

The Hui (Muslim) Minority in China

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THE golden millennium of Chinese Islam began in 31 AH/651 AC, the year that Islam was introduced to China by the Arabs, and ended in 1054 AH/1644 AC when Ming Dynasty was replaced by the Ch'ing. During these 993 years, China was ruled by T'ang (618-906), Sung (960-1279), Yuan (1279-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. During these centuries, the believers in Islam developed from their T'ang-Sung status of scattered settlers into a full-grown Hui minority in Yuan-Ming times. The Hui minority which consisted of Arab, Persian and Central Asian Muslims and their Chinese spouses, was probably an unprecedented creation as a religious-multiracial people who were united together as an ethnic group by the teachings of Islam.

Islam, Judaism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism and Zoroastrianism came to T'ang China at about the same time. But by the end of the Ming Dynasty, Islam was the only faith which survived, developed, gained strongholds, evolved into a Sinoised minority and obtained permanent ethnic membership in the formation of the Chinese nation. The other four religions either went underground or disappeared in the 14th century. Although Buddhism, which came to China in the first Christian century, was still the second largest faith, it was negative to reality and the worldly life, lacking the perspicacity and principles to meet the Chinese demands.

However, this glorious millennium was, unfortunately, followed by the dark age of Chinese Islam, the Muslim genocide in the Ch'ing period (1644-1911). In these 267 years, approximately 12,000,000 Muslims were massacred by the Manchu-Han superior military power.

After the downfall of the Ch'ing, the First Republic of China was established in 1912. All the Chinese Muslims supported the new government and started their revival movement which is continuing to the present day on Mainland China as well as in Taiwan.

Islam in T'ang China

The Chinese *New T'ang History* recorded that the first Arab mission, dispatched by the third Caliph 'Uthman (r 644-655) arrived at Ch'angan, the capital of T'ang Dynasty (618-906), in 31 AH/651 AC,¹ nineteen years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632 AC). It was exactly one hundred years before China lost Central Asia to the 'Abbasid Caliphate in the war of Talas in 751 AC.² This new religion was brought to the Far East not by militant Arabs with swords on camelback, but by Arab diplomats, scholars, merchants, scientists and artists, who held no ecclesiastical status. Their number was small and had little impact on the Chinese community, which was dominantly Confucianist. Islam as a religion was confined to the Arabs only because

it was brought to China by the Arabs without the intention of gaining proselytes.

Northwest: the First Muslim Stronghold

Only six years after the Sino-Arab war in Talas, the vigourless T'ang Empire was threatened by a rebellion led by a Turkish warlord, An Lu-shan (d 757). As a result, the T'ang Emperor Su-Tsung (r 756-762) asked the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r 754-775) to send an army of 20,000 (even 100,000) Muslim soldiers from Arabia and Central Asia to help the T'ang troops defeat the rebels in 758.³ After the war, these Muslims were allowed to settle in the Northwest and were given Chinese wives. Consequently, they had dual nationality because they were the sons-in-law of the Han Chinese. They were the earliest ancestors of the Muslims in Northwest China. Due to their military contributions to, and their matrimonial relations with, the Chinese, Islam gained its first stronghold in this Confucianist land.

Southwest: The Second Muslim Stronghold

In 801, Islam penetrated into the Yunnan province in Southwest China from Central Asia when a group of 20,000 Arab and Samarkani soldiers were hired by the Tibetans as mercenaries to wage war against the petty Kingdom of Nanchao in Yunnan. Nanchao was a satellite state of the T'ang Empire which, in



due course, helped the former defeat the Tibetans and the Muslims. All the Muslims were captured.⁴ Unexpectedly, instead of being punished, the Arabs and Samarkanis were not only released, but for unknown reasons, were allowed to live in Yunnan, marry Chinese women and serve in the military and domestic services. In short, they became the forefathers of the Hui minority in Southwest China.

