

## *Huizu between Religious Control and Freedom in Communist China: A Study of Chinese Muslim Minority*

**Dr. Ayesha Qurrat ul Ain**

*Assistant Professor, Faculty of Usuluddin,  
 International Islamic University, Islamabad*



Version of Record Online / Print: 26-Dec-2018

Accepted: 18-Dec-2018

Received: 31-August-2018

### Abstract

*The freedom of religion in communist China is an ambiguous notion as the communist party understands religion as a reminiscent of backwardness and simultaneously proclaims the freedom of religion in the country. Islam, religion practiced by Hui minority, is included among the recognized religions of China and its adherents are granted rights to follow it. This paper argues that the Communist party has employed a disguised policy of controlling religious belief through establishing state controlled religious organizations and imparting freedom to practice religion. The slow and steady mind-making through these institutions train Hui youth to withdraw from their religion and to facilitate this withdrawal, the previously extant correlation between Hui ethnicity and religion (Islam) has been eliminated by the state and Hui ethnicity has nothing to do with religious affiliation anymore. The data for this research has been collected through ethnographic research upon the Hui community of Xi'an, employing unobtrusive observation as well as intensive interviewing.*

**Keywords:** *Huizu, Islam in Communist China, Belief control, Ethnic minority, Chinese Muslim minority*

### **Literature Review:**

Before and during the Cultural Revolution, the historiography in China remained primarily determined by the state's totalitarian orientations. Elman 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 Republican History projects begun by academics in China and then answered by scholars in Taiwan are but further examples of the poverty of state-controlled Chinese historiography (so-called dynastic history); they were not simply Marxist-Leninist or Maoist in origin, but also products of long-term imperial habits of historical control. 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."<sup>1</sup> It was only after Deng's reform policies that researchers got immediate and unmediated access to the local accounts and the oral narratives<sup>2</sup>. A major breakthrough in the trends of Chinese historiography was the publication of local Shaanxi records by Mark Selden in 1970's. In the light of these historical records, it has become possible to reconsider the history of Hui Muslims and revisit the relationship of state and religion in Chinese history.

We find a variety of opinions among the social scientists regarding the interrelations of religion and state in China. Most of them<sup>3</sup> agree to the fact that the history of religion in China is closely tied with the imperial patronage and interlaced with political concerns<sup>4</sup>. Many researchers including Lee<sup>5</sup>, MacInnis<sup>6</sup>, Potter<sup>7</sup> and Yang<sup>8</sup> have argued that in Communist China, the religion is being controlled and manipulated in the name of religious freedom. The state manipulation of religion in the case of Christianity has been studied by Peng<sup>9</sup>, Kindopp<sup>10</sup>, Leung<sup>11</sup>, Tapp<sup>12</sup> and Cao<sup>13</sup>. Similarly the case of Buddhism with reference to its relationship with Communist state has been studied by many scholars. In the vein of the aforementioned literature, the present research is an effort to analyze the situation of Hui Muslim minority in communist China.

### **Research Questions and Methodology:**

This research paper intends to investigate the nature of the behavior of Chinese state towards Hui Muslims in the modern period. It aims to explore the tools and strategies adopted by the Chinese Communist state in order to control the spread and transmission of Islam to the future generation of Hui Muslim minority.

This study is undertaken according to the case study research methods used in the social sciences, which implies observation, description and analysis of a particular case as of the Hui Muslim community of Xi'an. This is a small scale qualitative research based on participant observation, interviews, and analysis of historic, archival, and documentary material. The analytical and critical methods are applied to evaluate the information. The open ended interviews are conducted to understand the respondent's concern in a particular case, and not applied as a basic instrument to find out or validate a theme. This research offers a blend of theoretical and empirical analysis of Hui Muslim minority in contemporary China, using both archival and qualitative data derived from iconography and fieldwork in Xi'an between November 2011 and December 2014. Furthermore, it is aided by an extensive literature review both from European and local Chinese histories (official archives and local narrative compilations). Personal observation of the nature of Hui-Han relations in Xi'an and other Chinese localities during three years extensive field surveys helped putting the archival data in proper context.

