

The Role of Hui Scholars and Intellectuals in Assimilation, Integration and Sinicization of Muslims in China

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Abstract:

National integration and unity is one of the major challenges in the modern era of nation states. In the age of globalization and greater communication, local cultures and ethnic groups are emerged as key factors in national integration process. China consists of more than fifty ethnic groups where Hui Muslims remained one of the major ethnic groups having a long history of cultural assimilation and political and economic integration. This process of assimilation and integration is mainly driven by the Hui elites and intellectuals who tried to bridge the Islamic and Confucius teaching. The Hui intellectuals and scholars produced a huge literature known as Han Kitab which had a great impact on the process of national integration and assimilation. This literature helped the Hui Muslim ethnic group to adopt local cultural values which resulted in greater assimilation. Scholars of nationalism viewed that social and economic factors play an important role in national integration. The common values and culture provides a sense of belonging and cohesion which is vital for national unity and integration.

Key words: China, Sinicization, Hui, assimilation, integration, national unity, nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The role of intellectual and scholars in influencing and shaping societies is very significant and cannot be denied. Intellectuals are those people or individuals who are involved in the analysis of political, social and all other dimensions of human problems. According to Gian Tu Trung, intellectuals are those who have diverse wisdom and foresight, who apply their intellect and forward-looking visions for the purpose of awakening society (Trung, 2013). In China, the Hui Muslim scholars played a vital role in national integration and process of sinicization. Since the middle of 7th century, they played an important role in all walks of life from administration and politics to military services. Initially, these people were settled in coastal areas such Guangdong for business purposes. With the passage of time, their population increased and they further expanded to other major cities such as Xian. This gradual expansion allows them to become more prosperous and developed while the diverse cultural values some time lead to problems and conflicts. From 7th to 12th century, they played an active social role which was changed to political and administrative

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role under the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). The administrative and political role allowed the Muslims to further enhance their influence in state affairs which resulted in greater interactions and integration with other dominant groups and cultures. Scholars and experts of national integration have different views regarding national integration; some scholars argued that political participation leads to sense of participation and belonging while other scholars stressed that the economic development and prosperity is the key elements for unity and national integration. Keeping in view both points of view we can analyze that Hui people played a vital role both politically and economically for centuries which enabled them to assimilate with local culture. At the end of dynasty system and the start of new political order, the role of Hui people became more relevant which they played effectively after the establishment of Republic of China in 1912. Their active participation domestically and also at foreign front during Japanese occupation helped them to become indispensable part of the political system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

National unity and integration is one of the major issues around the world where different states have adopted various measurements and policies. Nations are imagined communities having some common characteristics (Doak, 1997). Majority of societies are heterogeneous in this modern nation state system where diversity may lead to conflict. In order to overcome these challenges and problems, various nation states have adopted multiple measurements, approaches and mechanisms to integrate the diverse groups in society. In the 21st century, the process of globalization, greater interactions and communication have changed the dynamics of the world politics. These interactions and communications also led to some issues and conflicts such as identity crises and emergence of ethnic nationalism across the world. China, like other nations have diverse society where more than fifty ethnic groups are living. There are many factors playing an important role such as economic development and prosperity. The historical analysis shows that Hui intellectuals and scholars played a dominant role among Muslim scholars for national integration and unity. There are different scholars of nationalism who explained various factors which play a key role in national integration. Miroslav Hroch, one of the main theorists of nationalism argued that there are three phases of nationalism such as common memory of the group, linguistic and cultural relations which lead to greater social communication, interaction and feeling of equality where member of a particular nation feel like a civil society. This theoretical approach can best explain the role of Hui intellectuals in national integration. Initially, the Hui people have a common memory of centuries with local people and culture. This common memory allowed them to interact and integrate with local culture and society.

