

## **A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF ETHNIC CONFLICT AND SOCIAL ANARCHY IN SHAANXI: THE MUSLIM UPRISING 1862-1873**

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### **Abstract**

Hui rebellion (1862-1873) is depicted generally as the confrontation of Hui with the Qing state but an exploration of the background of the uprising in the Shaanxi province and a keen look into the oral histories and compilations of local narratives of the devastation reveals that the reality was much more complex. The historical account of these rebellions produced the stereotype that Manchus and Hui had been in conflict throughout whereas this paper contends that the Qing reign can be comfortably divided into two distinct phases with respect to the behavior of Manchus towards the Hui minority. The first phase is marvelously peaceful and prosperous whereas the second is equally drastic and catastrophic. How did this sweeping shift occur? The answer to this logical query involves the third and most decisive component of the whole confrontation i.e. Han gentry and militia. We propose that Han officialdom played a crucial role in creating an ambiance of confrontation of Hui with the Qing state. Were it not the ethnic riots and racial bias by the Han gentry, Hui would have

never been forced to stand unanimously for the protection of their identity and rights. On the other hand, although the Qing Empire wanted to discriminate between rebels and innocent people yet its efforts remained futile as with the weakening of the central state, the axis of power shifted to local Han authorities who were adamant to exterminate Hui from the area. Thus an uprising against Han discrimination distended into a rebellion against the state on a large scale.

**Keywords:** Muslim Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, Qing China, Intergroup Relations, Ethnic-Religious Minorities.

## A. Introduction

Grievances of ethnic minorities in multiethnic societies tend to produce riots and conflicts in the society as happened during the late Qing when such conflicts inflated to launch a large-scale rebellion. The study of these grievance-oriented-conflicts in today's scenario is significant because it helps us understand the historical dimension of ethnic conflicts in contemporary China. We suggest that these grievances played a significant but paradoxical role in the sprout of Hui rebellion in Qing; Muslims' aid of Mongols in usurpation of China and dominance over Han majority as *Semuren* germinated a sense of deprivation and hatred among Han towards the Muslims. Consequently, Han, when empowered in Ming, operated to suppress Muslim identity enforcing acculturation and integration (though indiscernible often). When alien Manchus turned over Ming to establish a minority rule, it regenerated the sense of humiliation and suppression in the Han majority who could not speak up against the powerful ruling Manchus but could find a rather vulnerable ethnic minority in the form of Hui to deflect their

rage from Manchus. This resulted into social, political, economic and cultural discrimination against Hui Muslims by local Han authorities which led to aggravation of Hui to the extent that they rose up against the authorities in various parts of China. So, we hypothesize that Hui did not rebel against Manchu regime as neither they had separatist aspirations nor did they reverie the usurpation of Chinese throne. As the local narratives and historical evidences in the forthcoming pages illustrate, Hui rebellion was outcome of ethnic discrimination and persistent unfair treatment of minorities in the area by the ineligible and prejudiced Han officialdom.

This research is novel in argument and approach as these events have been put forth previously either as a peasant revolution against feudal oppression or as the revolt of Hui against the heathen Manchu rule owing to the intrinsic rebellious teachings of the former's religion i.e. Islam. The CCP historians have been interpreting all the rebellions not only in Qing but throughout Chinese history as an outcome of class struggle owing to their essential Marxist approach. It was in the interest of the socialist revolution to adopt such an interpretation because it justified the termination of dynastical rule as well as the abolition of Confucian orthodoxy relegating it to be the basis of feudal system. Mao Zedong (1959) always emphasized the role of peasant movements, their struggle against the feudal lords as the foremost motivation for the social communist revolution in China. Moreover, the emphasis upon nationalization and integration of the ethnic minorities into the mainstream Chinese society has been the primary rather inevitable goal of CCP state as it is the only way to run such a multiethnic

state as China<sup>1</sup>. Therefore Chinese historiography, controlled by the state, has tended to undermine the ethnic aspect of the Shaanxi Hui rebellion rendering it to be a rebellion of Hui and Han peasants against the local feudal lords and exploiters. Before and during the Cultural Revolution, the historiography in China was primarily determined by the state's totalitarian orientations. Elman (2010) very truly regrets;

“Chinese history on both sides of the Taiwan Straits has already used up its social science capital, revealing a bankrupt national history that dances either to the tune of Marxist social science or that of the Kuomintang... The massive effort by PRC scholars under the auspices of the Qing History Institute at People's University to update the 1928 ROC version (there was no PRC then) of the Qing Dynastic History is suffering a similar fate in ultranationalist Beijing circles today.”