## Introduction

Islam has always been a religion of minority in China. It never asked for the imperial patronage nor did it try to proselytize people en masse so it did not face imperial adversity in its early history but the pursuit of its adherents regarding settlement and acculturation in China was significantly, if not solely, governed by the state policies. Muslims came to China during Tang dynastical age as Arab and Persian traders mainly and remained secluded in ghettos as per state laws. During the reign of Mongols, they became the representatives of the empire and took official responsibilities thus got dispersed throughout the Chinese lands.

The preceding age was of Ming dynasty which emphasized upon the acculturation of foreigners and integration of ethnic minorities into the Chinese culture through intermarriages and language change. In this period, Muslims were truly indigenized and became part and parcel of Chinese society. The intermarriages of these originally foreign Muslims with local women produced a mixed progeny tied to both foreign ancestry and local roots and as a consequence of this interethnic hybridization, Chinese Muslim ethnic minority known as Hui emerged. The historicity of this early cross matching and interethnic socialization is still commemorated by Xi'an Hui when they proclaim that they are descended from *Huimin Baba* (Muslim grandfathers) and *Hanmin nana* (Chinese grandmothers).

The Hui minority, created in this way, was a unique instance of Islam exclusive to Chinese soil, embedded in both Chinese and Islamic civilization, possessing double identity associated with both their religion and their motherland China. In seventeenth century, Ming dynasty was replaced by Manchus and Qing rule was established. With respect to Qing policies towards Hui minority, we can divide their reign into two parts roughly i.e. from 1650 to 1780 and then from 1781-1912. The temporal span from 1650-1780 witnesses comparatively peaceful and accommodative policies towards the Huihui of Xi'an and Shaanxi. Since Manchu themselves were an ethnic minority, they were conscious of minority rights because safeguarding it implied the preservation of their own rights.

Moreover, 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>14</sup>. In the latter half of Qing reign, the rebellions in Taiping and Yunnan and Gansu affected the atmosphere of the whole empire adversely. The situation was worsened due to natural catastrophes like drought in Northwestern China; poor economy and weak administration caused the general masses to join the rebels. The malfunctioning of Qing bureaucracy and militia resulted into the restlessness and ethnic riots in Muslim majority provinces between Han and Hui. These riots sooner took a serious turn and a disastrous Hui rebellion rose in Shaanxi and neighboring provinces. Although Qing Empire crushed the rebels after a decade long warfare yet this upheaval took a huge toll of Hui lives in Shaanxi and they could never

restore their prestige and prosperity again.

The Qing state declined by the end of nineteenth century and underwent through serious jerks owing to the successive defeats and humiliations at the hands of the British, French, Americans, Germans and other Western colonial powers and finally at the hands of the Japanese in 1895, the Han majority availed this opportunity to overthrow the weakened Manchus and established a political state saying good bye to imperial China forever. Han leaders of early twentieth century called people for radical change in the country and these calls were visibly tinted with anti Manchu sentiments to motivate people emotionally by reminding them the cruelties and atrocities of Manchus from seventeenth century in order to depose the dynasty<sup>15</sup>.

These efforts bore fruit in the form of a revolution of 1911 which closed the chapter of imperial China forever laying the foundation stone of Peoples Republic of China. 1911 revolution was a milestone in the history of new China as it accompanied withdrawal from the imperial monarchy, its flawed bureaucratic system and official hierarchies. Such a radical shift necessitated an immediate substitute apparatus for running the newly established republic. The dilemma of the new state was twofold i.e. internal chaos and foreign aggression in the form of colonialism so they had to engage in a meticulous task. So it was not easy to provide a coherent framework and an organized manifesto of the new state immediately so there was a multitude of voices interpreting and manipulating the causes and outcomes of the recently ensued revolution. Meanwhile the echo of different revolutionary movement was heard throughout the state and the people were awakening and getting acquainted with their political, social and economic rights.

Hui community did not lag behind in this awakening moment and their leaders rose up to seek the social rights for their community. So, new Muslim schools were opened with a curriculum combining religious knowledge with social and natural sciences in order to make Hui compatible with the changing social patterns and emerging political and economic trends in Chinese republic. Despite all that, unfortunately Shaanxi Hui were so badly crushed in the rebellion during Qing that they could not pace with the emerging Hui educational and economic reforms. Neither their educational and economic situation was up to the mark nor did they have enough resources to establish institutions to combat the giant of illiteracy. It was only by the end of twentieth century during the reign of CCP that they became able to regain the economic stability and engage in socioeconomic reforms.

