

## The Study of Islam and Islam Economic Thought in China

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**Abstract:** Islam research in China has a relatively long history, to date, has made a more fruitful results. Islam Economic Thought is one important meaning of al-Shari'ah. There have been many excellent researches from the Islamic world and Occident on this topic; Islam Economic Thought Research in China has relatively weak foundation and needs to play to its own strengths and learn from related researches from the Islamic world, the United States and Europe to better complement the study of Islam in China.

**Key words:** Islam in China • Islam Economic Thought • Development • Religious studies • Muslims

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### INTRODUCTION

**Overview of Islam in China:** Although there have been discussions on the exact time when Islam came into China from Sui Dynasty Kai Huang Theory, Tang Dynasty Wu De Theory to Tang Dynasty Xuan Guan Theory and so on, the Chinese scholars generally based on the views of the famous historian Chen Yuan (1880-1971) who believes the exact year is the second year of Yong Hui in Tang Dynasty Gao Zong Period which is 651 AD. That means the Islam in China has 1356-year history and experienced a tortuous and complicated process from "Islam in China" to "China's Islam".

It is an indisputable fact that there had already been Muslims gathering places in Tang Dynasty. After sending an expedition to the West, the Mongolian brought back a large number of Muslims into the military mainly as non-commissioned officers who could both a soldier during the war and a farmer after the war. With The descendants of Muslims who came to China early, the new Muslims businessmen and envoys were blended with the Chinese people to extend the Hui ethnic group. At that time, The Hui was a mixed concept and extended Dongxiang Hui, Baoan Hui, Sala Hui, Tibetan Hui, Mongolian Hui, Bai Hui and Dai Hui, etc. The policy of China's ethnic identification in 1950s listed Hui, Dongxiang, Baoan and Sala as separate ethnic groups, but Muslims had been still scattered in Mongolia, Dai, Bai,

Tibetan and other ethnic groups. Till now, Muslims in China has classified into 10 ethnic groups and a population of 23 million. They mainly distributed in northwest, north, southwest and northeast parts of China. Following China's main ethnic Han, Hui has the second widely national distribution.

In the Chinese history, Islam had no connection with the followed Knowledge in State, Officials for the division and People Knowledge which were formed before Islam coming into China and also had nothing to do with Chinese Imperial Examinations and co-existing of state and private school which Islam encountered in China. At the beginning of Islam entering into China, they had consciously taken father-son family propagation system. In addition to marry within their family members, they also absorbed a large number of alien members which were mainly the Han majority and Mongolian, Uygur and Tibetan members had been also involved in Hui to ensure the population. This self-reproduction behavior has made Islam receive few attentions from local officials in China for a long time. In Chinese history, as a result of quick development, Buddhism used to hurt the monarchy and experienced the annihilation. The famous example was three emperors' suppression of Buddhism. In the Fifth year of Hui Chang in Tang Dynasty Wu zong period (845 AD), the government closed 4600 temples and more than 40 thousand private Buddhism buildings and forced more than 260 thousand monks to renounce the cloth.

The Hui Chang catastrophe was mainly to suppress Buddhism and involved the Nestorian (Christianity), Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism and other foreign religions. However, Islam had survived at that time. One of the reasons was that Islam had just started in Tang dynasty and Muslim had always kept themselves in their own family, moreover, muslims have never outward preach, so it was basically not known to the outside world. Even in the Muslim gathering places, when Chinese set foot in this place, they could not see any signs of idol worship. This characteristic of China's Islam could not form challenges of mainstream culture which had Confucianism as its inner core, so muslim could preserve its own believe. However, just this behavioral characteristic of by father to son and do not spread out aroused the suspicion of the outside world, That is, most Chinese people do not understand is "Muslims do not worship heaven and earth, no worship of idols, but they often pray together, do not know what they are praying?".

