welcome from his students, teaching them tirelessly day and night at a school. Unfamiliar soil, water, and food, however, made him fall ill (152).

Also buried there were pilgrims and scholars from Hezhou in southern Gansu, an epicentre where shrine-tomb complexes of Sufi orders in China are concentrated. They were most likely returning from Mecca through the sea route. Ma Xiaoxian was a scholar from Hezhou's Yayou village who had undertaken the pilgrimage 'to the House of God (*beit Allah*),' and passed away in a school in Canton in 1899 aged eighty. His son and nephew erected a Sino-Arabic epitaph in his honour (157-158). Fa Mingdao or Muhammad Omar of Gansu's Hezhou ( محمد عمر القانسخوجوي ) was a 'scholar of law ( عالم الفقيه ),' a 'hajji' and a 'murshid,' or spiritual guide, born in 1854. Hezhou's elderly, the leaders of the Haopan mosque (濠畔寺), and his two sons established the epitaph in his honour in 1911, expressing hopes that God would make his tomb the highest place in paradise (167-168) (Figure 2).

With increased travels, a Mecca-bound pilgrim from Yunnan sojourning in Canton 'verified' the presence of the grave in Canton. *Genealogy from the West (Xilai Zongpu)*, published in the Huaisheng mosque in 1876, was composed with the explicit intention of recording the Abī Waqqās tomb as a historic reality. It was written by Hajji Ma Qirong (馬啟榮) from Xinxing (新興) in Yunnan; the 'hajji' title suggests he was residing in Canton after returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca. The book's purpose was to pass on the narrative of 'ancestors' (*zuzong*) and memorialize the core roots of Muslims in China (*Huihui*), traceable to Abī Waqqās. While sharing a storyline much like other legendary tales of the origins of Muslims in China, Ma Qirong's version accentuated the two direct journeys Waqqās undertook between Canton and Mecca and Medina, and his bringing back a complete copy of the Quran. This added emphasis perhaps reflected the growing domination of Ottoman-Arab Islamic geographies for Muslim communities in China from the mid-nineteenth century, as opposed to Persia-influenced Shī'ite and Sufi



**Figure 2.** Tomb of Abi Waqqas, late nineteenth century. Broomhall, *Islam in China*, frontispiece

branches (Wang 2014). Abī Waqqās' very death was mandated by Prophet Muhammad: when asked by Abī Waqqās where he should die, the Prophet ordered a man to shoot an arrow to the east. Abī Waqqās discovered the arrow mark outside the city's north

wall, and understood that it marked his death place (Liu and Mason 1921, 271–76).<sup>15</sup> In this storyline, the grave represents a sacred remnant that shows authentic historic linkages between western Muslim lands, Canton, and China as determined by the Prophet.

## Twentieth-century ruptures and resurgences

While Islam in China has often been studied on the level of a sub-region or in relation to the state as a minority nationality, seen on an intermediary scale, places of communal congregations such as the Abī Waqqās cemetery were always sites of coming and going. The act of patronizing temples or inscribing details about donors was in no way unique to Muslim communities (Miles 2017, 113–19; Brook 1993). Yet cross-spatial genealogical narrations, patronages, and pilgrims to both Mecca and the cemetery – coupled with the centrality of Canton as an inter-Asian oceanic gateway – created a powerful and durable triad that sanctified the cemetery and turned it into a trans-regional communal hub.

After five centuries, possibly longer, of memorialization, in the twentieth century the Abī Waqqās graveyard faced two contradictory forces: expedited mobility that solidified the position of the cemetery as a trans-regional pilgrimage site, and increased attacks on the grave carried out under the banner of positivist scrutiny and anti-religious movements, both unfolding on a national scale. With each crisis, the tomb returned with new meanings – as a symbol of Islam’s authenticity in China in the early twentieth century, then, as a testament to the historic maritime silk roads from which the People’s Republic of China derived a language for cultural diplomacy.