### **Regulating religion through institutions in New China**

In 1912, China Muslim Association of Common Progress was founded by Wang Kuan, Hou Deshan and others in Beijing aimed to work for Hui welfare at non-governmental level and in 1936 it had 200 branches throughout

the country<sup>16</sup>. It worked for development of Hui regions, educational reforms both in religious and secular fields, facilitating the translation of Holy Qur'ān into Chinese, running factories to generate employment for Hui people and its leadership comprised of Hui entrepreneurs as well as Ahongs so it enjoyed high esteem among Hui. There was also a new wave of Hui publishing houses in the Republic era as Muslim literature was published in bilingual form i.e. Arabic and Chinese and the religious books became commonly available to the Muslim readership in this way.

The most important accomplishment of this period was to publish the complete translation of the Holy Qur'ān into Chinese language in 1927 for the first time in Chinese history. Despite all these efforts and achievements, Hui were not an admired people in the Republic era as far as the attitude of Han majority was concerned. They were tortured psychologically and humiliated emotionally repeatedly during the period from 1911 to 1935. Many newspapers and journals published insulting articles against Islam, The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and Hui culture causing serious protests and sometimes bloodshed by the Hui. The state shouldered Hui in these conflicts and ordered to shut the culprit newspapers down. The Republic Period was a short span of forty years only and China was once again at the verge of another revolution at the hands of China Communist Party which founded New China in 1949.

Hui had contributed a lot in the foundation of New China as their chivalry in the anti-Japanese war was memorable and vital to the Chinese triumph. So, the new Chinese constitution affirmed Islam among the five religions of China and granted equal rights and freedom to Hui along with all ethnic minorities. The delegates representing Protestant Christianity, Buddhism and Islam participated in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1949 when CCP intended to establish a forum for the religious and ethnic minorities in order to interconnect with them and indirectly control them through state appointed representatives.<sup>17</sup> In 1950, PRC established" a regional coalition Government "in Northwest China, comprising of the five provinces of Muslim majority population i.e. Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang with Xi'an as the seat of its regional administration.<sup>18</sup>

The CCP since the foundation of New China was conscious of regulating religions in the country so Religious Affairs Bureau was established by the state council. The China's Islamic Association was also revived as a sub-organization of the Bureau and its first meeting held in 1953 in Beijing with 111 representatives under the leadership of *Bao'erhan Shaxidi*. Apparently it was a representative organization of Muslims in the Communist government but inherently its mission was to disseminate the socialist ideas in China's Muslim community and help Muslims adapt to the new socialist state and its demands.<sup>19</sup>

The CCP leaders were convinced of triumph of socialism over the

religions as *Zhou Enlai* said while allowing the practice of religions, "So we are going to go on letting you teach, trying to convert the people . . . After all we both believe that the truth will prevail; we think your beliefs untrue and false, therefore if we are right, the people will reject them, and your church will decay. If you are right, then the people will believe you, but as we are sure that you are wrong, we are prepared for that risk."<sup>20</sup> This association established its branches and offices at provincial level thus connecting the scattered Muslim community through an official network. All the mosques and Qur'ānic schools are required to be registered with this association. Communist China has been striving to seek relationship with other countries including Muslim states and this is why it needed to exhibit religious freedom and tolerance towards its ethnic minorities including Muslims. They were sent to Muslim states like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Pakistan etc as ambassadors and representatives.

In 1955, another government institute was established for training of Muslim Imams and thus controlling the minds of Muslims through the indoctrination of their religious leaders. China Islamic Institute offered courses upon core Islamic studies and Chinese language and culture as well as Marxism so that they could be eligible to work as the bridge between the state and their community.

### **The coercive policies during Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution**

The CCP has always been divided upon the issue of religious freedom between Maoist and non-Maoist approaches upon how to deal with the religion. Mao Zedong and his companions considered religion to be a trace of backwardness and feudal age and thus must be eradicated. So, Hui communities suffered a great deal under the Maoist regime when all the religions were considered to be anti-modern and thus an obstacle in the way of New China to progress.