### **The Islamic Study in China**

**Islamic Study in Chinese History:** There are mainly two points representing the Islamic studies with historical records in the history of China's Islam:

The first is the Mosque Education. Till Ming Dynasty, Islam had been in China for almost thousand years, so it was not as dynamic as before and after Ming authority pursuing Boycott foreign policy, foreign muslims can not enter China, Islam in China gradually lost its fresh blood. Chinese muslims faith gradually dilute, although they read aloud the Arabic classics books, they did not understand its meanings, Many Muslims abandoned their faith gradually. In this case, A devout muslim named Hu Dengzhou in Shaanxi province followed the private school system and tried to give lectures on scriptures to the Muslim children, which had remarkable results at that time and then developed into systematical and standard Mosque Education. It had played important role for Islam to develop in China. During the time of receiving the mosque education, the Chinese Muslims began the study of Islam. Definitely, the history could not assume, but if there were no Hu Dengzhou's education, there would be a different fate of Islam in China. Just because of this, Hu Dengzhou is the one who need to have more words in the Chinese Islamic studies. Through the Mosque Education, the Muslim family have understand and researched Sharia, ilm al-kalām, Sufi thought, Arabic, Persian and ancient customs of the Central and Western Asia, but few could gain new

insights through restudying these context of historical documents for the reality. In the face of modern erosion, the development of Mosque Education which played a major role in history had become an epochal proposition for all scholars.

The second is the interpretation by Confucianism. A group of muslim scholars with profound knowledge of Confucianism and Islam in Ming and Qing dynasties had realized the differences between the mainstream society and the Islamic world and tried to use benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust in the name of Confucianism to interpret the Islamic Five Pillar and Six Belief. These actions did not only have the efficacy to introduce Islam to the outer world and temporarily ease the ethnic relations, but also left classical books for descendants. Coincidentally, Han Lin, a Ming scholar-bureaucrat had written a book called *Duo Shu* which used Confucian discourse system to interpret Christian Bible to spread Christianity in China. In addition, after the Buddhism coming into the Central China, it had to be Sinicized and Zen Buddhism is the highest product of this process. Therefore, it is not difficult to learn that if the alien culture wanted to take root in China, Sinicization is the only way.

**China's Contemporary Study on Islam:** Apart from the mosque education and the interpretation by Confucianism, the study on Islam scattered in other fields in the Chinese history. The modern research on Islam in China began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first phase was from the early half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main Islamic researchers then were: Chen Yuan, Jin Jitang, Bai Shouyi, Da Pusheng, Wang Jingzhai, Ha Decheng, Ma Yiyu, Fu Tongxian, Ma Jian, Chen Hanzhang and other scholars. Their academic achievements were including *A Brief History of Islam in China*, *Study of the Muslim History in China*, *Chinese Muslim History* and *A Short History of Chinese Muslim* which were the cornerstone of the Islamic study, whose main areas were the Islamic history in China and Islamic classical books. Since then, the sub-disciplines of Islamic studies have not only involved in the world Islam, Islamic history, dogmatics and al-fiqh, but also the contemporary Islam, Islam in China, the Islamic culture and art and the Koran study and other fields. During this period, the study of Islam was affected by the textual criticism style of study which had traditional history as the main research methods since the Emperor Jia Qing and Qian Long in the Qing Dynasty. The researchers were mostly

Muslim in China, but there were also some scholars who did not have the Islamic faith representing by Chen Yuan. Their study also recognized by the Muslim scholars. Meanwhile, in the overall background of dissemination of Western Learning to the Orient, the Western research methods and academic tradition have also handed in, researchers in China had begun to try to apply new methods and means to study and reflect the Islamic classics, history, philosophy and religion method.

The second phase was from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the founding of New China in 1949, the study of Islam in China became systematic and standardized. Under the direction of Chairman Mao Zedong, the Institute of World Religions of the CASS had been established in 1964, which provided the soil for the China's early studies on Islam and other major religions. At that time, Marxism was the main way to study religions. With the deepening of research as well as major changes of people's ideas after China's reform and opening up, religion has gradually been considered as a culture, which has been a common sense for most religious scholars today.

After the founding of New China, Islamic studies have experienced an unprecedented development, especially after 1977, there has been great progress for Islamic study in the Quran, Islamic philosophy, Islamic history, Islam school, Islamic social thought, Islam and International Relations, Arabic literature, famous Muslim scholars' thoughts, Islamic reference books, Hui ethnic group Study and other areas. The breadth and depth of those researches are far beyond previous period. The Islam academic discussions have been also active; the scholars held nationwide Islamic conferences in Yinchuan, Lanzhou, Xining, Xi'an, Urumqi and Kunming to further promote the national Islamic academic research.