It was only after Deng's reform policies that researchers got immediate and unmediated access to the local accounts and the oral narratives (Gillin,1964; Gray, 2002). A major breakthrough in the trends of Chinese historiography was the publication of local Shaanxi records by Mark Selden in 1970's. Recently, Chinese historiography is being revised by taking Hui-Han conflicts as major cause of Hui uprising in Qing; for instance, Gansu uprising of Hui associated with Jahriyya has been interpreted in these terms recently (Ching, 2011; Lipman, 1990) and similarly Atwill (2003) described Hui rebellions in Southwest China in the construal of ethnic conflicts. The

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese state policy is aligned with not circulating any literature or allowing any activity pertaining to highlighting the ethnic differences between the inhabitants. Gjessing, Gutorm. 1956. "Chinese Anthropology and New China's Policy towards her Minorities." *Acta Sociologica* 2:45-68., P.49

present research is a continuation of the aforementioned approach in the context of Shaanxi province.

The research relied upon an extensive literature review both from European and local Chinese histories (official archives and local narrative compilations) along with frequent personal discussions on the issues with local Hui as well as Hui scholars from other parts of China. Personal observation of the nature of Hui-Han relations in Xi'an and other Chinese localities during three years of extensive field surveys helped put the archival data in proper context. We have consulted oral histories, personal narratives and local reports published by Hui publishing houses or journals such as *Huimin Qiyi*, *Shaanxi Huimin Qiyi Ziliao*, *Huizu Jianshi*, *Shaanxi Wenshi Ziliao*, and *Dao Xian Huanhai Jianwenlu*. Each of these compilations comprises a good number of individual accounts contributed by various Hui people who witnessed the Hui uprising of Shaanxi. Out of these *Huimin Qiyi* is the most renowned insider historical source of Hui rebellions as its compiler was a communist Hui known as Bai Shouyi.

Among the Western scholarship who worked on the Hui people of Northwest China, we find the names of Broomhall, Lipman, Israeli, Gladney, Dillon, and Maris Gillette. Lipman provided an elaborate narrative of encounters of Hui and Han militia so it proved to be an inevitable source of historical data but his work remained confined to the area of Gansu predominantly. Israeli (2002) although wrote many articles about the state of Muslims in Qing but his essentially biased hypothesis considering Islam prone to rebellion, contrary to the facts reinstated by other historical sources, affects the worth of his research adversely. Dillon concentrated on the

far Northwest of China i.e. Xinjiang and its suburbs and not mainland China with respect to the Hui uprising. The works of Gladney (1994; 2003) make a significant contribution to understanding the Han-Hui relationship as well as the ethno-political landscape of China but contemporarily and not historically. The most significant piece of resistance with reference to the Hui community of Xi'an is that of Maris Gillette (2008; 2002). She conducted an extensive ethnographic research upon the Hui minority of the city. She consulted many significant local historical sources and interviewed local residents but her principal methodology was confined to discourse analysis. She did not delve into the historical analysis in an ethno-political scenario thus her work represents a kind of research with aims and methodologies fundamentally different from the present research. Hence this paper is based on a new argument incorporating both old and new historical resources employing a combination of historiography and ethnography.

It is important to understand the historical facets of religion and ethnic relations in today's China and analyze them in proper context particularly when China is exercising the same policies of enforced assimilation of ethnic Muslim minorities by settling Han in Uighur areas and causing unrest among North Western Muslims thus giving way to hatred and racial revulsions. The unrest and rebellion in Xinjiang in 1995 were basically owing to the overemphatic integrationist policies of CCP state and excessive immigration of Han to Xinjiang. The principal demand of the Uighurs and Kazakh rebels was the evacuation of the area from Han immigrants and it denoted that the unrest was generated due to the ethnic

injustice prevailing in the area and unfair dominance of Han over the ethnic minorities (Millward, 2007). This sentiment is still found in the Uighur population of Xinjiang as the recent years have seen a reasonable boost in the number of permanent and floating Han population in the area. The results of the Asian Barometer Survey of the social behavior of Chinese citizens, conducted in 2007 and 2008 show that ethnic minorities in today's China do have grievances and feel disadvantaged and less privileged than their Han co-nationals. Many people have argued that the stratification among Han and minorities and the sense of deprivation among ethnic minorities is the major cause of conflicts in Tibet of today's China as well (Clarke, 2007; Odgaard and Nielsen, 2014; Ryono and Galway, 2014; Veeck, Pannell, Smith, and Huang 2011; Zhang 2001). Not only in Xinjiang and Tibet, similar kinds of grievance oriented conflicts between Hui and Han society/state have been observed in Mainland China as well as reported in Yunnan (McCarthy, 2011).