As Muslim writers in the eastern coasts of China endeavoured to find their political place in the post-imperial modernizing nation-state and to reorganize communal histories through positivist readings, sceptical views surfaced in and out of Muslim circles. A founder of a modern Islamic school in Beijing, for instance, noted inaccuracies in the story of Abī Waqqās in Liu Zhi’s biography of the Prophet. Liu’s book included a story about a Sui emperor sending emissaries that led Prophet Muhammad to dispatch four sages including Abī Waqqās to China. The Beijing educator pointed out that Islamic sources did not corroborate the story. The timing of Waqqās’ dispatchment – the second year of Prophet Muhammad’s prophet-ship – was also illogical, given that the spread of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula was still in its early stages. The writer ‘was afraid’ that Liu Zhi had let Chinese historical records distort the biography of the Prophet (Zhao 1926, 51).<sup>16</sup> Christian scholars and missionaries similarly discredited the story (Broomhall 1910, 66–76, 114).

The criticism notwithstanding, writers and caretakers in Canton still described Abī Waqqās as the first believer, someone who had made an arduous journey to China and initiated China’s many converts to Islam. As of 1930, Canton’s Muslims commemorated his death anniversary every year in November in the Islamic calendar (*zula jia-a-da; tian-fangli shiyiyue* 祖刺賈阿打; 天方曆十一月), because ‘his efforts [could] not be left to be effaced’ (‘Xianxian Wanguoshi Jinian’ 1930). The cemetery and the mosque beside it underwent repair throughout the 1920s and 30s, supported by donations from coreligionists in Hong Kong as well (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 192–97, 199–200).

The continuing significance of Abī Waqqās as a point of reference and a magnet for pilgrimage is reflected in none other than a mosque record in Shanghai, the epitome of modern China and the new channel for international steamship transport. Shanghai quickly emerged as a key Sino-western and inter-Asian intermediary node in the late



nineteenth century, making it a central transit point for Muslim travellers.<sup>17</sup> In 1924, to accommodate increasing numbers of merchants and pilgrims sojourning in Shanghai, the city's Muslim leadership expanded the 'western,' or Xiao Taoyuan mosque (小桃園清真寺) built in 1917. The stele commemorating the mosque's expansion was transcribed into a booklet for donors. The booklet explained that 'the northern mosque' in the city could not accommodate the influx of people sojourning (*qiao*) for trade (*shang*) and travel (*lü*). The western mosque, splendidly expanded, could accommodate students and travellers heading to the 'Heavenly Square' (*Chao Tianfangzhe* 朝天方者) – used to refer to Mecca in its literal place. The mosque would also 'ensure the wellbeing of persons who were going to southern oceans (*Hainan* 海南) in reverence for the Huaisheng mosque and the Fragrant Tomb (*Xiangfen* 香墳), or the Tomb of the Echo, with the 香 character (*xiang*; fragrant) substituted for the 響 character (*xiang*; echo), suggesting that some travellers passing through Shanghai also paid homage to the Waqqās tomb in Canton.

Shanghai's Muslim leaders also drew on the familiar trope of Abī Waqqās' arrival in Canton to position the western mosque as the most recent end of the long chain of Islam's pasts in China. The booklet begins by referencing 'Sage Waqqās (*Xianxian Wan Ge Shi* 先賢宛葛士)' who came from 'western lands' (*xiyu*) during the Sui Dynasty, bringing the scriptures of the Quran (*Gulan Zhenjing* 古蘭真經). Such arrival, along with the establishment of the Huaisheng Mosque in Guangdong, were identified as the starting points of Islam (*huijiao*) and of mosque construction on Eastern Soil (*dongtu*). Also written in historical records, it emphasized, were 'other famous mosques such as Jingjue mosque (淨覺禮拜寺 Nanjing) and the Xi'an Ancient Mosque (長安古寺).' The existence of centuries-old mosques testified to the long presence of Islam and the practice of mosque building in China. Two members of Shanghai's Islamic community travelled to historic mosques to collect donations. Because Shanghai 'directly succeeded Guangdong, with similar oceanic climate and patterns of tide, and is prosperous,' many who had accumulated wealth in Shanghai 'aspired to bestow their properties for posterity' (Jiang 1933, 1).

Shanghai may have supplanted Canton as a logistical hub, but in the context of disintegrations that characterized China in the early twentieth century, Abī Waqqās figured as a symbol of past unity. At the time of the western mosque's construction and expansion, China had fragmented into warlords' fiefdoms Muslim communities across former Qing imperial territories faced political and doctrinal controversies (Cieciura 2016; Sager and Zeyneb 2020). The booklet was alluding to such backdrop when it stressed that the task of the western mosque in times of crisis was to 'not hold onto differences' between 'the old and new' teachings (*buzhi xinjiu* 不持新舊), which would invite attacks from other religions. The mission at hand, instead, was to 'rectify religion, promote education and cultivate persons of talent to safeguard the world in times of its rise and fall (*zhengjiao changxueye zhibei dan rencai weishi* 正教昌學業植倍誕人才為世).' This would prevent the disintegration of the 'foundation that Waqqās had built by coming to the east and establishing teachings' (Jiang 1933, 1).

A personification of origin elsewhere, a mosque builder, and a carrier of the Quran whose death embedded Islam in China's soil, Abī Waqqās accumulated yet another meaning in the context of transnational religious revival that followed the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976): on the one hand, a testament to the historic maritime silk roads, and on the other, a saintly figure to be commemorated by Sufi pilgrims. Before its victory in 1949,

the Communist Party had positioned itself as an ardent advocate of minority nationalities' right to self-determination, in contradistinction to the assimilative stance held by the Nationalist Party (Mullaney 2011). In the early years of the PRC, as the state sought to portray itself as a protector of Islam to audiences inside China and outside, Muslim communities in Canton had even received a few benefits such as having the two Eid days as holidays, and being exempt from animal slaughter tax on the Eid days and Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Bao 2014, 215). Although the Abī Waqqās cemetery no longer functioned as a public burial ground due to urban construction projects, a new Muslim public graveyard was built in Baiyun district in northern outskirts, and tracts of tombs in the Abī Waqqās cemetery were reburied in the new graveyard (251). Under the politically charged anti-rightist, anti-traditionalist and anti-religious upsurge during the Cultural Revolution, however, religious gatherings and rituals came to a halt and mosques were shut, to the extent that a few of them were used as warehouses and factory buildings (223-4).

When the Abī Waqqās graveyard once again rose to prominence immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution, it did so not only as a trans-local pilgrimage destination and a communal centre, but as a testament to the old maritime silk roads that provincial and state authorities were keen on excavating. With the onset of capitalist open-up-and-reform policy and the waning of revolutionary Marxist socialism as a convincing societal principal, historic relics and sites emerged as arenas for brewing cultural nationalism and points for 'heritage diplomacy' through which the past was summoned as a way of creating new foreign linkages. From the viewpoint of provincial officials and scholars, local heritage sites could also provide stable sources of income from tourism, with the support of the national bureaucratic agency such as the National Cultural Heritage Administration. The process of winning such recognition was selective and political. While certain places with ethnic and religious significance were listed as heritage sites as a part of endeavours to promote the image of China as a multi-ethnic nation, these were located primarily in Han-majority areas. Canton's authorities and scholars, on their part, endeavoured to authenticate the maritime linkages between Canton and Southeast Asia by reconstructing historic sites such as the tomb of the Nanyue King and Whampoa harbour. These projects aimed to revive proofs of past transnational maritime connections, partially in competition against the port of Quanzhou that had superseded Canton between the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Chan 2018).

For provincial officials and researchers seeking to promote Canton's position as an international pivot, the cemetery of Abī Waqqās bore testimony to the oceanic routes that had once stretched from Canton to distant places in West Asia more than a millennium ago. Already in 1978, Guangdong Provincial Revolutionary Committee affirmed the status of the Abī Waqqās graveyard as a major historical and cultural site to be protected on a provincial level. As verifications of Canton's cosmopolitan past, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Abī Waqqās graveyard and the Huaisheng mosque made inroads into anthologies on Canton and maritime silk roads that were compiled by the province's amateur and professional historians. In one such collection published in 1991, an article referred to Canton as the 'sacred center in the East in early years of Islam' that reflected the port's position as a hub of maritime silk roads (Jiang 1991, 158). While noting the myth-like character of the story of Abī Waqqās, the article described his cemetery as a 'testimony of Sino-Arabian friendship and a symbol of Mecca in the East' that proved Canton's pivotal position in the maritime silk roads (167).

Muslim communities and provincial authorities' branding of the Abi Waqqās cemetery as 'Mecca in the East' and a proof of the entrepot's golden ages blew renewed life into the grave complex in 2010 as a site of cultural diplomacy. In preparation for the Asian Games hosted in Canton that year, which overlapped with the dates of Eid al-Adha celebrations, the cemetery was designated as a reception point for foreign visitors. In what became the largest expansion of the mosque-cemetery complex, a grand new Sages Mosque was built in the short span of seven months that could accommodate around three thousand people; the whole complex could accommodate about 8,000 people on jum'a days, and 36,000 people on the two Eid days (Bao 2014, 246). According to the 2010 commemorative stele, the majority of the financial support came from the city administration – 21 million RMB from the municipal government, 8 million RMB from the Canton branch of the Chinese Islamic Association, and 9 million RMB from private donors of the city, across China and abroad.<sup>18</sup> A plaque by the entrance to Abi Waqqās cemetery indicates that in 2012, the grave made it to the Chinese World Cultural Heritage Tentative List as a Maritime Silk Road entrepot, under the supervision of the National Cultural Heritage Administration. Similarly, the Muslim graveyard in Baiyun district that had been newly constructed in 1955 underwent expansion in preparation for the Asian Games – with funding from the city's financial bureau (5.4 million RMB) and the Chinese Islamic Association (about 5 million RMB) (Bao 2014, 252) (Figure 3).

Blending in strategies of heritage diplomacy into the afterlives of Abi Waqqās has offered protection for the cemetery to continue performing as an inter-regional congregation site, albeit under the increasingly watchful eyes of the state. When the death



**Figure 3.** Abi Waqqās Mausoleum (Photo by Author, December 2019)

anniversary ritual for Abī Waqqās was restored in 1984, pilgrims from various places including Xinjiang, Hebei, Bengal, and Hainan attended the event (Yang 1985, 40–41). As the old ritual resumed, inter-provincial migrations, likely stimulated by religious revival and economic liberalization, brought elements of northwestern China's Sufi practices to the mausoleum in Canton. Such trend represented a return of Sufi influences. Epitaphs of the latter half of the nineteenth century, as mentioned earlier, recorded the burials of scholars and pilgrims from Hezhou and Mecca in the cemetery, some of whom were adherents of Sufi orders. In the late nineteenth century, Muslim women and men in the Huaisheng mosque formed circles and knelt while reading aloud recitals (Ma 2004, 113–14). A phenomenon that invites further research is that at some point in the twenty-first century, the death anniversary of Abī Waqqās became an occasion for performing *dhikr* remembrance practices that are commonplace in northwestern China. Two objects that adorn the tomb suggest that Abī Waqqās tomb has been incorporated, perhaps once again, into China's Sufi cartographies: an incense burner and a plaque. Etched on the incense burner is a description that reads 'Guangzhou Waqqās Baba gongbei (广州宛嘎斯爸爸拱北).' *Gongbei* is a term used in Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia provinces in northwestern China to refer to Sufi shrine-tomb complexes. *Baba*, likewise, is a descriptor for a saintly sheikh. A plaque hangs on the top of a mausoleum entrance, sent by 'believers in Gansu and Yunnan' to 'memorialize and congratulate the erection of Waqqās Baba Gongbei.' The words read: 'the Way connects to the Western Regions (*Daotong Xiyu* 道通西域).' Throughout the 2010s, the death anniversary commemoration ritual for Abī Waqqās attracted three to four hundred visitors annually ('Guangzhou Xianxiansi Jinniande 'Darenji' Huodong' 2012; 'Guangzhou Musilin Juxing 'Darenji' Huodong Jinian Wan Ge Su' 2014).

Through uneasy balancing acts of assembling communal and religious networks all the while capitalizing from the state's silk roads diplomacy rhetoric, the functions and representations of the cemetery keep metamorphosing. In the latest formulation of survival strategy, Canton's Muslim community has gone beyond framing the grave of Abī Waqqās as a remnant of the maritime silk roads. Leaders of the Islamic Association branch in Canton have posed the death anniversary commemoration as an exemplar of Islam's localization in China, directly repeating the slogans upheld by the aggressive state campaign begun in 2017 to 'Sinicize' Islam (Feng 2018). As a part of that policy, as of late 2019, all Arabic characters that had dotted restaurants and stores in Canton had been torn down. On Friday prayer gatherings, guards stood by the gates of the cemetery to keep an eye on hundreds of enterers. While tensions simmered, streams of pilgrim tourists and Canton's sojourners from across China and Eurasian Muslim societies were making their way to the enclave.

## Conclusion

State religious organs' framing of the Abī Waqqās cemetery as a model of Islam's localization in China is a truncated representation of the trans-local imageries and mobilities that have sustained the grave. The 'little Mecca' in Canton has consolidated through centuries of historical narrations and cross-regional patronages that, unlike the state's assimilative agenda, have encompassed multiple places and temporalities. Formulations on the coming and death of the Companion, which were transferred back and forth on paper and stelae, endowed the figure with new meanings through waves of time. Readers of

collective genealogies that were crystalized in Abī Waqqās stories travelled through space and time while staying put, between any place in China and the utopic locales in the west. The cemetery, a testimony to the past linkages between the holy cities and China, has functioned as a communal congregation point for burials, commemorations, and pilgrimages – rendered possible through confluences of patronages and sojourners. These were processes that unfolded through long centuries of history, which were intimately tied to the ebbs and flows of Canton's position as an infrastructural hub.

This paper has sought to return to historical writings and commemorative places that are often overlooked as fictional, and uncover their potentials as prisms to surpass the state-centered focus that locks Muslim populations in China as minority ethnicities. A purportedly unverified myth facilitated conceptual belongings to dual homes, and materialized itself into a mosque-cemetery complex that has drawn pilgrims and donors from across China and Asia. The grave, discovered as an ancestral trace and constructed as a site of veneration, survived by absorbing hybrid rituals on the ground and pulling in grand narratives on interstate diplomacy. Abī Waqqās represents but one of Chinese Muslim figures that have been commemorated through a variety of textual mediums and pilgrimages. Tracing their afterlives and metamorphoses of death places, unbounded by genres of sources and predetermined limits of the nation or the region, will open new avenues of understanding on the diverse forms of historical narrations and cross-regional circulations that have defined Islamic social formations. Such approach would further capture understandings of the past and forms of mobility that escape modern historiography and the paradigm of minority ethnicity.

## Notes

1. The campaign requires that mosques raise the national flag of China, and learn and promote the Constitution and laws, core socialist values, and China's traditional culture. (Chinese Islamic Association 2018)
2. The said tomb likely referred to 'Gaisimu (盖斯墓),' otherwise known as 'Lü Gongbei 绿拱北' in Hami. For images by tourist visitors, ('Hamishi Gaisimu 哈密市盖斯墓' n.d.) The politics and history of this structure's construction requires separate research.
3. While the date of mosque's construction has been disputed, writers of the Song period in the twelfth century have given descriptions of the mosque and the minaret. See (Steinhardt 2015, 62) and (Chaffee 2018, 104–7)
4. For translations of Wu Jian's text, besides Chen Dasheng's work, see (Park 2012, 119–21). Park's book also touches on how geographers in China between the eighth and thirteenth centuries differently characterized *Dashi*. *Dashi* was a transcription of the Persian word *Tājik* or *Tāzī* that had been used to the refer to the Arabs. Whether Wu Jian's original inscription actually contained the description on 'Sahabat Sayyid Waqqās' has been questioned in (Chen 2015, 39)
5. The term 'Huihui' first started to be used during the Yuan Empire, probably originating from the term *Huihe* 回紇 or *Huihuihu* 回回鶻, indicating Turki Muslims in present-day Xinjiang and Central Asia. (Park 2012, 226, note 30).
6. For the ban on maritime trade during the early years of Ming China and the mandate that directed *semuren* who had assisted the Yuan to adopt Chinese attire and names, and to marry Chinese populations, (Chaffee 2018, 162–69).
7. Mecca appears as 'Majia (麻嘉)' in Zhou Qufei's *Lingwai Daida* (Notes from the Land beyond the Passes, 1178) and Zhao Rugua's *Zhufan zhi* (Description of the Foreign Lands, 1225), wherein the city is described as the birthplace of the Buddha Ma-xia-wu, and the Ka'ba as



the Buddha's House that attracts all countries of Dashi every year. See (Park 2012, 46–47) and (Hirth and Rockhill 1911, 124–25). In *Daoyi zhilue* (Shortened Account of the Non-Chinese Island Peoples, 1330) by Wang Dayuan of Quanzhou, Mecca appears as 'Tiantang,' a Buddhist descriptor for the netherworld. For a partial translation of the book's section on Mecca, (Bretschneider 1888, 300–301) Park offers an overview of Wang Dayuan's account in (Park 2012, 114–18)

8. Different versions of the narrative were reiterated on stelae throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Interestingly, the stele of 'Babasi 巴巴寺' in Sichuan's Langzhong 阆中 (1747) that celebrates the arrival and teachings of the well-known Afaq Khoja writes that Afaq Khoja, 'whose ties extend to the ancestral country of the Heavenly Square (Tianfang),' had arrived in the Central Plains (China) following the footsteps of 'Šahāba Sa'd Waqqās.' (Yu and Lei 2001, 489–90).
9. Ramadan had been living in Wanping 宛平 in present-day Beijing and serving as a darughachi in Rongzhou 榮州 in southeastern Guangxi Province, which borders Guangdong to the east and had served as an important gateway into Vietnam via the western South China Seas. He died at the age of thirty-eight and was buried in Guangzhou. (Yuanxiu, Jianzhao, and Fengda 1989, 91–92). Ramadan may have been part of Uyghur Turkic settlers in Korea who had occupied roles in administration and maritime commerce during the Mongol period (Lee 2007). The epitaph of Ramadan, discovered in 1985, became the subject of an extensive investigative documentary produced by KBS (KBS 2006)
10. The translation comes from (Broomhall 1910, 113–14). I have not been able to identify which mosque 'masjid Darkahah' refers to.
11. On Chinese entrepreneurs' uses of the global trade networks in Canton, (Wong 2016). For an exploration of presence of Muslim or 'Moor' merchants in Canton and Macao in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who had potentially sailed from Surat, (Smith and Van Dyke 2004).
12. The graveyard as a 'symbolic representation of the social order' that reflects and shapes the continuity of a property-holding kinship group is explored in (Bloch and Parry 1982, 32–38).
13. These transitional points included Zhaoqing 肇慶, Wuzhou 梧州, Xunzhou 潯州, Nanning 南寧, and 'Beisai' 北賽/白色. On Ma Dexin's journey and intellectual productions, (Petersen 2018; J. Wang 2014)
14. Shādhiliyya order, which initially originated and flourished in Morocco and Egypt in the thirteenth century, is one of the most important and influential Sufi currents in the Islamic world. P Lory (n.d.), 'Shadhiliyya,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.
15. Original manuscript is available in (Ma 2008b) For a reprint, (Ma 2008a)
16. In a related series of articles, Zhao also discredited Huihui Yuanlai and Xilai Zongpu as incredible historical writings (Zhao 1926).
17. Recent research has recast the city as a critical trans-local or transnational node where different populations from Asia such as Sikh and Korean diasporas dwelled for extended periods of time and harbored their passion for arts, films, and revolutions back home (Han 2015; Cao 2017). For the rise of Shanghai as a hub for steamship transport, where post-1895 railway projects also intersected, see (Reinhardt 2018, 64, 114).
18. The stele is displayed within the Abi Waqqās mosque-cemetery complex. Author visit in December 2019.

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