At this stage, our scholars have analysis of the historical trend, the status and characteristics of Islam with multi-level and multi-angle. For example, in the field of Quran translations and the Islamic reference books, the authoritative Uighur and Chinese translation of the Quran has been published and a series of presentations of Quran has been launched, so the study of Quran has a major development and the published Islamic dictionary and encyclopedia also provides a wealth of knowledge for people who want to understand Islam; in the field of Islam review and Islamic world studies, scholars are more concerned about the Arab world and Islamic status issues which involved in the contemporary Islamic revival movement, religious radicalism, as well as the Islamic and

international political issues; In the study of Islamic history, it focuses on Islam in China which includes the history of Chinese Islamic sects, the relationship between traditional Chinese culture and Islam and the Islamic historical data collecting and so on. In addition, it has also been impressive on the studies of the Islamic history, al-fiqh, Islamic philosophic thoughts, Biography of the famous Muslim, Islamic culture, Islamic literature, Islamic education, Islamic science, Islamic art and so on.

The third phase has been from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Entering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our Islamic studies show the characteristics of various research methods, wide scope and detailed research content. This was reflected in the following areas:

**Islam Adapts to Socialist Society:** Since 2001, in response to the Development of China's West Regions, Chinese scholars linked Islam with the China's Western Development and discussed the Islamic adaption and promotion with western development issues, which became the study highlights in recent years. Besides, the recent study is also on how to use the traditional religious and cultural resources to promote a harmonious socialist society construction, when Islam is facing the opportunities and challenges In recent years, some scholars have begun to use cultural anthropology, religious sociology and other methods to study the practical problems in contemporary China, especially on the situation of Islamic minority communities in modern society. These studies mostly based on field survey and reflected the diverse faces of Islam in China. They have a positive and practical significance to put forward the learning views and opinions to actively guide religions to adapt socialist society.

**International Islamic Studies:** As the international religious extremist forces still rampant, the attentions on them have been increased. Scholars have drawn some unique new ideas when they combine the study of religion and international politics. The scholars from the Institute of World Religions in CASS have followed closely with Islamic extremism and "political Islam" issues and explored the underlying causes from religious, social and political point of view as well as its future development and impacts on China. The representative works include *Islam and World Politics* and *Contemporary Religion and Extremism* written by Mr. Jin Yijiu; *Islamic extremism in Globalization* by Li Qunying; *Islam in Southeast Asia and Contemporary Politics* edited by He Shengda and so on.

**Chinese Islamic Studies:** The focus of our academic research has always been the history of Islam in China, Islamic culture, Islamic ethics, mosque construction and so on. In recent years, the research has been deeper and broader and a number of high levels of academic books and papers have been published. For example, Islamic studies scholars have emphasized the major roles of Arabic, Farsi and Urdu literature in the development of Islamic thought for a long time, while the Chinese writing since the Ming and Qing dynasty has not been given due attention. In recent years, this trend has started to change and some foreign scholars have begun to study famous Chinese Muslim scholars such as Liu Zhi, Wang Dai Yu and other representatives in "Chinese translation movement". The Chinese Islamic literature which has been blended by China's traditional culture and Islamic culture is getting more and more attention. Some scholars have suggested that since Chinese Islamic literature has contributions to diversify the Islamic thought, it should be given the same position as other languages literature does and more attention. There have been a certain depth of research achievements, such as *Study on Wang Dai Yu Thought* and *Islam in China - Study on Liu Zhi* by Mr. Jin Yijiu; Sun Zhenyu's *Ma Dexin and his Islamic thought* and so on.