## **B. Historical background**

Islam has always been a religion of minority in China. Muslims in China moved from the obligatory seclusion in Tang-Song China to the dispersion in the whole of China as representatives of the Yuan and finally ended up acculturating in the mainstream Chinese society, at least apparently, in Ming-Qing China. The Hui community in Xi'an is considered to be the oldest one among the Hui communities of China and thus it witnessed all the phases through which today's Hui identity is constructed. The ancestors of today's Xi'an Hui community were the Arab and Persian Muslim settlers who came as

traders and soldiers in Tang and Song dynasties in many currents. The early Chinese empires dealt with them quite like other foreigners and placed them in the *Fān fāng* prohibiting them from integrating into the Han society but manifested a multicultural approach and granted these Muslims complete religious freedom (Chang, 1987). This marginalization and internal hybridization of these early Muslims laid the foundations of the construction of a new ethnic minority in the centuries to come, known as Hui (Chang, 1999).

They serve as the connecting link between Chinese and Islamic cultural spheres for today's Hui thus retaining their ethnic integrity as well as affirming their status as rightful denizens of Chinese land. A second substantial wave of Muslims entered China during the Muslim Diaspora after the fall of Baghdad caliphate at the hands of Yuan. With this, the already extant Muslim community of China got strengthened and departed their ghettos for socio-economic purposes consequently getting acquainted with Chinese culture and society. Muslims were given a status higher to Han during Yuan and this transition in the status and context of Muslims played a paradoxical role i.e. it helped dissemination of Muslims in China but simultaneously generated sentiments of detestation for them among the Chinese people. The Chinese abhorrence resulted into an atmosphere of conflict but the mechanism of conflict operated in a way aligned to the incorporation of Muslims in the Chinese society rather than their extermination during Ming. Hence began the phase of adaptation, boosted by the Ming integrative policies and accomplished by the Muslims' compliance to adapt to their host culture.



By the foundation of Qing dynasty, Shaanxi was a province of numerous and prosperous Hui population. They had adopted Chinese food as theirs, replaced their lingua franca with Han language and even embraced traditional Chinese architecture as the structural design of their mosques substituting the characteristic minarets with pagodas. The Shaanxi Hui were the true heirs of double identity i.e. Chinese and Muslim and certainly this duality of their identity was not a matter of fixed entities for them. It was a dynamic process of adjustment, personal preferences and fluid exchange of ideas and practices. These Hui were later identified as Gedimu when new factions of Islam emerged in China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, influenced by Middle Eastern Islamic movements and the Sufi orders transported from Central Asia. The Shaanxi Hui community did not experience a major factional shift and its majority remained Gedimu predominantly when the Hui population of the neighboring provinces of Ningxia and Gansu was almost exclusively following one or the other newly introduced Sufi orders.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently Gedimu looked like Han but internally they were linked together through religious and cultural ties, for example their concept of *Qing zhen* and the mosque centered neighborhoods were setting them apart from Han majority. So, the ostensible resemblance did not bridge the crevice between Han and Hui internally. In the ancient times, Chinese minds

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<sup>2</sup> Sufism began to make a substantial impact in China proper in the late 17th century, arriving mainly along the Central Asian trade routes with saintly shaykhs, both Chinese and foreign. The hierarchical organization of these Sufi networks helped in the mobilization of large numbers of Hui during economic and political crises in the 17th to 19th centuries, assisting widespread Muslim-led rebellions and resistance movements against late Ming and Qing imperial rule in Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Xinjiang. For a detailed discussion of Hui sects in Shaanxi and elsewhere, please see Dillon, Michael. 2013. *China's Muslim Hui community: migration, settlement and sects*: Routledge. P.117-126

were trained to treat foreigners as barbarians and uncivilized, therefore, this Hui community of foreign ancestry and foreign religion was no way eligible to stand equal to them despite their familiar outlook. The roots of resentment specifically oriented towards Hui were embedded in late Yuan times as well. The same feelings and behavior patterns continued to the Qing age rather than were augmented, as may be anticipated, because Manchu were an ethnic minority ruling over China. Hui, on the other hand, considered Han to be non-believers and not clean and pure and thus relegated them to an inferior status in their shared Hui understanding. They did not eat from Han restaurants, did not attend their feasts, and did not participate in their life passage rituals or religious festivals and observances. These mutual incompatibilities and constant uneasy coexistence took no time in breaking out as endemic unrest when the situation grew tense and friction crossed the limits when Qing was at the verge of decline by the end of nineteenth century.

