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## Marginalization of Hui Muslims in China: A Sociological and Islamic Perspective

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*Introduction-* Chinese Hui Muslims, who constitute around 11 Million of the Chinese population, are at the crossroads of victim-hood, deprivation and a desire to rebuild their destiny. The Hui People have a strong desire to lead a respectable life and seek opportunities for progress and development similar to other communities of china and the world. The present study observed the Hui Muslims are marginalized in all spheres of development including education, employment, income and assets. There is a need for durable changes in Chinese government policies concerning Hui minority. Being rich in diversity, china is one of the important example of pluralism with multi dimensional Ethnic, cultural and social groupings, races and religions. Like other main ethnic communities, the marginalized Hui Muslim should pursue social, economic, religious and educational aspirations not only within the frame and support of government provided infrastructure, opportunities and political awakening but needs to walk extra step for achieving their targets on their own without any kind of violence.

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# Marginalization of Hui Muslims in China: A Sociological and Islamic Perspective

Dr. Md Ehtesham Akhtar

## I. INTRODUCTION

**C**hinese Hui Muslims, who constitute around 11 Million of the Chinese population, are at the crossroads of victim-hood, deprivation and a desire to rebuild their destiny. The Hui People have a strong desire to lead a respectable life and seek opportunities for progress and development similar to other communities of china and the world. The present study observed the Hui Muslims are marginalized in all spheres of development including education, employment, income and assets. There is a need for durable changes in Chinese government policies concerning Hui minority. Being rich in diversity, china is one of the important example of pluralism with multi dimensional Ethnic, cultural and social groupings, races and religions. Like other main ethnic communities, the marginalized Hui Muslim should pursue social, economic, religious and educational aspirations not only within the frame and support of government provided infrastructure, opportunities and political awakening but needs to walk extra step for achieving their targets on their own without any kind of violence. The Beijing Government had not made any kind of solid efforts to address various aspects of the Muslim deprivation in entire china. In Hui Muslim community there is a need of Policy Makers, Community Leadership Motivators & Trainers in a good number that could use their mind in the strong social, political and religious construction of Muslim society in entire China.

Social, political, and religious leaders are assets, backbone and face of any community anywhere in the world, who play a key role in motivating and leading the community to the heights of progress and empowerment. They are the people who have deep understanding of issues at the ground level and enjoy negotiating skills to respond in vibrant democratic and undemocratic setups. History shows that most of the Social, political, and religious leaders have attain heights of success not because of personal ambitions but that of their missionary zeal and selfless contributions for their community and nation. Chinese Hui Muslims too have such hidden potential that must be searched and, given them their due place in societies and channelize their potentials.

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### a) *Hui Muslim in China*

China is the home of 56 ethnic groups, out of which 91.6 percent of the population is the Han ethnic group. Other 55 ethnic groups are customarily referred to as the ethnic minorities. According to the fifth national census in 2000, 18 ethnic minorities have a population of over one million, namely the Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Yi, Tujia, Mongolian, Tibetan, Bouyei, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Li, Kazak and Dai. Hui and Uyghur are two major Muslim ethnic groups in china that comprises 11 million and 8 million respectively. Hui found throughout china and Uyghur mostly in Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. Hui and Uyghur both ethnic communities believe and practice Islam. Majority of the Hui concentrated within the North western china (Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and xinjiang). The other famous places where Hui also exist are Beijing, Inner Mongolia, Hebel, Hainan, and Yunnan. The Hui have been labeled the “Chinese-speaking Muslims”, “Chinese Muslims”, and most recently, as “Sino-Muslims”.

It is the general perception that Hui people are descendants of Persian, Arab, Mongolian, Turkish Muslim merchants, soldiers, and officials who settled in China and intermarried with local Chinese (Gladney, 1991). The term Hui originated from the Mandarin word “Huihui,” a term first used in the Yuan dynasty (1276–1368) to describe Central Asian, Persian, and Arab residents in China (Lipman, 1997). Islam came to China during middle of the seventh century during the Khilafat of Usman Ghani “Raze Allahu Anhe”. During this period nomadic groups in Central Asia converted to Islam and settled in northwestern China. As a result, during the seventh century large Muslim communities emerged in Yangzhou (Jiangsu), Canton (Guangdong), and in the ports of Fujian (Israeli, 1982). During the tenth century, Muslim migration into China reached its peak. In those earlier times, *Muslims lived apart from local Chinese in separate quarters and maintained different systems of laws and ways of life.* Their seclusion was made possible by the virtual extraterritorial rights they enjoyed (Israeli, 1982). Eventually, many Muslim men married Han women and some adopted Han children in times of famine. Inter-marriage not only enabled the numerical growth of the Hui people but also increased their assimilation into the Chinese mainstream society (Israeli, 1982). According to Islamic point of view a Muslim Could never live in a separate or excluded