The Southeast

In addition to the two large groups of Muslim military immigrants who settled in the Northwest and the Southwest, several tens of thousands of Arab and Persian merchants came to Southeast China around the same period. They invested heavily in business, owned sea transportation, enjoyed a luxurious life, and were averse to being soldiers or farmers. Most of them had no intention of living in the Orient. When China was at peace and there were opportunities to make profit, they stayed. When there was war, they simply packed their gold and belongings and sailed home.⁵ Very few of them remained behind. This was the reason why Islam did not gain a stronghold in the Southeast as it had in the Northwest and Southwest.

Muslim Population in T'ang China

Because of this, Muslims in T'ang China consisted mainly of Arabs and some Central Asians who were concentrated in the Northwest and the Southwest. These two military groups were initially estimated at 40,000, but this figure was soon increased to 80,000 by the addition of 40,000 Chinese wives. By the beginning of the 10th century, over a period of 149 years (757-906), equivalent to five generations, the Muslim population would have grown to no less than 500,000 even by a conservative estimate.

North China: The Third Muslim Stronghold

During the reign of the Northern Sung Emperor, Shen-Tsung (r 1068-1085), there arrived in his capital, K'aifeng, in 1070, a group of 5,300 young Arabs under the leadership of a Bukhara Prince Sayyed So-fei-er (d 1120), who was descendant of the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) in the 26th generation.⁶ At the same time, Sung China had lost a large territory south of the Great Wall, including the city of Yenking (Peking) to the Liao Empire of the Khitan (1034-1125). For political reasons, Shen-tsong received So-fei-er with great honour, making him

the Marquis of I-ning. More importantly, he allowed all the Arab adventurers to settle in the war-devastated land between K'aifeng and Yenking in order to create a buffer zone between the weak Sung and the strong Liao.

In 1080, another group of more than 10,000 Arab men and women on horses, led by So-fei-er's military aides, arrived in China to join him in Honan. After an audience with these Arabs, Emperor Shen-tsong again permitted them to settle in the Honan, Shantung, Shansi, Hopei and Anhui provinces. So-fei-er was promoted by the Emperor to the status of Duke of Ch'ingkuo.

As settlers in the area between Sung China and the northern nomads, So-fei-er's family became the non-Chinese power in the 11th to 12th centuries, monopolizing the land traffic on the Silk Road with the support of the Chinese, Khitan, Tibetan and Tangut governments. This was how Islam gained its third stronghold in North China.

So-fei-er, the founder of the Muslim community in North China, was the ancestor of several famous Muslim statesmen, generals and scholars from the 13th to the 19th centuries. More importantly, the Sayyed discovered that Arabia and Islam were misnamed by the T'ang-Sung Chinese as Ta-shih-Kuo (the state of Arabia) and Ta-Shih-Fa (the Religion of Islam). The ancient Chinese mistook Ta-Shih as Arabia. To correct these mistakes, he introduced Hui-Hui-Chiao (the Religion of Double Return) to substitute Ta-Shih-Fa and then replaced Ta-Shih-Kuo with Hui-Hui-Kuo (the Islamic State). The Religion of Double Return meant to "submit and return to Allah". Thus, in Chinese Hui-Hui-Chiao was universally accepted and adopted for Islam by the Chinese, Khitan, Nujens, Mongols, and Turks before the end of the 11th century.

Muslim Population in Sung China

Although there is scarcity of information in Sung history about the

Muslim migrations from Central Asia and North China, we believe that this movement towards the East continued. But the immigrants were often stopped by the Khitans or the Nujens (Chin) on the way, and they had to reconcile themselves to staying in the Liao or Chin territory while biding their time to come to China. When the Mongols conquered both countries in the 13th century, the Muslims were free to join their brothers-in-Islam in the Great North.

We have to depend on our considered judgment to estimate the size of the Muslim population at the end of the Sung (960-1279). Assuming that the total population at the beginning of the 10th century was 500,000 in the 13th century, after a period of 319 years, it should have increased to fourfold to approximately 2,000,000. This is a conservative estimate, but I concede that there is no hard data to corroborate it.

Islam in Yuan China: Khublai Khan and the Hui Minority

The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) was founded by Khublai Khan (1260-1294), a grandson of Chingis Khan (1162-1227). His military machine was built largely upon the 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 Muslim soldiers he brought to China from the Middle East and Central Asia.⁷ All the commanders-in-Chief of the three Mongol war zones (Central China, Southwest China and Southeast China fronts) were Arabs: Prince Sayyed Po-Yen (1235-1294), Prince Sayyed Edjill Chams ed-Din Omar (1211-1279), and General P'u Shou-keng (1214-1291). They won the wars for Khublai Khan against the Sung Empire. Many thousands of Muslims served as high officials in the central and provincial governments. Because the majority of the Mongol soldiers were Muslims, the Khan ordained them second-class citizenship in Yuan China. It was the beginning of the Hui minority in Chinese history, the greatest achievement of the Chinese Muslims.⁹

Prince Ananda's Attempt to Islamize the Yunan Khanate

Ananda (1307-1370), a grandson of Khublai Khan, succeeded his father as the Prince of Ansi (Tangut), an area covering Shensi, Kansu, Such'uan and Tibet in 1285 when he was 15 years old. He was brought up by his Muslim foster parents who taught him the religion of Islam.⁸ He soon established a close relationship with the 11-Khan in Persia.¹⁰

After the death of the sixth Great Khan, Yuan Ch'eng-tsu (r 1295-1307), Ananda's supporters, including the Queen Bulohan and Premier Ahutai, planned to raise him to the throne, but their plot was foiled by his adversary, Prince Haishan. All of them were executed. However, his death did not shake the religious belief of his 150,000 Mongol soldiers in Ansi, who were considered the ancestors of the Tunghsiang Hui minority in Northwest China. Had Ananda succeeded in his imperial campaign, the Yuan Dynasty would have become Islamized like the three Mongol Khanates in the West.

Hui Population in Yuan China

In T'ang-Sung times, Islam was confined to the North, Northwest and Southwest. Muslims were considered foreign settlers. Under the rule of Khublai Khan, Islam extended into all the provinces in China Proper. Wherever there were military bases, transportation centres, agricultural districts, commercial cities and industrial areas, people found the Hui participating in all walks of life. These conditions continued unchanged even in the Ch'ing period.

It took more than six centuries (757-1279) for the scattered Muslim settlers to grow from the 40,000 souls of the 8th century to two million in the 13th century. During the 89-year rule under the Mongols, who conscripted two to three million Muslim soldiers from the Middle East and Central Asia to fight their wars against Sung China, the Muslim

population increased to 4,000,000 in the 14th century. They were the largest minority in China, even larger than the Mongols.

Islam in Ming China: Emperor Ming T'ai-tsu

At that time if someone had said: 'The unexpected increase in the Muslim population, the sudden elevation of their political and military power, and the poor defensive strength of the Han in the Yuan period would pave the way for the 4,000,000 Hui minority to produce a favourite son, who would one day build a new dynasty', people would have said that he was a dreamer! But, according to our research, the founder of the Ming Empire, Chu Yuan-chang — Ming T'ai-tsu — was a descendant of a Semu officer in the Mongol Tammachi Garrison force in Anhui.¹¹

It was the expectation of the Han Chinese that the Hui, who had collaborated with the Mongols to build the Yuan Dynasty, would be persecuted. However, they were instead given religious, political, economic and social freedoms by the Ming Emperor. Several hundreds of thousands of them were in the Ming military service and many of their leaders were appointed to high military and civil posts. It was the Emperor's policy to protect the Muslims by having them completely Sionized and to dilute the hatred of the Han Chinese who had been harshly treated by the Mongols and the Semus. For this reason, the Emperor forced Muslims to attend Chinese schools, to speak Chinese language, to wear Chinese clothes, to adopt Chinese names and to marry Chinese spouses.¹²

One more important factor that points to the Islamic identity of the Ming ruler was that Emperor Chu Yuan-chang's queen, Ma Hou, was a Muslim and that some of their sons and daughters married Muslims.¹³

Under this favourable political climate, the Hui minority lived in peace, prosperity and happiness for



a period of 276 years. The fact that Ming T'ani-tsu was a Muslim was kept a highly guarded secret in Ming history, undiscovered by any Chinese historian or scholar during the last six centuries.