The Cultural Revolution was launched in 1958 and the religious practices were abrogated. Red Guards took over the religious institutions destroying the mosques relegating them as symbols of feudal anti-modern culture. Mosques in Xi'an were also destroyed, their properties confiscated, the religious scholars forced to return to lay man life departing the mosques and the religious education was prohibited totally. Xi'an Hui elders remember this oppressive time and share their experiences of learning Qur'ān secretly during Cultural Revolution. They even urge their off springs to earn religious education saying that the new generation is lucky enough to practice Islam with liberty.

An old lady<sup>21</sup>, while sharing the dreadful experience said that the Hui were not allowed attending the mosque or acquiring Qur'ānic education. All the religious education and practices were secretly conducted at homes and at a much reduced level. The *lǎo rén* (older community members) of Xi'an Muslim Street reported<sup>22</sup> that the mosques of the area were used by the Red Guards as *Yúlè Táng* (entertainment halls). This practice was quite

humiliating and painful for the local Hui as for them mosque represented the house of Allah. So, the period of Cultural Revolution was a major setback for the Hui of Shaanxi as far as the practice of religion is concerned. Not only hindered from practicing religion but also tortured psychologically and harassed emotionally by misuse and demolition of their sacred edifices.

### **Deng's new policy of religious freedom and control**

This situation prevailed till 1976 when Deng Xiaoping put an end to the Cultural Revolution and introduced his reforms. He opened China to the world and resumed the religious rights of all the ethnic minorities. Islam along with other four recognized religions of China i.e. Daoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Protestantism is well defined by Document 19 of March 1982 and the new constitution which is still promulgated. The freedom to practice religion is guaranteed but with the condition of accepting the ultimate supremacy of state<sup>23</sup>. The law declares that no person may 'make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State'.<sup>24</sup>

Deng's policies are not to be taken as a diversion from the Maoist's policies of religious control rather a new tactic to deal with religion using it as a tool to enhance the economic stability and progress of China helping the Chinese state having good relations with the Western and Gulf modern developed countries. Deng's seemingly compassionate policies towards religions and their adherents do not reflect any sympathy towards religion rather work in disguise to control religious practices and beliefs even more keenly. The suppression of the religion during the Cultural Revolution had resulted into the clandestine practices of religion and thus beyond the control of CCP therefore, the new policy of religious freedom is introduced to entice religious followers to public worship to facilitate the regulation and control of religion for the Communist state.<sup>25</sup>

1980's was a decade of fortune for the restoration and expansion of religions in China including Islam. The religious sites were restored and rehabilitated including mosques and Hui tombs. The government provided funds to restore and repair the losses during Cultural Revolution. *Huajue* Mosque of Xi'an and the Small Mosque were also repaired during this period. The state provided funds for the mosques in Xi'an who were included among the cultural heritage by the authorities whereas other demolished mosques were constructed through local fund raising<sup>26</sup>. By the end of 1980, there were 118 mosques in Shaanxi.

The China Islamic Association was restored and its regional offices resumed their activities. The basic purpose of establishing the institutes of religious activities was, as stated by the authorities, to produce a group of young religious scholars not only well-versed in religious education but also capable to serve the interests of Communist part by being 'politically patriotic' and eager to support the Party's viewpoint and aims to establish a socialist society<sup>27</sup>. The policy of religious freedom and training the minds of religious

believers through socialist educational institutions adopted by the Chinese state is in fact a tool to eradicate the religion finally through gradual mind making of people instead of coercive policies. As a party leader Li Weihuan said explicitly that the policy of religious liberty is a radically new idea and if the Communist party could carefully execute this policy, it will slowly and steadily change the adherents of religions from belief to non-belief.<sup>28</sup>

By the end of 1995, Shaanxi also had a provincial office of Islamic Association based in Xi'an. Most of the mosques and religious schools of Xi'an are registered and are run by a democratic administrative committee introduced by the government when mosques were reopened after the Cultural Revolution. These committees work to arrange and manage religious activities, festivals, Qur'anic education and the financial resources of the mosque as well as they serve as the connecting link between different mosques. There are regulations formed by the government to control the religious activities of the natives and foreigners both. So, Hui communities enjoy the freedom to practice Islam and pray or acquire religious knowledge at the registered mosques or religious schools. They are also allowed to make Hajj to Makah and travel to Muslim world to acquire religious knowledge at the universities but at the same time all their religious activities are conducted only under the state monitoring and prescribed boundaries. Hui, being an ethnic minority are privileged with some 'preferential policies'<sup>29</sup> which include reserve quotas for higher education and employment and the permission to have more than one child.<sup>30</sup>

### **The identity of Hui between religion and ethnicity**

As far as the Hui identity as a nationality and its ethnic relationship with Islam as a religion in PRC is concerned, both the Republican and Communist governments have included Muslims among the 'five great people of China', along with Mongols, Tibetans, Manchus and the Han majority.<sup>31</sup> Now, they are considered to be one among the ten Muslim ethnic minorities. But Islam has no link with the Hui ethnic identity officially in today's China and the most significant or striking element of their Huiness according to the state criterion is their foreign ancestry. Islam has been the characteristic element of Hui identity till the Republican period but CCP has devised a new nationality criterion based upon Stalin's definitions. According to this standard, there are 55 nationalities in China and Hui is one of them with its basic determinant being the lineage of people. It has always been problematic and debatable issue among scholars that how Stalin's definition of nationality can be applied to Hui when they don't possess any of the characteristics mentioned in the definition of Minzu (nationality). Minzu is said to share a common territory, language, form of economic livelihood, and psychology and all these are non-existent in Hui and thus inapplicable to them<sup>32</sup>. But despite all these debates and arguments, the State Nationalities Commission in 1989 agreed to impart anyone who could verify his or her descent from foreign Muslims, a distinct Minzu called Huizu.<sup>33</sup>



The idea underlying the concept of Minzu is not entirely an innovation and superimposition of state upon the people as Sino-Muslims themselves wanted a status distinguishable from the Muslims of Xinjiang and Northwestern frontiers of China. Moreover both Han and Hui since long believe that lineage and ancestry mean a lot in determination of one's identity. CCP took advantage of this popular understanding and produced a stereotype in the special Hui histories compiled by CCP scholars that Hui are originated in the Ming dynasty from a mixture of Arab, Persian and Central Asian races. And since their ancestors were traders and merchants, they are intrinsically inclined towards merchandise and not interested in seeking education.

The problem is not in locating the foreign ancestry of Hui rather in the way it has been exploited by the PRC scholars. Xi'an Hui express this identifying element when asked about their lineage; they respond that they are descendents of Muslim paternal grandfathers and Han paternal grandmothers. And this trend of locating their genitors in ancestral generation is found among Xi'an Hui since 1930's at least as Maris referred to a local document from 1938 with the same phrase<sup>34</sup>. At the same time they understood Islam to be an essential element of their Hui identity and it is only the CCP policies which served to detach Islam from the Hui identity classifying it only a matter of personal belief and not the grounds of collective identity of Minzu. This is how they altered the connotation of the word Hui as it had been understood since Ming relegating it equivalent to a nationality of a cultural minority i.e. Huizu. Although religion is not their collective identity classifier according to the official criterion yet practically the only unifying element binding Hui together is Islam.<sup>35</sup>

Since Ming, Hui has been understood as an equivalent to Muslim and till today the elderly Hui people of Xi'an equate both the words and take them as transposable. But the young generation, well aware of the state propagated meaning of Hui differentiates between the two. When asked their nationality, they respond to be Huizu and when asked about religious affiliation, they mention Islam as their religion. While talking to Fatima a young Hui lady, I used the words *Mūsīlīn* (Chinese word for Muslim) and Hui interchangeably. She immediately corrected me saying that Huizu is just a Minzu and not identical to *Mūsīlīn*. She added that these local boundaries and demarcation of Minzu cannot break the universal network of Muslim Ummah. All the Muslims are in a brotherly relationship irrespective of their Minzu. She recited the Qur'ānic verse saying that All the Muslims are brothers whereas the ethnic nationality is merely a trivial and local matter. Lindbeck<sup>36</sup> has rightly observed the same feature in 1950 that the Muslims could never follow the minority policy of the Communists party of relegating religion to be a matter of ethnic difference only because this is against the factual reality.

Muslims in China feel stronger connections of Islamic brotherhood with their coreligionists beyond the linguistic or ethnic differences. However,

the paradigm of locating one's identity and the very understanding of the title 'Hui' is definitely changing among Hui from older generation to the younger one.

The Soviet concept and framework of nationalities has been expanded and modified by the CCP state to acculturate and sinicize the Hui.<sup>37</sup> Not only their origin, their culture and dispositions are also the subjects of state propaganda as they are portrayed to be culturally backward, inherently disposed towards commerce and tended towards illiteracy.<sup>38</sup> Han are said to be the elder brother of all the minority nationalities and thus portrayed to be the most progressive and modern, detached from any religious bindings or cultural traits that would render one to be backward or feudal. So, Han are portrayed to be the ideal people whom all others including Hui need to imitate to get rid of religious affiliations and to embark on the journey of progress and development.

On one hand, CCP grants religious rights to Hui demonstrating to the world that China is a liberal state and on the other hand it reinstates Hui people that unless they get rid of these religious precincts, they would never be progressive and modern like Han. By providing religious liberty to Hui, the state reinforces the idea in Han minds that since Hui are parochial and underdeveloped that is why they are provided with relaxations to follow their cultural practices<sup>39</sup>.

So, this ambivalent attitude serves many purposes of the CCP government both internally and outwardly. Leung calls it the "United Front Tactics"<sup>40</sup> of CCP under which Mao recruited believers in the government controlled bureaus of religious affairs and controlled and monitored the activities of respective religious communities. And through which Deng used the minorities to serve as representatives of China's tolerant religious policies for the outer world and simultaneously pressurizing them psychologically to work for the national progress imitating Han and leaving their backward cultural traits behind.

The policies of CCP and other socio-historical factors have influenced Hui considerably. As we have already seen that Ming policies of acculturation had turned Hui into a community with close resemblance to Han in their appearance and material culture. It is only the religious injunctions which make Hui stand apart and discriminated from Han socially like pork taboo, praying five times a day and some religious cultural festivals. If compared to other ethnic minorities, Hui can be easily classified as most accommodative minority in China. Their language, food, dress and living style is very close to Han ways and it has sometimes lead to the criticism of Muslim reformers towards Hui that they have compromised their religious traits.

Apart from Israeli<sup>41</sup>, all other scholars of Islam in China<sup>42</sup> are strongly of the view that Hui are the most integrated people in the Chinese culture. Chinese state also admits this fact that Hui are patriots and they have adopted China as their homeland and have owned its culture. So, Hui are granted

more rights to practice religion and are dealt with relaxation and leniency as compared to the Uyghurs who are subject to suspicion of separatist movements. Hui are tended towards accommodation and reconciliation particularly because they do not have any other homeland to seek for. Their language, culture and even the way they practice and understand their religion, is developed and shaped in Chinese ambiance so they ultimately belong here. This spirit of belonging to China and feeling it as their own motherland can be evidently observed in Xi'an Hui community whom I have been interacting.

**Conclusion: the impact of CCP policies upon Xi'an Hui**

After observing a continuous and growing tendency of integration among Hui of Shaanxi one wonders that what would be the future of Hui people. Will they be totally assimilated losing their identity under the social and political pressures or will they be able to retain their unique identity? This question can find a clue to answer in Wang Jianping's observation that Hui acculturation in the Han society serves to reduce their 'cultural distance' from their Chinese neighbors without doing any harm to their ethno-religious distinctiveness<sup>43</sup>. Leslie interprets Wang's statement saying that Chinese traditional social emphasis upon lineage would not let Hui identity wither and even acculturated socially; Hui would retain their distinctiveness and would never be merged in Chinese Han majority. According to him, like the rest of the world in China as well, 'labels are more important than reality'<sup>44</sup>. But what we see in Xi'an nowadays is a different situation practically. The young Hui community is totally integrated and indistinguishable from Han. The youth is not concerned about their religious obligations like offering prayer or covering head by females etc. Although pork taboo is maintained but one cannot know it unless eat together. So, apparently the Hui are losing their Muslim identity though retaining their Minzu distinction. What Leslie said about the survival of Hui owing to the Chinese emphasis upon lineage, seems true for the endurance for Huizu as state understood and redefined it.