**Islamic Literature Search:** In recent years, China's prominent achievement on Islamic studies is the history data collection. On the one hand, this work is the collection and organization of China's rare historical data from a global perspective; on the other hand, it is the compilation of local Islamic history. In recent years, Islamic data compilation and rescue work have drawn growing academic attention. For example, the *Muslim ceremony under integration of religious historical documents* is a comprehensive and systematic arrangement for the first time, which does not only contain the earliest version of Quran in Chinese history, the precious Quran manuscripts in the Qing Dynasty and Hui astronomical manuscripts in the Ming Dynasty, but also for the first time published a number of important folk manuscripts which were often overlooked in the past, such as *Guang Chang* etc... Some information belonged to salvage protection. This work laid a solid foundation for future Islamic study and its importance is self-evident. Meanwhile, the regional compilation has taken a major step forward. The representative of this monograph includes *Hui in Nanjing and Islamic History Material* and *Data Selection of Historical Figures from Muslims in southern China* and so on. It is noteworthy that these two books are both related to China's southern Muslim

history and culture. The South Islamic studies had always been ignored before and there had been less research in the eastern region. These two books show that our focus on Islamic studies begun to overcome the imbalance deficiency that is the neglect of the east and focus on the west.

After the reforms and opening up, under the situation of prosperous social science research in China, the quality and quantity of Islamic studies have a major upgrade, but compared to other religions, especially Buddhism in China (Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism), Protestantism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Islamic studies still dwarfs and its research base is relatively weak.

**The Study Method of Islam in China:** Chinese Islamic scholars have different ideas and insights on Islamic studies. Some scholars divided Islam in China by regions, which are the mainland and Xinjiang Islam. The study of Xinjiang Islam is mostly on historical review of the literature with less realistic issues, while the associated Xinjiang Uygur anthropological study is a good complement for research on reality. The Mainland Islam is involving many areas and taking the northwest as the most important region and gradually to the north, southwest, northeast and southeast. Compared with Islam study, the research methods and ideas of the anthropological study on the Northwest's Muslim and Muslim ethnic group with small populations such as Boan, Sala are different, but it could comprehend the Islamic culture better. In addition, it is worth to study the Southeast part in China which is one of the Islamic presences in the history having more precious buildings, inscriptions and etc. Because of the opening up, the southeast coastal areas become the window for Arabic trade with China. Mosques, Muslims gathering places, trade reciprocity and academic thinking become the concerns and also appear in the related anthropological research literature.

Some other researcher's studies are based on Islam itself, which could be divided into *ilm al-kalām*, Islamic philosophy, Islamic law, Sufism and other social thought. Currently, there have been more academic results in Islamic philosophy, Islamic law, but most of them are all-inclusive ones.

**Research Status of Islam Economic Thought in China:** As *ilm al-kalām* studies in China, the studies on Islam economic thought is also relatively weak in China. Currently, there are a number of overview researches in this area and a few papers on zakat, reba, Islamic tax, Islamic finance, inheritance and other sub-titles.

**Books Involving Islam Economic Thought Study:**

The most commonly used Islamic Economy monograph is Liu Tianming's *Islam Economic Thought* which involves the classical Islam economic thought and economic thought of some well-known muslim scholars and Islam sects in the history. It opens the study of Islam economic thought in China. In addition, there are other books as *Islam and the economy* by the co-authors of Zhang Yongqing, Ma Ping and Liu Tianming and *Outline of the Islam economic system* by Wang Zhengwei and so on.

**Research Papers on Islam Economic Thought:** The papers from Xiao Xian, Ba Jianqun, Zhu Zhongdi, Yi Ding, Yang Cuiibo, Zhang Yunzhong, Li Yanzhi and other scholars put the focuses on the concept and practice as well as advantages and disadvantages of the Islamic finance. There are also papers from Mi Shoujiang, Ma Mingliang, Wang Guangda, Su Xihong, Liu Wei, Liu Yun and Ma Zhongjie discussing the Islam economic thought and its impact on Muslim in China. Some other scholars like Feng Lulu had a deep theoretical analysis on Islamic financial practices and associated it with the Islamic religious ethics to find the paradox of the religious charity and real practice and possible response options.

**Opinions on the Islam Economic Thought Study:** After having an overview of the Islam economic thought academic research, I believe there are two characteristics in these in-depth studies:

The first one is the academic background. The Islamic economy was originated from Sharia. Besides the Islamic commandment, the Islam economic thought have based on Islamic fatwa, Qiyas, Ijma and al-Ijtihad. In other words, Islamic economy is inextricably associated with Islam. There would be no deep analysis of the Islamic economy without Islam. The Islamic economy studies also have economy background, which is western economy. Although there are some critics to the western economy, it has been gradually improved in more than 100 years and formed a sophisticated research approach and systems. When the Islam economic research in China has been caught in the current situation, it is one of the best ways to learn from the West. However, the West and Islam have so different traditional culture that we could learn the research approaches and system from the West instead of copying the whole economy.