Hui Population in Ming China

After the downfall of the Yuan Dynasty, there were no important Muslim immigrations into China. The peaceful and happy life of the Hui minority, under the rule of the benevolent Ming emperors, expanded their population from 4,000,000 in the 14th century to a total of 20,000,000 in the middle of the 17th century; a five-fold increase in 276 years cannot be considered an exaggeration. Of course, this figure did not include the population of the other non-Hui Muslim minorities in Kansu and Sinkiang.

End of the Golden Millennium

Chinese Islam was firmly established and fully developed in its first millennium. In those ten centuries, 7th to the 17th, the Muslims made tremendous military, political, religious, cultural, commercial, medical and technical contributions to the T'ang-Sung-Yuan-Ming governments and the Han communities.

The Hui population grew from 40,000 T'ang Muslim settlers to 20,000,000 Sinoized Hui citizens at the end of the Ming. They were in-laws of the Han Chinese. They occupied lands and engaged in all kinds of trade and industry almost everywhere in China Proper. They served in military service and never rebelled against any Chinese government. They were completely Sinoized and inter-married with the Chinese. However, though they lived peacefully with the Chinese, they never forgot that their paternal ancestors were Arabs, Persians and Central Asians. Yet they loved China because their maternal ancestors were Chinese. China became their motherland.

After holding sway over China for 250 years, the Ming Empire began to disintegrate. In 1644, it was overthrown by the Manchus from the Northeast. This non-Chinese tribe formed the Ch'ing Dynasty with the support of the Han. To the Muslims, it was akin to a catastrophe. They lost their benevolent rulers and were greatly threatened. The collapse of the Ming Empire signalled the end of the Golden Millennium of Chinese Islam, followed by an un-

precedented Muslim genocide in the 17th to the 19th centuries.

The Dark Age of Islam

After having lived in peace and prosperity in China for one millennium (651-1644), the Muslims were shocked by the collapse of the Ming, the protector of Chinese Islam. They realized their dark age was coming and they would have to brace themselves to face the disaster. In so far as the Manchu authorities were concerned, Muslims were not greatly concerned because they never had bad relations with the new rulers.

However, they feared Han retaliation for what Yuan Muslims had done to their ancestors under Mongol rule.

The first Han official, Hung Ch'eng-ch'ow, set the stage for the fulfilment of the ominous Muslim expectation. As the last Ming governor-general in Manchuria, he defected to the Manchu side in 1642 and disclosed the top Ming secret that the Ming royal family was closely related to the Chinese Muslims.¹⁴ Hence, the Ch'ing government adopted an anti-Muslim policy as soon as they had destroyed the Ming Empire.

In the course of 224 years (1648-1872), the Hui and several other non-Chinese Muslim minorities in Kansu, Sinkiang, Shensi and Yunnan organized more than ten uprisings against the Manchu-Han authorities.

The first one was commanded by two Ming loyalists, Ting Kuo-tung (d 1649) and Mi-la-yin (d 1648), in 1648 in Kansu.¹⁵ They raised the Ming flags and declared the late Ming Prince Chu Shih-Ch'uan (d 1648) their ruler. The ill-prepared rebellion lasted only about one year, but many cities were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Han and Muslims were killed.

The last Hui uprising under the leadership of Tu Wen-hsiu (d 1873), Sultan Sulayman of the Panthays of Ynnan (1855-1872), was the largest anti-Ch'ing revolutionary force, fighting for political justice, religious freedom and Muslim independence.¹⁶ After 17 years of struggle, the Panthays were finally defeated by the united Manchu-Han forces. As a result, more than one million Muslims were slaughtered. The Panthays were descendants of the Hui who settled in T'ang and Yuan times.

According to reliable Christian sources, the Hui minority alone lost about 10,000,000 lives in Shensi, Kansu and Yunnan.¹⁷ The number of non-Chinese Muslims killed in Sinkiang was estimated at 2,000,000. The total of all the Muslims killed in the 17th to the 19th centuries was about 12,000,000. This was the greatest racial genocide in Chinese history.

History reveals that the Han's hatred of the Muslims, the short-sightedness of the Ch'ing rulers in their anti-Muslim policy and the narrow-mindedness of the Ch'ing Muslims in building their own kingdoms within China were responsible for the death of 12,000,000 Muslims and of an equal number of Han Chinese. In addition, millions of acres of farmland became scorched earth and

the Ch'ing treasury was depleted in financing the wars. It ultimately led to the humiliation of the corrupt Ch'ing government by the Western powers and eventually to its downfall in 1911.

Hui Minority Population in Ch'ing China

The Muslim genocide overshadowed the bright side of Chinese Islam for three centuries. The Muslims did not accomplish any important enterprise during the Ch'ing period except for the few Hui scholars who wrote books in Chinese and Arabic on Islam and the few high military officials who worked for the Manchu, not for Muslims. The greatest loss was that the Muslim population did not increase at all.

Our estimate of the Ming Hui minority in 1644 was 20,000,000. However, 10,000,000 of them were massacred by the Ch'ing armies, but about 10,000,000 were born, so the size of the Hui minority in the beginning of the 20th century remained unchanged from its 17th century figure.

Muslim Minorities in Modern China

According to *Moslems in China*, a book edited by the China Islamic Association in 1953, there are today ten Muslim minorities in China. Ethnically, they could be divided into two groups. The first group consists of nine non-Chinese peoples: the Uighur, Kazakh, Kirghis, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Paoan and Tunghsiang. Their ancestors were from Manchuria, Mongolia, Sinkiang, Persia and Central Asia before the rise of Islam. The second group consists of the Hui minority only, those whose paternal ancestors were Muslim Arabs, Persians and Central Asians. They migrated into China during the T'ang-Sung Yuan times and their earliest maternal ancestors were mostly Chinese.

Geographically, China is divided into two halves. The first half, China Proper, covering the vast land from

south of the Great Wall to the northern borders of Vietnam, Laos and Burma, has been the homeland of the Han Chinese for several thousand years. It was from the 13th century onward, that the Hui minority began to populate these provinces in China Proper.

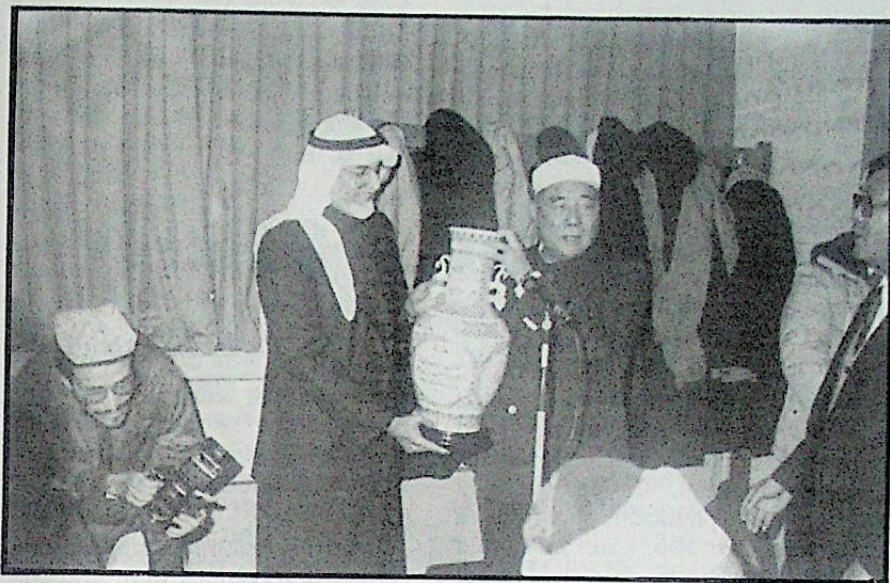
The second half, covering Mongolia, western Kansu and Sinkiang, has been occupied by nine other Muslim minorities probably from the 7th century. These nine Muslim minorities have never been Sinoized. Their relations with the Han are not as close as that between the Han and the Hui. Since the Ming times, the Hui spoke Chinese in addition to Arabic and Persian, wore Chinese dress, adopted Chinese names, married Chinese, and worked closely with the Han in military, political, agricultural and commercial fields. Physically, they became more similar to the Han than to other Muslim minorities. A Uighur, on the other hand, remains racially a Uighur, a Turk remains a Turk, and so on.

Heredity is the determining factor in the formation of any nationality.

But this principle cannot be applied to the formation of the Hui minority because its determining factor is Islam, the religion that unified the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mongols and Chinese into an ethnic-religious Hui minority. Not every Arab, Persian or Turk who lives in a Hui village is a Hui. Only he who embraces Islam and lives a Muslim life is a Hui. Anyone of the Hui minority who forsakes Islam is not a Hui anymore. Although he loses his religious status, he does not lose his racial identity.

The Republican Period: Hui Minority and Religious Freedom

During this period (1912-), there are two Republican governments in existence. The first is the Republic of China, a democratic state, founded in 1912 by the Nationalist Party. Four years after the Sino-



Japanese War, the Nationalist Party was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 and the government of the Republic of China was reduced to an island state in Taiwan. Shortly thereafter, the Peoples' Republic of China, an authoritarian state, was established on the mainland by the Chinese Communists.

Under these two different governments, religious activities, living conditions and the problem of Muslims are quite different. But, in the hearts of all Chinese Muslims, there are two urgent problems that need clarification and solution: the accurate size of the Muslim population and religious freedom. These problems can be solved by the various Muslim minorities and, particularly, the government of the Peoples' Republic, with mutual trust and open-mindedness. A satisfactory solution to these would certainly strengthen Muslim loyalty and solidify national unity.

The Nationalist authorities and Muslims in Taiwan are not in dispute over religious freedom, because it does not conflict with Nationalist policy. In any case, Muslim population in Taiwan is too small to threaten the power of the Han Chinese. However, in mainland

China, freedom of religion has been repeatedly jeopardized and the size of the Muslim minority population has often been manipulated by the Communist authorities. Religion and nationality are equally important to the Nationalist and the Communist governments. But due to different political philosophies and systems, their policies towards the Muslim population have tended to differ.

Nationalist Policy Towards the Hui Minority

During the years 1928-1945, Nationalist China, in pursuance of Dr Sun Yat-Sen's Doctrine of Nationalism, insisted that the Hui were actually Han Chinese who embraced the Islamic faith and were thus different only in habits and customs from other Chinese.¹⁹ In other words, the Muslims were only a religious group, despite the 1912 Nationalist Constitution that recognized them as the Hui-tsu (Muslim minority).²⁰ However, this racial policy underwent a moderate change in 1946, and by 1954, its spirit had been completely revised.

The (December 25) 1946 Amendment to Article 135 of the Republic of China Constitution changed the status of the Muslims from "(that

of Chinese stock who embraced Islamic faith and were different only in habits and customs from the Han Chinese", to "People living in interior areas who have their own habits and customs". Although this amendment did not openly recognize the Muslims as an ethnic minority it indicated that the Nationalist government was beginning to realize that the Hui were different from the Han Chinese in terms of race, religion, habits and customs.

However, on March 18, 1954 the National Assembly passed a revised bill prescribing that "those who embrace the Islamic faith should be called Hui-min" (Muslim people) instead of "the people living in interior areas who have their own habits and customs". This revised version of Article 135 clearly showed that the Nationalist authorities had come to understand that the Hui were a religious ethnic minority, different from the Han Chinese.

At the present time, there are only 45,000 Hui in Taiwan. They are free to work, travel, attend school, marry, worship Allah and attend to Islamic duties. Externally, the Hui have kept close contacts with the Muslim world through the Islamic associations in Taipei. Due to their friendly relations with the Muslim countries, both the Nationalist government and some Hui businessmen have developed profitable trade with the Saudis, Jordanians and other Muslim states. Every year, the Hui send a delegation to Makkah to perform the Hajj and the Hui youths are sent to study religion, history and the Arabic language in the Middle East countries.

In view of these favourable conditions, the Taiwan Hui community has no cause for complaint. We hope that their happy and peaceful life will serve as a pointer to the relationship between Muslims and Communists on the mainland.