The history of Chinese Muslims goes back to seventh century when the Arab Muslims introduced Islam in China through sea and land route. The Arab traders and merchants had trade relations with China and other neighboring countries since long time. Such relationships were fruitful in spreading of Islam in the region. During this long course of history, the Chinese Muslim passed through many challenges and at the same time they remained part of the influential people of the society such as administrators, advisors and also served on key positions. In the modern era, the Chinese Muslims are facing a number of problems and challenges as highlighted by the international media and human rights organization. Although these challenges exist however, scholars and researchers are of the view that historically Chinese Muslims contributed a lot for

society and national integration. So, the main objective of this research paper is find out the role and contribution of Hui scholars and intellectuals in national integration and Sinicization of Chinese Muslims.

There are more than twenty million Muslims living in different regions and provinces of China. Officially, there are fifty-six ethnic groups in China where Muslim are divided into ten groups (Newby, 1988). Hui and Uighur are the two prominent groups with more than ten million populations each. The majority of Muslims are living in the western part of country but at the same time a reasonable number of Muslims particularly the Hui Muslim can be found in all urban areas of the country. In available literature, the issue of Uighur Muslim is more highlighted while the Hui Muslim have been ignored up to a greater extent who have gone through the process of assimilation and integration and now part of the society politically and culturally. Such development and history lead us to some question such as why these people are more integrated than other Muslim ethnic groups such as Uighur? What are the main factors which led them to assimilation and integration? In order to find out various factors and actors, it is significant to know the background and settlement of these people to discuss and evaluate this process of integration.

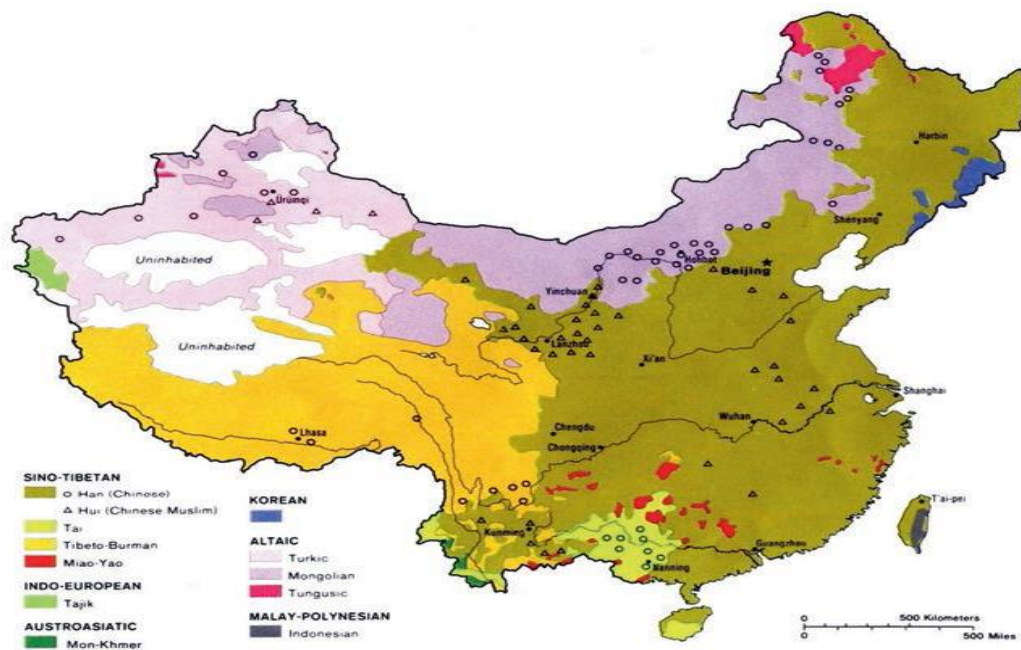
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF HUI PEOPLE

The Hui Muslims are one of the major ethnic groups among other nine Muslim ethnic minority groups living across China mainly in the Western part such as Gansu and Ningxia (Hillman, 2004). This ethnic group is known as Hui or Huizu in Chinese history which has a long history of assimilation and integration. During this long period of history, this ethnic group was known with various names where some main attributes distinguished them from other Muslim ethnic groups. Broadly speaking, the Hui population increased in China due to three main factors: first through migration, secondly through intermarriages with Han Chinese and lastly through conversion to Islam. According to historian and Chinese studies experts, Islam was introduced in China through sea route where Guangdong remained the major center of many cultures. According to Muhammad Ali Kettani, initially Muslims settled in Guangdong province and then gradually they expanded their presence and ultimately reached Xian, the capital city where they were welcomed by the emperor in the year 651 and allowed to build a mosque. This mosque which is known as Xian mosque, is the oldest mosque in China (Keetani, 1986). This gradual shift towards the capital city allowed Muslims to become more integrated with local culture and society which remained one of the main reasons why unlike other minority groups such as Uighur, the Hui became more integrated. These initial interactions and communication paved the way for the greater interaction and integration of these people in coming centuries. Officially, China consists of 56 ethnic groups where ethnic minority groups enjoy autonomy at province, prefecture and county level.

China's Ethnic Minority Policy

According to the constitution of People Republic of China, " The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the ethnic minorities and upholds and develops a relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's ethnic groups. Discrimination against and oppression of any ethnic group are prohibited." Citizens of all ethnic groups in China enjoy all equal rights accorded to citizens by the Constitution and law (National Minorities Policy and Its Practice in China , 2004). According to Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the National Bureau of

Statistics, there are more than 11.5 million Hui people living in China having almost same number of people in Uighur ethnic group. This number increased from 9 million to 11.5 from 2000 to 2018. According to statistical year 2020 book, there are five ethnic based autonomous regions including Hui-based Ningxia autonomous region, thirty ethnic minority autonomous prefectures and 120 ethnic minority divisions at county level (Guo, 2020). The following map shows the areas of ethnic minority groups including Hui ethnic group which mainly resides in the Western region of the country.



Source: China Ethnic Statistical Year Book 2020

Keeping in view the above statistics, Hui is the second largest ethnic minority group in China which have had long impact on Chinese history, politics and international relations. Such developments and background allowed many scholars and researchers to find out various factors which contributed to the Sinicization of Hui people in China. In this regard, the role of various socio-cultural, political, religious and economic factors may be prominent but at the same time an important question may arise that how these factors were effectively manipulated? Many experts and researchers viewed that the Hui elite played a dominant and decisive role in the Sinicization process.

Process of Sinicization Under Ming Dynasty

Majority of the scholars of Chinese studies stated that Hui integration was a gradual process which took centuries. This history may be divided into various phases such as the initial integration from Tang to Yuan dynasty, secondly from Ming dynasty to Republican era and lastly from the modern era of post 1949. This historical analysis may enable us to deeply understand various socio-cultural, political and economic factors which play a vital role in Hui integration and sinicization. The initial developments and Muslim settlement in the Guangdong region provided an environment of mutual co-existence and diversity which enabled different communities to interact and integrate with each other. So, it can be concluded that in the first phase, the economic activities at the coastal areas

remained one of the major sources of interaction and integration (Tibbetts, 1957). In the second phase, Muslims further expanded to the rest of the country especially Xian city where they were welcomed by the emperor and allowed to build a mosque which is one of the biggest mosque in China even today. Mosques in major and capital cities of China such as Xian mosque also known as Huajue Xiang Mosque and Ox Street Mosque in Beijing show the Muslim presence all around China. The infrastructure and design of these mosques are highly influenced by the Chinese architecture as Nancy Shatzman in his article on old mosques in China discussed that the six mosques on which we have focused are further distinguished from most of the mosques in China with clear Chinese features such as ceramic tile roofs, pailou, or court-yard settings because they have been identified as protected historic monuments (Steinhardt, 2008).

These architecture work and mosques building design shows that the dominant Han culture have influenced Muslims in all walks of life. The initial interaction and integration led to further assimilation and integration when the Muslims became part of administration and started playing an active role in politics and state affairs. The invasion of China by Mongol allowed the Muslims to play more dominant role in politics and administration. Due to various reasons, the Yuan ruler preferred Muslim advisors and administrators over the Chinese which further enhanced Muslim's role in politics and administration. According to Morris Rossabi, desperate for assistance, Kubilai imported Muslims from various parts of his domains to help govern China. He assigned them positions in the financial ministries of the government, though a few served in the Bureau of Astronomy and in the army (Rossabi, 2014). These events and active role of Muslims in governance was further enhanced during Ming dynasty which resulted in further integration and assimilation of Hui people.

The fall of Yuan dynasty resulted in the rise of Ming dynasty which ruled over China from 1368 to 1644. The Ming court allowed the Muslims to work in various departments from Astronomy to diplomacy unlike the prevailing perceptions that they will restrict the Muslims. During this dynasty, the Muslims became translators, interpreters, envoys, philosophers and explorers (Rossabi, 2013). These policies and positive gestures resulted in a peaceful coexistence which proved to be the major factor in Sinicization of Hui people. With such development, other events were also taking place such as the Chinese had very bad experience with the foreigners for almost one century. The new government wanted to get rid of these customs and traditions adopted by the foreigners and invaders. In this era, under these circumstances, Muslims had one choice to cooperate and coexist with the local people. Such development resulted in the adoption of Chinese language; Chinese names, dress and even the Imam of mosques have to show loyalty to ruler. The era is marked as the era of assimilation and integration where Hui people actually adopted the local culture and language which paved the way for greater assimilation.

Language is the key factor in the development of cultures across the globe and also plays a significant role for national unity and integration in the modern nation state system. It is a source of communication of ideas, emotions and desires and also produces symbols. According to Hanna Yusuf, language can be used as an effective instrument for national development and the promotion of national consciousness (Yusuf, 2012). During Ming dynasty the Chinese Hui Muslims adopted local culture and language which played significant role in their assimilation with local dominant Han culture. They changed their Arabic and Persian names and started using Chinese name such Ma

for Muhammad. The process of Sinicization was initiated during Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Because of this process, Muslim groups, particularly the Hui group, culturally and politically assimilated with dominant Han culture by adopting Chinese names, learning Mandarin, and enjoying political offices. This process was further strengthened by the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) which resulted in the integration and assimilation of Hui people (Hroch, 1995).

Hui Elite and Sinicization Process

Nationalism and national integration are more likely political phenomenon but it may become more social-psychological phenomenon in the context that every individual create some attitude and behavior towards their own and other nations. Such attitude and feelings are central to the study of nationalism and national integration (Druckman, 1994). View and attitudes may change time to time mean different factors may change one's perspective regarding nation or other nations. Scholars and intellectuals in any society played and are still playing an effective role in shaping and reshaping of individual's ideas and attitudes. As mentioned above, Muslims have a long history of settlement and assimilation with local culture and society where various factors played an important role. Among these factors the role of intellectuals is very significant where different scholars tried to bridge the gap between local dominant Han community and Muslims. Han kitab played a dominant role in integration of Hui people with local culture and society.

The Han Kitab is the collection of various Islamic texts by the Muslim intellectuals to synthesize Confucianism and Islam in order to bring these two ideologies close together. Han is a Chinese word meaning Chinese while Kitab is an Arabic word mean book so its mean Chinese book. Some prominent Muslim scholars like Liu Zhi, Wu Zunqie, and Wang Daiyu mainly contributed to Han Kitab in 18th century. These interactions and development is described by Kristian Petersen as, following centuries of cultural and physical division between local inhabitants and Muslim settlers, Arab, Persian, and Central Asian people were slowly assimilating into Chinese society, intermarrying with local people, and gradually forgetting their original languages (Petersen, 2018). Some scholars and researchers are of the same view as Petersen described the process of integration which actually started since the 7th century when diplomats from the Arab world visited China and established cordial relations. Based on the above argument, it can be analyzed that actual process of integration started in the 7th century and this process of integration was more accomplished during Ming dynasty where the local Muslims abandoned Arabic and Persian language and adopted local name which had long lasting impact on their lives. Apart from these cultural and linguistic factors, the administrative role of Hui Muslim elite played an important part in assimilation process. According to Drukman, political, economic and socio-cultural needs fulfillment give individuals and groups a sense of security, prestige and more importantly a sense of belonging which is very important for national unity and integration (Druckman, 1994). He further discussed the social and psychological roots of nationalism which are more relevant to Hui approach towards nationalism and national integration. Basically, these social and psychological factors particularly during Ming and dynasty played a significant role. The Hui people considered themselves as integral part of the society due to these social and psychological factors which gradually developed and where the Hui elite played eminent role. The Hui elite throughout the history tried to bridge the gap between the Han and Hui Muslims. In other words, the administrative and political power and social status developed a sense of belongingness and unity

among the Hui people. Apart from these administrative and political power, the Hui people also played a significant role in military. Anthony Garnaut in his article discussed how the Hui people in military service enhanced regional stability and territorial integrity when the country was passing through a time of trouble and turmoil (Garnaut, 2008). Based on these social, political, psychological, administrative and historical factors, the Hui people played an active role both domestically and globally.

Japanese Occupation and Hui Activism

The Hui both played an imperative role both at internal and external front while defending the country's territorial integrity. The Japanese occupation on one hand threatened the territorial integrity of China while on the other hand it led to the unity of various ethnic groups against the defense of their country. In this trouble and turmoil, the Hui intellectuals played a key role in mobilization of Muslims to defend the country. Muslim religious scholars call Ahong in Chinese, played a prominent role by motivating the young Muslims to protect the homeland. The Ahongs spread their message through gathering, speeches and distribution of magazines such as Chinese Islamic Studies Magazine, the Islamic Gazette, the Light of Islam, and the Muslim Youth to mobilize the people. In order to organize and mobilize the people, a pan Islamic organization was established by a Muslim general in 1938. These Ahongs quoted the Hadith *حب لوطن من الايمان* (Love for the state is part of faith) for greater mobilization (Kittani 1985).

The Chiang Kai-Shek government was also interested to mobilize the Hui people in anti-Japan complain that's why he nominated a Hui official General Bai Chongxi to look into the Hui affairs. Besides this, his main objective was to motivate and mobilize people and to strengthen relations with the Muslim world in order to denounce this illegal occupation of Japanese forces. This move was part of the foreign policy of China to denounce Japanese aggression and get the diplomatic support of other states. The first diplomatic mission was organized in 1938 under the leadership of Wang Zengshan (he was graduated from Istanbul University) with other prominent Hui elites including Ma Tianying, Xue Wenbo and Wand Shiming all graduated from Al-Azhar. According to Miroslav Hroch, a prominent scholar on nationalism, at some stage of history the members of a society feel cohesion and unity which lead them to same destiny and same cause. This cohesion and unity are based on some historical and socio-cultural commonalities which further transform into group cohesion (Hroch, 1995). Based on this argument we can analyze that the Hui people politically integrated during Yuan dynasty, socially they became more integrated in Ming dynasty where they adopted local culture and language and finally they became fully integrated in post-Republican era where they strongly resisted the Japanese occupation and also helped the government to curb the turmoil and instability in the country. The outcomes of late 1930s and early 1940s had a positive impact on the lives of Hui people where they became more integrated with fellow ethnic group members as well as with the state. The huge literature produced by the Hui scholars and intellectuals through newspapers, magazines and other sources helped their integration with state and society.

The Role of Hui Intellectual in Bridging Islamic and Confucius Teachings

In every society common factors of language, culture, history, ideology help in integration. In China the Hui scholars and intellectuals tried to bridge the gap between the Islamic and Confucius

teachings. The main objective of this approach was to bring some commonality among these diverse groups of the society. Since 18th century these scholars produced a huge literature in Chinese language in order to make the Islamic teaching compatible with local culture and traditions. These developments are described by Jonathan Lipman as “in the historical process of rendering Islam compatible with Chinese civilization, Chinese-speaking Muslims created a large and relatively unexplored body of texts collectively known, since the nineteenth century, as Han kitāb (Lipman, 2016).

The role of Han kitab and sinicized Hui intellectuals such as Ma Zhu, Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi remained very crucial for the sinicization of Hui people. Wang Daiyu was the first author who contributed for Han kitab. He was the first scholar among Muslims to produce his work in Chinese language which proved to be the standard for the expression of Islamic ethics, morality and theology (Murata, 2017). These scholars promoted the ideas and commonalities between Islam and Neo-Confucian teachings in order to bridge the gap between these two ideologies. A True Commentary on the True Religion (Zhengjiao zhenquan,) is the first text for Han Kitab written by Wang Daiyu which discusses God, the universe and the human soul. This text is very significant due to the systematic positioning of Islamic teachings explained within the broader context of Neo-Confucianism. Ma Zhu was another prominent Hui scholar who contributed to this tradition (Han Kitab tradition). Ma Zhu from Yunnan province belonged to Syed Ajl Shams Din family who remained governor of the province during Yuan dynasty. This relationship shows that Hui elite and intellectuals, with the passage of time, gradually integrated and assimilated the Hui people with mainstream culture. He further contributed to the ideas of pioneer writer Wang and focused on the political dimension which made him distinguish from other scholars. According to him, there are some main commonalities between Islam and Confucian teachings such as justice and morality. He further explained that social order and morality is a quality of good Muslim so these commonalities bring both sides together. According to Alexander Wain, because Ma Zhu recognizes a common core to both Islam and Neo-Confucianism, however, he saw no contradiction in asking the Muslim Hui to swear to the non-Muslim emperor (Wain, 2016).

The tradition of Han Kitab greatly influenced the lives of Muslim across China particularly the Hui Muslim. This huge literature which is produced in hundred years explained and introduced Islam in native language and helped in creating new identity. This literature greatly helped the Hui Muslims to reshape their identity and remain open to the adaptation of local culture and values. Qing Lai has produced a qualitative analysis of the impact of this literature on identity making. According to him, the writing of Han Kitab was not only a process of text production but also identity negotiation. as a result, the Chinese and Islamic elements appeared simultaneously through the Han Kitab literature, all pointing to a distinct Sino-Muslim literati identity (Lai Q. , 2019). These developments and analysis shows that the Hank Kitab literature has a very significant impact on identity shaping of Hui people and on national integration and assimilation. Such measurements and approaches may be adopted in any society because nations are imagined communities. These imagined communities have many differences with each other so they need dialogue; support and peaceful coexistence which can be developed through translation and may lead to a sense of belongingness and national integration (Engola, 2019). This theoretical approach described by Engoola can best explain the Hui integration and assimilation process where the Hui scholars translated the teachings of Islam into native Chinese language which resulted in an environment of understanding and co-existence. The

translation and Han kitab literature was greatly utilized by the Hui scholars to integrate their people by highlighting the commonalties between Islam and Confucius teaching. The Hui scholars realized that the survival is the key issue in Han dominated society so they tried to develop a new approach by motivating the people to adopt local names, culture and values which enabled them to co-exist and integrate with the local culture.

CONCLUSION

The Hui Muslims of China present a unique case of assimilation and integration in China. Besides other factors, Hui intellectuals and scholars played a prominent role in this process of Sinicization which resulted in the greater integration of Hui people with local Han dominant society. This process of assimilation and Sinicization was gradual process where the Hui people initially changed their Arabic and Persian names and later on became active participants in political and administrative affairs. This process took place due to the enormous literature produced by the Hui scholars to find out the commodities between Islamic and Confucius teachings. This approach remained helpful in bridging the gap between these two systems. The tradition of Han Kitab greatly influenced the lives of Muslim across China particularly the Hui Muslims. This huge literature which is produced in hundred years explained and introduced Islam in native language as well as it helped in creating new identity. This literature greatly helped the Hui Muslims to reshape their identity and remain open to the adaptation of local culture and values. Scholars of nationalism viewed that social transformation and common values provide sense of belonging which is helpful for national integration and unity. The process of Hui integration can be best explained through this approach where Hui people transformed their values and became an integral part of the local culture. This social change led to political and economic participation which steered assimilation and Sinicization.

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