places anywhere in the world, If a Muslim live in a excluded place outside general public is against Islamic teaching and Islamic way of living. The above mentioned way of living by Israeli was easily seen during British rule in India. It can be strongly say that to live in a separate place was the practices of Britishers not Muslims. History shows Muslim rulers always lived within the society with a common people in any period anywhere in the world. It was impossible for a Muslim in china to live in an excluded place and get a major victory of conversion into Islam. The above mentioned line "Muslims lived apart from local Chinese in separate quarters and maintained different system of laws and ways of life" is totally beyond Islamic teaching and practices, even uneducated Muslim could not believe in the above lines mentioned by Israeli. A fish couldn't live without water and a Muslim couldn't live without Muslim society. Despite the long history of the Hui people in China, they remain a clearly defined minority group. According to Michael Dillon, the history of the Hui people dates back to the seventh century, when the Chinese began interacting with Middle Eastern Muslims, shortly after the establishment of Islam. Most of this contact occurred between Chinese, Arab, and Persian traders. In fact these traders were the first person introduced Islam in China. Arab and Persian traders began to visit Chinese ports at Guangzhou, Quanzhou, and Hangzhou during the Tang Dynasty (618- 907). As trade ties increased, Muslims felt the need of Mosque (Masjid) for five time prayers and Friday (Juma) Prayers. Daily five times and Friday prayer is essential (Farz) in Islam and that cannot be prayed alone. Such religious needs encouraged Muslims to build mosques, which led to the establishment of small Muslim communities in eastern China. Muslims also migrated to China through the Silk Road in Central Asia. Under the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1378), thousands of Muslims from Central Asia entered western China.

#### b) *Hui and Islam*

By viewing the social, cultural and religious history of Hui. It can be strongly say, Hui people accepted Islam when Sahaba (Companion of Prophet Muhammad "sallahu Alaihe wa salam") came from Macca to china for the purpose of trade during Khilafat of Usman Ghani (Raje Allahu Anh). All over the world, Muslim scholars and preachers easily quotes the example of china, how "Sahaba" success in China in his mission of preaching Islam without any war and conflict. The only way of success was honesty in businesses. By viewing the honesty of sahaba in all sphere of life, a large number of Chinese residents converted into Islam. With passes of time that converted Muslims known as HUI. HUI are the first people of china converted into Islam.

In early period of Islam in china not only one ethnic groups and one part of resident converted into

Islam but from different parts and different ethnic groups accepted Islamic teachings. This is the reason Hui Muslims are seen all over the china and speak a number of non-Chinese languages. It can be strongly say Hui Muslims doesn't belongs to only one race, they are mixture of different races in early period of Islam.

The ancient Silk Road trade route cut through what is today the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, luring Muslim traders from afar. Descendants of Arab and Persian merchants travelled here in the 7th century and many settled, planting the roots of Islam in the heart of China. About half the country's 20 million Muslims are from the Hui ethnic group (Aljazeera 12 October 2012). The Ancient Record of the Tang Dynasty describes a landmark visit to China by Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (ra), one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad (s) in 650 C.E. This event is considered to be the birth of Islam in China. The Chinese emperor Yung-Wei respected the teachings of Islam and considered it to be compatible with the teachings of Confucius. To show his admiration for Islam, the emperor approved the establishment of China's first mosque at Ch'ang-an. That mosque still stands today (Yusuf Abdul Rahman).

Muslims fully integrated into Han society by adopting their name and some customs while retaining their Islamic mode of dress and dietary restrictions. Anti-Muslim sentiments took root in China during the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644 - 1911 CE), which was established by Manchus who were a minority in China. Muslims in China number more than 35 million, according to unofficial counts. They represent ten distinct ethnic groups. The largest are the Chinese Hui, who comprise over half of China's Muslim population. The largest of Turkic groups are the Uygurs who are most populous in the province of Xinjiang, where they were once an overwhelming majority (Yusuf Abdul Rahman). In china Hui Muslim have significant autonomy and freedom to devoutly follow their religion in a region where Islam thrives. While Hui Muslim have been afforded much more political and religious freedom by Beijing. But Uyghur Muslim of Turkic descent in the far west face harsh religious restrictions and repression, Observers say it is their friendly historical relations with the ethnic majority Han (Aljazeera 12 October 2012).

#### c) *Hui and Language*

IT can be strongly say "Language is the constituent element of civilization. Man could not become man except by language. The importance of language for man and society cannot be minimized. Language is not only a mode of communication between individuals but is also a way for the expression of their personality. Sociologically, language moulds the individual from childhood. The child comes to know most of the things of the world through language. Language helps to understand the culture, life styles of other societies their traditions, customs and festivals.