The Second is the language requirement. As the Islam economic study in Arab countries and some European countries has developed well, so it is

particularly important for Chinese scholars to learn from foreign materials, which need to master one or two languages such Arabic, the original language of the Islamic culture and the universal English.

I believe that the most common and effective way to study is to sort out the historical sequence under the guide philosophy. The study of Islam economic thought should master the following points:

**Tracing to its Source:** The source of the Islam economic thoughts are Quran and Hadith. The Islam economic thought is manifestation of sharia in the economic field. Its main body is the Islam itself. Therefore, the deep understanding into Islam religious thought is necessary and sufficient condition of Islam economic thought study. Islam economic thought exist in the fence of religious morality. Hence, it is ethics economy or moral economy. Compared with classical economy, the western altruism economy and social economy is closer to the substance of the Islamic economy which is the ethics could not been forgotten during the process of production and economic development.

**Economic Philosophy:** The discussion of scholars in the major civilization like Muslim, Jew or Christian civilizations on Scholastic philosophy and nomology have limited to religious morality for a long historical period. These scholars are not intended to study those economic issues based on economic life itself. The premise of their theory is that all human activities including economic ones are targeted and the ultimate goal is to be strived. Islamic economic philosophy is also deeply rooted in the Sharia and emphasized the secular life including economic life is just a test by Allah who bless some people while deprive others some rights. "Gain" is not an evidence of the Allah grace and "lost" is not the feature of disfavor. Therefore, under the guidance of Islam, the highest goal of a civilized society is to enhance social - economic justice [1].

**The Demand for Value:** Any kind of religion, of course Islam, takes "forsaking evil and promoting virtue" as its goal and establishes corresponding moral doctrines with its code of ethics. Islam, as a manipulating religion, is a blend of religion, moral and law. It fulfills the function of law and moral. "Justice" reflects not only an effective standard established in human society, but also a ruler for individual social relation. The conception of "Justice" to Arab-Islam scholar forms a crucial scale for social equality and balance. According to jurist, "Justice" originates from Islam Sharia. It interprets the starting point and

destination of Islam economic issue. Comparing with Buddhism's compassion and Christianity's charity, Islam extremely advocates justice and equality and take them as the most well-known mental characteristics in its moral doctrine. Put it bluntly, most Islam economic thought is expound based on the word "Justice". Besides, Islam social thought is also based on it. Seizing the conception of "Justice" is helpful to find essence beyond surface, to realize the seeds of various muslim social phenomenons. Of cause, justice is also an important criterion when St. Thomas Aquinas and other Latin scholar analyze the economy.

**Research Approaches:** Scholars should focus on the history of Islam economic thoughts. The historical review would ultimately back to reality. As the Islam economic thoughts research has almost no roots, we should start from the history of Islam economic thoughts and take it as the vertical axis to study other contents of Islamic economy, which would bring a lot of harvest:

First, the social economic life had been paid more attentions since the beginning of Islam. The history of Islam could reflect many aspects of Muslim social and economic life. The Islam economic thoughts has been coped with the changing time from the four caliphs period, Umayyad dynasty, Abbasid dynasty, Ottoman Empire, as well as modernization and Westernization. The history of the Islam economic thought is a thought innovation history.

Second, in the Islamic history, especially the golden Abbasid period, there had been more the outstanding Arab - Islamic scholars and nearly 40 of them had explored the economic issues and many scholars have deep understandings on this topic, especially Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Khaldun. The economic thoughts of Islamic jurists in history had been influential to the later Muslim economists and government policy-makers. In other words, many modern Muslim economists and politicians have inherited the legacy of traditional economic. Therefore, the review of Islamic history could better appreciate the modern thoughts.

Third, through the review of the Islam economic history, we also could find the evidence of the blend of Chinese and Western thoughts, especially in most fruitful Abbasid period, in which its sparkle points had been absorbed into the western civilization and the wealth of human thinking could be preserved. It is easy to see that only an open and inclusive society could win the revitalization and harmony is the mainstream of human society development.

**The Significance of Study on Islam Economic Thoughts:**

Except for keeping the wealth of human thought, any scientific research is for practical use. The Study on Islam Economic Thoughts has no exception. It has important theoretical and practical significance:

- The needs for China's socialist economic ideology construction. In addition to study the economic practice, the Western and Islamic economics are both important references. There had been no economic thoughts of Arab-Islamic scholars publishing in the relevant English literature in the Middle Ages, which was only corrected in some English literature in the late Middle Ages. When Spengler wrote an article of Ibn Khaldun, he mentioned: "The knowledge of economic behavior is indeed very fruitful within a number of groups. if someone want to understand the truth of the Muslim economic thoughts, he or she must turn to understand and experience these writings" [2].

The current economics literature believes that many concepts as market forces, imbalance between supply and demand and so on has been emerged in the very recent economic thought history. Joseph Schumpeter proposed a controversial Big Blank Theory, in his classic History of Economic Analysis and believed that the period of the Greek and Latin scholastics, especially St. Thomas Aquinas period was "the blank century ", during which there was no economic results [3]. As a matter of fact, the Big Blank Theory completely ignored the Arab-Islamic as well as some European scholars. That theory is untenable. From his book, we could see that Schumpeter may not know about the economic expound in some Arab-Islamic literature [4]. In fact, there had been at least 40 famous Arab-Islamic scholars discussing economics in the Middle Age. The history of economic thought could be better improved by recalling the contributions of these thinkers.

- The need to understand and deepen Islamic study. The previous Islamic study has more emphasis on political and cultural issues and less on the economy, especially economic thoughts. In the world's three major religions, Islam is one religion with more focus on economy and a world religion with widely economic activities. Without understanding their economic thoughts, it is impossible for us to learn this religion. China's modern religions are mostly universal ones, such as Buddhism, Christianity and

Islam and so on; even the Taoism which is from the local Chinese culture has won worldwide influence and thus has a broad international association. World leading religious scholars Hans Kung and Daisaku Ikeda suggested to establish a common universal ethical spirit on the basis of religious ethics and believed it would determine the future of human coexistence and development. Hans Kung stressed that if there was no mutual understanding among different religions, it is impossible to understand nations; if there was no dialogue and communication among religions, it is difficult to achieve peace and friendship among them as well as nations. This understanding gives a sense of urgency, especially in the current international situation. Hence there are following "global ethics", "universal ethics", "religious peace" and "religious parliament" which all are worthy of our attentions and study. It is an important task for our religion study to make appropriate cultural strategies according to the relations of religion and international politics to properly solve domestic problems and improve the international environment [5].

Islam economic thought has been originated from sharia and has important meanings. By studying the Islam economic thought, it is helpful to have insights into Islam and strengthen inter-religious understandings among cultural tradition in order to achieve coexistence.

- The need to development economic and cultural exchanges between China and Arabia area. It is of necessity that the Arab Economic Forum held in Yinchuan City, Hui Autonomous Region of Ningxia this fall to present the evolution of Islam economic thought and its characteristics as a basic topic. The Arab business group coming to China as early as Tang and Song dynasties was famous for trading skills. Guangzhou, Yangzhou and Quanzhou which were the gathering cities of Muslim used to be commercial centers. In the year 851, an Arabic businessman Suleyman came to Guangzhou and he wrote a book named Travel Memoirs in China and India. The book described that "Guangzhou is the gathering commercial port for the Muslim traders where there was one Muslim teacher and one mosque...since there are too many Muslim merchants in Guangzhou that the Chinese emperor appointed a Muslim governor to manage Muslim according to the Islamic rules. The governor prays with Muslims together every week. They also have

blessings for the Muslim Sudan after al-Wa'z. The governor is honest and fair. Everything was done according to the Koran, Hadith and Islamic habits. So Iraqi businessman who came to Guangzhou all Praised this place" [6]. However, the policies of seclusion shut down those trade ports. After the founding of New China, The Chinese Government implement the Reform and Opening up policy, Guangzhou, Wenzhou and Yi Wu have again staged in the scene and become the first choice for Arab traders to China and also important openings for mutually beneficial trade between China and the Arab world. The study of Islam economic thought could understand more of the Islamic culture and its business characteristics in order to provide better services for the mutual trade.

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