### **C. Shaanxi Hui in the first phase of Manchu reign (1650-1780)**

With respect to Qing policies towards Huihui of Shaanxi, we can roughly divide their reign into two parts i.e. from 1650 to 1780 and then from 1781-1912. The span of 1650-1780 witnessed accommodative policies towards the Huihui of Shaanxi. The Qing Empire endorsed the idea of China as a multiethnic state replacing the previous notion of China being the property of Han people only.<sup>3</sup> In this way, they not only

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<sup>3</sup> It is evident in Qianlong's 1755 verdict: "There exists a view of China (Zhongxia), according to which non-Han people cannot become China's subjects and their land cannot be integrated into the territory of China. This does not represent our dynasty's understanding

justified their rule over the Han majority but also guaranteed equal rights of social justice and freedom to all the ethnic minorities of China. Manchu age is considered to be very influential upon the shapening of Hui identity in China as the Manchu themselves, being an ethnic minority, were striving for establishing their identity within the Chinese social hierarchy and this set a role model for the Hui and stimulated them to determine their status in a multiethnic empire.

### **1. Policies of Qing Empire towards Hui**

In the early years, the Qing Empire was busy crushing the Southern Ming dynasty and it was the last quarter of the seventeenth century when the newly found empire finally focused on the civil and economic reforms in the state. The following hundred years were the harbingers of peace and prosperity in Chinese lands. Israeli (1979) emphasizes the economic stability and administrative control of these hundred years which resulted into a flourishing society in general. A Chinese author (Kong Yizhou, 1953) while compiling the local history of Shaanxi Hui reinforces this stance saying that since the reign of Emperor Qianlong, Shaanxi was an abode of peace and order for Hui and there was no serious conflict in the early hundred years. So, despite the consistent tussle between Han and Hui, no brawl took a serious shape as the central Qing state was powerful enough to intrude directly into the local administrative issues when

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of China, but is instead that of the earlier Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties."Zhao, Gang. 2006. "Reinventing China Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century." *Modern China* 32:3-30.p.4

found an unjust or prejudiced decision taken by local Han officials. We find many edicts from the eighteenth century showing a benevolent imperial attitude towards Muslim faith and Hui literature and stressing the officials to treat the public without distinction or bias so that no seeds of rebellion or sectarian conflicts be disseminated causing a threat to the peace and security of the state.

Leslie (1986) translates and annotates a number of edicts regarding Muslims from the early Qing emperors, showing a consistent defense of the Hui against Han Chinese prejudice until the Qianlong emperor's reign. A monument from Qing records the following statement which indicates the religious liberty granted to the Muslims by the emperor Qianlong in 1763 A.D;

“Our ancient policy... has always been to get acquainted with people's ideas and wishes, and while educating them up to our standard and according to our systems, to still carefully conserve their own religious practices.... The Moslems being equally my subjects, why should their wishes not be satisfied?...my government seeing that different people must be ruled in different ways has always allowed people to pursue their own religious practices, so that through their religious beliefs they might be friendly to one another (Broomhall, 1910) (94-97)”.

This and other similar inscriptions from different Qing emperors show that in their age, China was a multiethnic empire and the minorities were granted liberty to practice their own religion. The Hui people were so influential and prosperous that it even helped the

propagation of Islam through the conversion of Han and it is stated that three out of every ten people in Shaanxi were Muslim (Jianbiao, 2011).

In 1731 A.D emperor *Yongzheng* issued an edict which mentioned that the emperor had been constantly receiving biased statements against Hui from Han bureaucracy but he declared that all of these complaints were based on discrimination and were baseless (Broomhall, 1910). It clearly stated that Hui would not be harmed at all provided that they were loyal to the state and participated in the walks of Chinese social life as diligently as Han Chinese did. The emperor declared his policy of discrimination between good and bad people irrespective of language, culture and religion. The biggest concern of the state was the submission and loyalty to the Qing Empire and not the personal beliefs or customs of the populace. If a religion did not threaten the state's authority, it was granted liberty and freedom. Reading between the lines, the edict makes us aware of what the Han administration was thinking and feeling about Hui as the Emperor was reported that the Hui were haughty, disobedient and rebellious.

They wanted the emperor to treat Hui harshly and suppress them but the emperor was wise enough to probe the truth for himself and smell the Han prejudice behind such statements. When the central Qing Empire was powerful enough it controlled the local bureaucracy by instructing them to observe justice between Han and Hui so the circumstances remained normal. But with the decline of Qing, the local administration and judiciary

started maltreating the Hui and shouldering Han unjustly in case of a Han-Hui local conflict which infuriated Hui who took it as a Qing offense against them. Gradually these sentiments of suppression and humiliation pushed Hui towards a rebellion against the Qing which they might have never intended in early Qing.

The Emperor *Yongzheng* in 1725 issued a decree for the governor and inhabitants of Shaanxi which delineated his policy of discrimination between good and bad subjects (Israeli, 1979). It goes against the stereotype that Hui were taken as prone to rebellion and disobedience by Qing because of their religion. The historical fact is that the Hui increased in number and their population reached 'approximately one million and seven hundred thousand by the reign of [Qing Emperor] *Xianfeng* with thousands of mosques erected.'(Jianbiao, 2011) So, by the mid of the Qing Dynasty, Hui community and their religion in Shaanxi Province were at bloom.

## **D. Shaanxi Hui in the second phase of Manchu Reign (1781-1912)**

### **1. Salar Rebellion in Gansu and its aftereffects**

The state policies did not get harsh towards Muslims until the *Salars* rose to rebel in Gansu in 1785 A.D. It was only then Qing emperor forbade Muslim pilgrimages to Makkah and put a ban on the religious preachers coming to China from the Muslim world. The permission to build the mosques was also withdrawn. In short, the Chinese state cut off the relations of local Muslims with the outer

Muslim world and deprived them of their religious rights. After the 1784 uprising, the Qing government forbade non-Muslims from converting to Islam (Ma, 1983). At that time the province of Shaanxi had a good number of Muslims and Xi'an had from four to five thousand Muslim families with seven mosques; most of them traced back to the Tang dynasty. *Huizu Jianshi*(1978) narrates that in 1781, *Bi Yuan* the governor of Shaanxi wrote a memorial to Qianlong emperor stating that Hui population of his province is denser than other provinces. He mentioned that the provincial capital Xi'an has at least several thousand Hui with seven mosques erected in the city. The emperor responded to the governor saying that no religious distinction must be made between his subjects and that all of them should be dealt with justice. The Muslim population of Shaanxi was assured that they will not be harmed as a consequence of the *Salar* revolt in Gansu, although they practice the same religion yet the state distinguishes between loyal and disloyal subjects. So if they will keep peace and maintain order, they would not be harmed at all.

This shows the serene and peaceful situation of Hui in Shaanxi and Xi'an during the eighteenth century. Even at the times of suspicion and rebellion, when the local officials maltreated Hui and confiscated their religious literature accusing them of possessing rebellious literature, Emperor Qianlong interrupted. He invalidated the link between Islam and the rebellious or defiant attitude of some Muslims and declared that Islamic knowledge was not responsible to produce such mutinous notions and movements (Yizhi, 1983).

## **2. Weakening of the Qing empire, natural disasters, and endemic of ethnic conflicts**

Emperor Qianlong's efforts to keep the peace were almost futile as the Qing state began losing control owing to the sporadic rebellions by Han and Hui both in various parts of the country. The rebellions in Taiping and Yunnan, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, affected the atmosphere of the whole empire. Yunnan had been haunted by Muslim-Chinese rivalries since 1821, but in Shaanxi small disturbances had been seen as early as the Qianlong reign. In the case of Yunnan, government officials supported the Chinese, and the Muslims had no option but to rise up against both the Chinese and the authorities. The rivalry between the Chinese and Muslim miners in central Yunnan triggered a severe clash in 1855, which developed into the slaughter of a great many Muslims in and around the provincial capital, Kunming, the following April.

This generated a general uprising of Yunnan Muslims, which lasted until 1873. To manage the expenses of large uprisings, a special tax on goods in transit—called the *likin* (lijin)—was started in 1853 and its income remained largely in the control of the local authorities. Thus the provincial governors-general and governors came to enlarge their military and financial autonomy, bringing about a trend of decentralization. Because the central Qing army was not sufficient enough to combat the widespread rebellious troops; the state had to rely on the local gentry and their militia for regional peace. In 1853 the Qing state ordered the formation of



local militias in Shaanxi and Gansu to defend against the Taiping armies (the military wing of a Christian sectarian attempt to establish a “heavenly kingdom” in Sichuan, the province immediately to the south of Shaanxi) (Jiqing, 1981). In these circumstances naturally, the locus of power shifted from the Manchu to those Chinese military officials who had played the main part in putting down the rebellions.

During the first half of the 19th century, a number of natural disasters hit Northwest China leaving a multitude of people in misery and starvation and they had to join the Taiping and other rebel groups for the sake of their survival. So, the province of Shaanxi being situated in Northwest China suffered from multifold problems which pushed the region into lawlessness and disorder. The official incompetence, military corruption, and increasing economic burdens because of both heavy taxation and insufficient economic resources all gathered to infuse the negative sentiments and fury in both Hui and Han inhabitants of Shaanxi.

Their aggression sprouted out in the form of local riots, market brawls, and sometimes intervillage conflicts on trivial issues. The most disgusting fact was that the local gentry shouldered and backed the Han Chinese in local riots falsely indicating the state’s intentions of exterminating Hui. Although there were no such orders from the central government, they were only overzealous and prejudiced local officials who were aided by the local militia, supported Han in the local conflicts and dealt unjustly with Hui, thus resulting in disastrous rebellions

later. As the riots were at the level of local counties initially, both Han and Hui had their own armed bands and they confronted each other occasionally but all these fights were completely local and not governed by any Hui leadership of the city or provincial level. So it was an act of self-defense rather than any planned rebellion or revolt against the Qing Empire initially.

A feature that distinguished Shaanxi Muslim population from other northwestern provinces of Muslim majority was that they were not adherents of any particular *menhuan*. The Sufi orders and their adherents had an organized network all over the region and thus could connect to each other through the chain of Sufi sheikhs whenever needed. Unlike Sufi orders, Shaanxi Hui population was Gedimu predominantly so their counties had no established connections except the broader relationship of Muslim brotherhood and shared identity. So it was harder for them to launch a coherent and prearranged fight against their foes. Their fights were merely comprised of spontaneous reactions to the Han attackers from the nearby counties. The situation got worse enough to push Shaanxi Muslims to fierce battles in 1860's, due to both internal turmoil and external stimulating intrusions. From Sichuan and Henan, *Shi Dakai* and *Chen Decai* led Taiping armies to the North, and from the East, the province was exposed to the danger of Western *Nian* so Shaanxi was in a very critical state (Pletcher, 2010).

The friction enhanced when the local officials urged the armed men from a multitude of Han counties to

gather against Hui. *Liu Rong*, the governor of Shaanxi, is particularly known for his anti-Hui policies as he declared Islam to be a religion lacking civilization and thus thought to civilize the Hui barbarians by forcing them to follow Han culture (Jiqing, 1981). The ineptness of Qing army was known to the local population so they underpinned their military preparations and strengthened their fortification, already in use for local defense. Sensing the alliance of local officials and gentry with non-Muslim population, some Muslims sought their protection by establishing connections with the invaders who might be their military allies in case of an attack. Meanwhile in the neighboring provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, the Muslims were effectively engaged in their military preparations.

### **3. A local brawl turns into a decade of warfare**

The initial cause of 1862-73 violence was a local communal conflict in Southern Shaanxi although historians differ on the details of the incident. Some report it as a brawl over the sale of bamboo and others narrate a story of Muslim young men's participation in a non-Muslims' festival to which they refused to contribute. It is unnecessary to falsify either of the events because there is a reasonable possibility that both of the events had occurred within a short period of time and infuriated the people of different countries simultaneously. And this hypothesis is supported by the Chinese historians who compiled the oral histories of the rebellion in the 1950s. Where the memory of Xi'an Hui narrators differs from the historical texts is in his accusation of beginning the

clash. According to them, the Han provoked the fighting. By contrast, the written histories and the oral traditions collected in the 1950s all bear testimony to the historical fact that Hui took the initiative. For example, Hui shepherds allowed their sheep to graze on Han fields and damage Han crops which enraged Han and they killed the sheep and thus fighting followed or a group of Hui burned a Han house and this infuriated Han and the clash began. So although we find inconsistency in historical accounts as to whether Hui were responsible for provoking Han or it was the opposite. In the continuation of the historical events, we find it more probable that Han would have exaggerated the event as they were shouldered by the local militia and gentry, unlike Hui who had no such support at all. But definitely all the historians unanimously share the observation that once the conflict ensued and things grew intense, both Hui and Han committed enormous violence and destruction.

#### **4. Hui rise against Han oppression or Manchus?**

The rebellion did not occur out of blue for some new reasons and motifs rather it was an outcome of different social and political pressures upon Hui as well as a natural reaction to the persistent suppression and hateful attitude of local administration and Han against Hui (Jiqing, 1981). There was a saying viral among the people that Hui killings would not be investigated by the authorities. So, it should not be portrayed as a revolt against Qing aimed to overthrow it instead it became incumbent upon Hui of Shaanxi to fight for their rights

and resist against the oppression they had been facing from the Qing officials and local gentry. Gillette (2008) quoted an Ahong of Xi'an from 1990s commemorating the Hui uprising of 1860s in the following words, "During the Qing dynasty, Han were trained from childhood to be cruel to Hui. Han were taught that Hui were useless. They were taught to look down upon the Hui (1025)."

Since it was normal for Hui and Han to confront local brawls or regional conflicts, during a similar instance there was a fight between Han and Hui and Han were chased out of their homes. A high-ranking Qing official who had worked in Beijing was the son of a Han woman who lived in that village. He returned home to visit her and found his mother evicted from her home. This infuriated him a great deal and he decided to take revenge on Hui. Leaving the village, the official spread the conflict to the neighboring ten counties, stirring the Han to fight the Hui. At that time there were whole villages comprised only of Hui people and villages in which Hui people were eighty-five percent of the population, but in the end, the Han won and either killed the Hui or chased them out of the country (Ma, 1983).

When the circumstance got tense in Shaanxi and the local massacre and riots were reported to the emperor, he sent two representatives in order to solve the matter through dialogue and reconciliation. But the enraged Hui killed Zhang Fei who belonged to Xi'an and was dispatched by the Emperor to probe and resolve the issue. His task was to convince the Muslim and non-Muslim troops to withdraw and comprehend that Taiping

armies were the real threat to the social stability of the empire and being loyal subjects, these local rivals should subjugate and cooperate with the state to crush Taiping. He ordered the Han *tuanlian* to leave him unguarded so that he may negotiate with the Muslim troops with no bias but unfortunately he was killed by the Hui and thus Qing emperor declared Hui to be the rebels against the state (Guangqi, 1993; Shuchou, 1953).

The Qing army was confronted with multifold tasks and multifaceted dangers comprising of Taiping and Nian armies and now the inner Hui rebellion. The Empire decided to distinguish between good Hui and the rebels, as had been the state policy since the emergence of Sufi orders. But the local Han did not agree to the suggestion and demanded total extermination of Hui population from Shaanxi. There was a circulation of leaflets with the statements 'extinguish Hui' and 'no Hui in Shaanxi' among the Han community by local militia (Jianbiao, 2011). These demands were heard as public slogans and widespread news in the area. Xi'an Hui remembers this demand as *Xi Hui* (wash away Hui).

The local Han troops were so emphatic that they sought permission to crush the Hui themselves if the Qing militia were reluctant to do so. Zuo Zongtang, who finally suppressed the rebellion, wondered why the local Han wanted extermination of Hui without any distinction of rebels. He wrote: "Shensi's gentry manifest a profound hatred for the Muslims. When they are asked their views about the Hui, they are always of the opinion that all Muslims should be killed... I fail to understand

their reasoning. (162)”(Israeli, 1979) This statement is verified by the accounts of local histories and narratives which say that Hui raised arms when they had no other option realizing the fact that they had nobody to complain to, ‘with no stability in their lives and nowhere to escape to, they had no reason to exist except to fight for survival.’(Qina).

In this critical state of affairs, the Hui commanders also had an internal dispute regarding how to respond to the threat of attack by Qing army and Han *tuanlian*. Some opined to besiege the provincial headquarter Xi’an until the Qing Empire agreed to reconcile and take away the charge of rebellion against Hui as they were expecting the worse from the alliance of Qing and local *tuanlian*. On the other hand, some others refused this option and insisted on adopting tactful negotiations with the authorities. This internal conflict even caused some killings and suicides within the Hui community. When this warfare was prevalent in the whole of Shaanxi, the Hui in Xi’an remained aloof and did not rise up whereas large groups of Han surrounded the city. The city officials shut all the gates but the Han people waited outside so that they could kill the Hui who might be departing the city or they could creep in by any means to slaughter the Hui living in the city.

Jinnan Wenqi records this event saying that On May 21st of a year during the Mei Jintang, a leader of local Han *tuanlian* threatened to exterminate all Hui of Xi’an. And upon his call, the armed Han gathered on the Southern side of the bell tower causing Hui to fear for their lives.

The life in Xi'an *Huimin jie* was still; what to say of any business activity or communal prayers all the residents hid in their houses keeping the doors and windows tightly closed. Some even took refuge in the mosques to save their lives considering mosques to be secure places. The women slept with their feet bound and clothes on to keep themselves safe from any sexual assault. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, again a similar threat was in the air by another local Han militia leader adding to the fury of Hui in the Muslim area. The social activities ceased in the Hui area altogether. There were no calls for prayers rather watchman's rattlers were used to intimate about the timings of prayer. The deceased Hui were not taken to the graveyard but rather buried within the Muslim area, the brides were sent to their husbands' homes at night (Qina). Written sources agree with this statement that the gates to the city were indeed shut and heavily guarded when Hui troops besieged the city wall. There is an oral narrative from the 1950s and a written account dating from 1938 which record that the provincial Manchu governor Yingqi Ban was frightened by the extraordinarily intense thunderstorm with severe lightning. He took it as a divine slogan in the favor of Xi'an Hui and made strict arrangements to guard Xi'an Hui by sending troops to guard the Muslim district and erecting fences around its edges.

Since the battle was fierce in the countryside of Shaanxi and the governor did not have enough resources to protect all the Hui of Shaanxi, he strictly ordered Xi'an Hui to remain inside the guarded city walls to stay protected and announced death penalty for those who



violated. A Hui author expressed the sentiments of his community at that time saying that they were like ‘caged birds’ or ‘the fish that dare not cross the boundaries of its pond’ (Guangqi, 1993; Jiqing, 1981; Shuchou, 1953). One of the 1950s oral histories reports that the Xi’an Hui were not allowed to depart the city for eighteen years, while another account gives a figure of “more than ten years”(Kong Yizhou, 1953). Many of the 1950s informants share the statement that Hui had been passing through the city gates carrying pork so that they could be identified as Han. Those who were identified in this disguise were put to death by the city guards as an old lady narrated that her elder brother was hanged on the city wall when he was trying to leave the city to meet his relatives living in a nearby county during the rebellion. At that time many Hui from the countryside wanted to take refuge into the city as they were being brutally killed out there. The guards used to ask the entering children what are they wearing on their feet. If they responded in standard Mandarin i.e. *xie* they were let enter and if they said the Hui slang for the shoes i.e. *hai* they were killed so it was a trick to identify(Gillette 2008). Hundreds of women and children were deliberately killed. Whole villages of Hui were completely wiped out.

## **5. Confrontation of Hui with Qing armies and its disastrous consequences**

In 1862, almost 700,000 Gedimu Hui stood against Qing in 18 battalions and finally in June, the Hui *tuanlian* besieged Xi’an which lasted for a year till the fall of 1863.

The brutal fight between Qing, its allied Han militia and the Hui *tuanlian* put many fighters and civilians to death. Although the provincial capital was restored, the fights between Qing army and the Muslims persisted in other parts of the province till 1868 when Zuo Zongtang arrived to subdue the Muslims and restore Shaanxi to the Qing Empire finally (Changshou). The rebels were in such a great number at that time that many historians of the time anticipated the establishment or emergence of a Muslim state in Northwest China including the province of Shaanxi. But their disunity and lack of a common leadership weakened them to the extent that they could not win over Qing despite the weakness of its armies.

By the time the imperial general, Zuo Zongtang, finally “pacified” Shaanxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang in 1873, the region was devastated. Fields lay fallow. Mosques, temples, and whole villages were destroyed. The Hui population of Shaanxi, which had made up between one-third and three-sevenths of the province’s inhabitants, about 700,000 to one million people, was reduced to a few thousand living in Xi’an (Shuchou, 1953). Not only their population was considerably reduced due to extensive massacre, also the provinces of their majority population were devastated, their economy and agriculture all perished. The population of Hui in Shaanxi at the beginning of twentieth century was 26000 and in the capital there were almost 9500 Muslims according to the official records (Chu, 1966). Hundreds of mosques were burnt or demolished during this calamity and Xi’an Hui were fortunate enough to save seven ancient mosques

only. The years of captivity during the Rebellion altered the lives of Xi'an Hui considerably and fended them off to backwardness and economic collapse. They faced all kinds of losses and trauma; their relatives and beloved ones were brutally murdered, they were sexually and emotionally assaulted, and emotionally tortured staying in persistent fear and terror for nearly two decades. All these calamities pushed Xi'an Hui back physically and emotionally making them feel homeless and unprotected in a land that they inhabited for more than a millennium. This feeling is reflected in their behavior even today when their elders abhor Han and their customs and insist upon ethnic segregation.

## **E. Conclusion**

Hui Muslims had a millennium-long history of peaceful and harmonious coexistence with Han people in the region so neither their religion nor their nature provoked them to revolt against non-believers. The seeds of ethnic conflicts between Hui and Han were sowed in the Yuan age when Muslims were given a status higher than the local Chinese by the Mongol emperors; it ignited the flame of hatred in the hearts of Han population towards Muslims. In the preceding Ming dynasty, Muslims were subjugated and integrated through assimilating policies and were localized to a greater extent.

The circumstances would have normalized with no ethnic riots ever raised again but unfortunately another alien rule i.e. Manchus intervened. The occupation of

China by Qing again led to the provocation of negative sentiments towards minorities among the Han majority. In the light of afore-mentioned historical evidence, we can clearly deduce that Han officialdom played a crucial role in creating an ambiance of confrontation of Hui with Qing state. Were it not the ethnic riots and racial bias by Han gentry, Hui would have never been forced to stand unanimously for the protection of their identity and rights. They were propelled to rise for self-defense owing to the discriminative policies of Han local authorities in Shaanxi at least. Also, we see that although the Qing Empire wanted to discriminate between rebels and innocent people yet its efforts remained futile as local Han authorities were adamant to exterminate Hui from the area. In this way, the situation worsened and the Hui finding no rescue from the Qing Empire assumed it to be their enemy and launched an uprising against the state as well.

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