Learning new languages increases intellectual status of mind and the brain efficiency could be improved with the aid of new languages. Language is also important to understand nature and its behavior. Man would have remained deprived of the Divine message of God if there was no language. It helped in making him capable of receiving and understanding his purpose of life. The culture that exists at a given time and place has come from the past and is the result of accumulation of things, attitudes, ideas, knowledge, error and prejudice. The animals as we have seen are incapable of speech except for a few sounds and so incapable of having any culture and civilization. It is man alone who through language has acquired a high degree of culture and civilization (Shelly Shah).

In china nine Muslim nationalities speaking distinct languages have been separated from the Hui, but the remainder is far from linguistic homogeny. With the exception of groups like the Manchurians, whose language has gone out of use, every minority nationality except the Hui speaks a common, non-Chinese language. The Hui generally speak the local dialect of wherever they live. In most cases this is a variety of Mandarin, but some Hui speak Tibetan, Mongolian and the languages of the Bai and Dai people of Yunnan Province. The boundaries between each of these is not necessarily just spatial or linguistic. Hui from all over China share certain Arabic phrases, they are largely the same basic expressions used throughout the Islamic world and hardly the basis of a unique dialect. Some would contend that the Hui once spoke a common language, but have assimilated over time. Virtually all Hui trace their ancestry to foreign Islamic immigrants, but this migration came in several waves spanning many centuries. Many of these immigrants have shared some knowledge of Arabic and Persian has served as a lingua franca in some instances, especially during a large Persian influx during the Yuan Dynasty but the Hui vernacular if there ever has been a tongue worthy of the name has varied across time and space. The broad linguistic variation between various Hui communities is at least partially due to their situation as the most widely dispersed of China's minorities (Stewart, Alexander Blair 2009). Arabic is seen as a common language among all Muslim Minorities in China. All Islamic authentic basic literatures are available in Arabic and Persian. To better knowledge of Islamic teaching, it is necessary to know Arabic and Persian language. Without knowing Arabic a Muslim couldn't learn or recite Quran. For better Islamic Understanding, a Muslim must have to know Arabic and Persian language. Thus teaching of Arabic and Persian are common among Muslims in china and the world. From the sociological point of view, language play major roles in entire socialization process of a human being. In the socialization process of Hui not only local dialects have their impact on their personality but Arabic and Persian have also exerted their impact on their

personality. In the era of Globalization, the authentic Islamic literature are also available in Urdu language, thus lots of Chinese Muslims are learning Urdu language.

#### d) *Hui Skills and Occupation*

Muslims virtually dominated the import and export business in China during Sung Dynasty (960 - 1279 CE). The office of Director General of Shipping was consistently held by a Muslim during this period. During the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644 CE), a period considered to be the golden age of Islam in China. Many other occupations, such as ritual slaughtering and leatherworking, are merely outgrowths of religious customs. It could also be argued that trading excursions are often a secondary outgrowth of religious travel. Indeed, Arabic and Persian language skills among contemporary Hui often earn them prestigious careers in international business and politics rather than employment as religious professionals (Stewart, Alexander Blair 2009). Ritual slaughtering and leatherworking are not only the occupation of Hui in China but these professions are mostly in the Hand of Muslims in Asia and Africa.

The presence of Hui in large urban areas in part reflects their business acumen and propensity for commerce related migration. The Hui people are noted for their skills in small businesses in particular, Islamic (*qingzhen*) restaurants, fur, leather, and jade processing. Over the centuries, their engagement in commerce often has resulted in their migration to different parts of the country (Gladney 1991, 1998). Hui identity is tied to trade and entrepreneurship and shows significant proportions of the Hui people in urban areas are engaged in business. Historically, the Hui people have had lower levels of education than Han Chinese. The Hui people's lower education is likely to pose a disadvantage for them in the urban labor market, and may be a reason for their high representation in urban trade and commerce. Largely because of their diet and the importance of the mosque to the Hui community, the Hui people in large cities tend to concentrate in enclaves that are segregated from Han Chinese (*Wenfai Wang, Shangyi Zhou, and C. Cindy Fan 2002*). One of the major Islamic reasons of Hui involvement in businesses is "Sunnah" Our Prohed had done businesses, so a practical Muslim will prefer businesses. According to general Islamic perception 95% benefits are in business. Thus it will not be an exaggeration to say majority of the wealthiest person in the world are business man. It will be overestimated to say, only a well educated person could run a good business. In the case of India, lots of middle richest men are not well educated simply knows reading and writing but they have money in millions. Such Islamic believe have promoted Hui Muslims towards business.



### e) *Hui - Han Unity in Diversity*

Hui are one of the important ethnic minorities mentioned in the list of Chinese government. In terms of demographic proximity and cultural assimilation most of the Hui are closer to Han Chinese than other Muslim nationalities. Hui are little different from Han in skin and colour. Majority of the Hui speaks Mandarin as a mother tongue. The Hui and the Han *have language and physical appearance in common* and yet they differ, as the Hui are Muslims and historically have their own identity. Differences between the Hui and Han are visible in *religious practices, diet, dress and often name*. Modern Islamic reform movements and ban on the Islamic practices in Xinxiang have awakened their Islamic belief and practices not only in Uyghur and Hui community in china but other Muslim community also. The technological developments have provided sufficient literature to Hui and other Muslims to know their religion and their duties in Islam. Not only Hui people benefited from available Islamic literature but other Muslim community in china also benefited. The attendance in masjid (Mosque) Increased in Xingjians, nagxiga bejing and other places in china. The recent ban on Hijab in Xinjiang is an example of increasing Islamic faith and practices in china. Easy availability of Islamic literature in print and electronic media provides sufficient material to a general people and researcher to know about Islamic teachings. The technological development have easily provided different kind of abundant Islamic literature to a common people to know about Islam and to accept the reality, what is wrong or right in social and religious life. On the other hand it can be strongly say, technological development is one of the major causes of faith conversion into Islam by all major and minor religious practitioner in china and the world. Currently eight different translations of the Holy Qur'an in the Chinese language as well as translations in Uygur and the other Turkic language are easily available.

According to Lipman, unlike the Uighur question, Beijing's relationship with the Hui must be understood at the local, rather than the national level. In most places, Han cadre and Hui minority leaders have managed to cooperate, allowing them to resolve disputes peacefully. However, in a few locations, the Hui and the Han have clashed and occasionally engaged in violence. Such violence has not reflected a Hui desire to secede or break away from the Chinese state however, and in general, Han-Hui relations have been relatively peaceful. The nature of relations varies from place to place and violence has only been used by a few Hui and Han outliers (McKinney, Evan W). Like the Uyghurs, China's Hui do not possess an organized resistance group. According to Gladney, the Hui are primarily Han Chinese, but they tend to blend in well with the indigenous inhabitants of the places in which they live. For example, Hui living in Tibet tend to speak Tibetan,

while Hui living in Beijing will often speak Mandarin. This has unique implications for evaluating Han-Hui relations. Grievances seem to be conspicuous in Han-Hui relations. Han migration in particular is important to consider. Like the Uighurs, the Hui maintain a different way of life than China's Han majority. However, because the Hui live all over China, migration policies have affected the Hui differently than they have affected the Uighurs. Most Hui communities have adapted to their proximity with Han neighbors without incident. Despite Han migration throughout China, the Hui have been able to maintain some degree of local autonomy. Such autonomy has undoubtedly led to relatively peaceful Han-Hui relations. Relations have been especially peaceful in regions where the Hui have remained in the majority (Chuah, Osman 2004). Internal colonialism and assimilation have also played a role in Han-Hui relations, but with less significance than the Uighur case. When the Han pressure to assimilate begins to overtake Hui nationalism tension may emerge. In response, Han and Hui people tend to minimize everyday contact so that a relative peace can still be achieved. However, intense social situations like this exist in many places throughout China where the Hui are a substantial minority. Most Hui are able to live with a tense Han-Hui social relationship, but at times, catalysts can turn a tense situation into a violent confrontation (McKinney, Evan W).

In 1856 a rebellion in Yunnan resulted in the deaths of millions of Hui. Despite the potential for violence among the Hui, the majority of Hui communities either do not experience intense assimilation or have reacted to it without violent confrontations. Identity also plays a role in Han-Hui relations (McKinney, Evan W). The Hui have tended to adapt closely with the indigenous populace and this has led many Hui to find a niche in contemporary Chinese society. According to Gladney, the Hui can be seen as the most closely incorporated Muslim minority into Chinese society and culture. From an ethnic perspective, the fact that the Han and Hui share some sense of ethnic similarity undoubtedly creates the basis for a peaceful relationship. However, according to Chuah, the fact that the Hui *do* have a distinct identity has contributed to some tension between the Han and Hui. Distrust, prejudice, and discrimination from both sides has contributed to tension and intensified hostility between the two peoples (McKinney, Evan W). Hui identity is also important from a religious perspective. Many Hui identify strongly with Islam and disruption of religious activities has, at times, sparked ethnic unrest. Thus, Han-Hui relations in China are clearly tied to the politics of identity.

### f) *Hui and Han Diet Difference*

Eating Pork is unthinkable among Muslims all over the world. A Muslim could drink wine but couldn't eat pork. Eating Pork is strictly prohibited in Islam, in

other word it is “Haram” for a Muslim Ummah (All Muslim). The Person eating pork could not be a Muslim; he/she could be a Muslim by name, but not by faith and practices. All over the world only “Halal” meats are permissible for a Muslim. It can be strongly say, Hui Muslims doesn't eat pork. