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## Ma families of warlords

**Ma families of warlords** (馬家軍閥, *Ma jiā jun fá*) is a collective term for three separate Hui Muslim lineages, all surnamed Ma, who dominated militarily and politically large parts of northwestern China from the late nineteenth century, through the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, to the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. There is no evidence that the three lineages were related, but all of them had roots in western Hezhou prefecture (in Gansu province), and two of them hailed from the same village. Members of these families played prominent roles as sponsors and protectors of many Muslim cultural, religious, and educational undertakings during the Republican period, facilitating the integration of the northwest with the Chinese nation-state and the breaking of some of the social barriers between Muslims and Han Chinese and between the Muslims of northwest and eastern China.

### 1. UNDER THE EMPIRE

The phenomenon of the Ma military lineages emerged in the era of the great

Muslim rebellion in Shaanxi and Gansu provinces in 1862–73. After subduing Shaanxi and Ningxia (in Gansu province), the Qing forces of Zuo Zongtang (d. 1885) turned to Hezhou prefecture in southwestern Gansu and the Muslim militias under the command of Ma Zhan'ao (d. 1886), the *shaykh* of the Khufiyya Šūfi order (an offshoot of the Naqshbandiyya). After defeating the imperial forces in February 1872, Ma Zhan'ao sought reconciliation with the Qing, was pardoned, allowed to maintain political leadership of the Hezhou Muslims (which he held as the *shaykh* of the Khufiyya), and granted official titles. His commanders Ma Haiyan (d. 1900) and Ma Qianling (d. 1910), who were both martial-arts masters specialising in caravan protection, were also spared and given official positions in the Qing military system.

Sons of the three Mas became crucial actors in the northwest during the last decades of the Qing dynasty, helping to put down another Muslim rebellion in 1895. Amongst the second generation, Ma Zhan'ao's son Ma Anliang (d. 1918) was the highest ranking and most influential due to his religious role in the Khufiyya