As far as the survival of Muslim identity of Hui is concerned it is endangered. The Hui youth is more prone to be influenced by state propaganda of progress and modernism and thus following Han in all the social and cultural aspects. So, culturally the Hui of Xi'an are moving towards integration and accommodation with Han Chinese culture and society. But this assimilating trend is counter-balanced with the emergence of Muslim revivalist movements emphasizing upon the religious roots of Muslim Hui in Xi'an with material as well as spiritual support of Muslim world particularly Middle East. Many religious schools have been established to teach Arabic language and Qur'an to the children and adults as well as to train the young people as the religious scholars. Many young boys and girls have gone to the Muslim universities in Pakistan, Malaysia and Cairo for attaining religious knowledge. So as we hypothesized the cultural journey of Muslims in Xi'an is a continuous dialogical process between adaptation to the Chinese culture

and retention of the religious traits. Furthermore, it can be clearly inferred from the historical account of Xi'an Hui that the Chinese state played a decisive role in the determination of Muslim identity, their self-perception and the kind and extent of their accommodation with the Han Chinese majority all the way from Tang to the PRC.

In the writings of today's Hui leaders, we find a strong aroma of combining national patriotism with the religious commitment. The way they adjusted with Confucian society, emphasizing upon the harmony of the society keeping themselves loyal to the emperor, the same spirit seems to be at work in contemporary society as well. Not compromising any of their identity aspects, they live in Chinese society being faithful servants of Allah and the patriotic citizens of PRC. A contemporary Hui author of Shaanxi presents Islam as a simple religion which emphasizes upon keeping balance between this world and hereafter and teaches its adherents 'to be patriotic and obedient' to the people of authority. And these teachings, in his view enable Hui to live peacefully with their non-Hui neighbors in order to facilitate both the groups (Hui and Han) to participate in building a harmonious society<sup>45</sup>. This piece of writing reflects the mindset of today's Hui, their self-perception and the way they locate themselves and justify their existence in a non-Muslim majority society.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

---

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Benjamin A Elman, "The Failures of Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010).p.373. Also see Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "On Shi and Lun: Toward a Typology of Historiography in the Prc," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (1996).
- <sup>2</sup> See for an introduction to this aspect, Donald G Gillin, "'Peasant Nationalism" in the History of Chinese Communism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 02 (1964); Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000* (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- <sup>3</sup> J. Lagerwey, *Religion and Chinese society*, Vol. 1, (Chinese University Press, 2004).
- <sup>4</sup> C.K.Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, (University of California Press,1961)
- <sup>5</sup> R.W.Lee, "General Aspects of Chinese Communist Religious Policy, with Soviet Comparisons," *The China Quarterly* 19, (1964): 161-173.
- <sup>6</sup> D.E. MacInnis, *Religion in China today: Policy and practice*, (1989).
- <sup>7</sup> P.B.Potter, "Belief in control: Regulation of religion in China," *The China Quarterly*, 174, (2003): 317-337.
- <sup>8</sup> F. Yang, "Between secularist ideology and desecularizing reality: The birth and growth of religious research in communist China," *Sociology of Religion*, 65, No.2,

(2004): 101-119.

<sup>9</sup> L.Peng, "Church and state relations in China: Characteristics and trends" *Journal of Contemporary China*, 5, no.11 (1996): 69-79.

<sup>10</sup> Kindopp, J., & Hamrin, C. L. *God and Caesar in China: Policy implications of church-state tensions* (Brookings Institution Press, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> B. Leung, "China's religious freedom policy: The art of managing religious activity", *China Quarterly*, :184, 894.

<sup>12</sup> N. Tapp, "China: A Pandora's Box?" *Anthropology Today*, 2, No.2, (1986): 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Cao, "Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State: An Ethnographic Account of Church-State Relations in China's Economic Transition", *Sociology of Religion*, 68, no. 1 (2007): 45-66.

<sup>14</sup>An excellent example of the Qing rulers' dexterity and creativity in employing the Han concept of China is Qianlong's 1755 pronouncement: "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 of China, but is instead that of the earlier Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties." Gang Zhao, "Reinventing China Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern China* 32, no. 1 (2006):.4

<sup>15</sup>Peter Gue Zarrow, "Historical Trauma: Anti-Manchuism and Memories of Atrocity in Late Qing China," *History & Memory* 16, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Shoujiang You Jia Mi, *Islam in China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Michael Dillon, *Contemporary China* (Routledge, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> John MH Lindbeck, "Communism, Islam and Nationalism in China," *The Review of Politics* 12, no. 04 (1950).

<sup>19</sup> Mi, *Islam in China*.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Marsh, *Religion and the State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival, and Revival* (Continuum, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication of author with the Hui residents during a visit to the Xi'an Muslim street on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014

<sup>22</sup> Author had many discussions with older people of the Muslim street during the visits to the local mosques and markets during the span from September 2012 to March 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Beatrice Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity," *China Quarterly-London*- 184(2005).

<sup>24</sup> (Article 36 in 'Constitution of PRC' 2000:7) quoted by Colin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Merle Goldman, "Religion in Post-Mao China," *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 483, no. 1 (1986).

<sup>26</sup> Information collected by author through informants in Xi'an Hui community in 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Ma Wenlong, "Religious Institutes and the Construction of a Harmonious Society in a New Era," in *Muslims and a Harmonious Society : Selected Papers from a Three-Conference Series on Muslim Minorities in Northwest China : Gansu Province, 2008, Shaanxi Province, 2009, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, 2009* ed. Jared Daugherty (Arlington, Va. : Institute for Global Engagement, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity."

<sup>29</sup> Some people change their nationality i.e. from Han to Hui to get benefitted from

there preferential policies. Personal communication of author with Ti'en, a local Han boy on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2013, who shared this information saying that he knew many people personally who did so.

<sup>30</sup> Han couples were not allowed to have more than one child according to the policies introduced in 1970's although some modifications and exception have been made to this law recently.

<sup>31</sup> In his inaugural address in 1912, Sun Yat-Sen, the Provisional President of the Republic of China, announced to the world: "The foundation of the country lies in the people; and the unification of lands inhabited by the Han Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan people into one country, means the unification of the Han Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan ethnic groups. This is national unification." Zheng Qian, *China's Ethnic Groups and Religions*, ed. Wu Wei, The Sinopedia Series (Singapore: Cengage Learning Asia Pte Ltd, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Martin King Whyte, Ezra F Vogel, and William L Parish Jr, "Social Structure of World Regions: Mainland China," *Annual Review of Sociology* 3, no. 1 (1977).

<sup>33</sup> Gladney observed that this criterion entirely based upon genealogy led the state to classify such people as Hui who have no link with Islamic belief or religion. Apart from possessing Muslim ancestry, they have nothing like Muslims i.e. they eat pork and practice Han folk customs. For details please see Dru C Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>34</sup> Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Dru C Gladney, "Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?," *The China Quarterly* 174(2003); David G Atwill, "Blinkered Visions: Islamic Identity, Hui Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856 – 1873," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 04 (2003).

<sup>36</sup> Lindbeck, "Communism, Islam and Nationalism in China."

<sup>37</sup> Jean A Berlie, *Islam in China: Hui and Uyghurs between Modernization and Sinicization* (White Lotus Press, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> This propaganda has been so repeatedly reinforced that Hui themselves in Xi'an are heard to repeat these stereotypes about them. Han are obviously more likely to believe this and the author personally heard these things from them among my colleagues and neighbors in the university premises and at restaurants.

<sup>39</sup> Gladney, "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities."

<sup>40</sup> Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity."

<sup>41</sup> Raphael Israeli, "Muslims in China: The Incompatibility between Islam and the Chinese Order," *T'oung Pao* (1977).

<sup>42</sup> Donald Daniel Leslie, *The Integration of Religious Minorities in China: The Case of Chinese Muslims*, vol. 59 (Australian National University, 1998); Jonathan Lipman, "Familiar Strangers: A Muslim History in China," (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Zvi Ben-Dor, "Even Unto China': Displacement and Chinese Muslim Myths of Origin," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 4(2002).

<sup>43</sup> Jianping Wang, *Concord and Conflict: The Hui Communities of Yunnan Society in a Historical Perspective*, vol. 11 (Lund University, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Donald Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China: A Short History to 1800* (Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1986).

## Huizu between Religious Control and Freedom in Communist China:

---

<sup>45</sup> Wenlong, "Religious Institutes and the Construction of a Harmonious Society in a New Era."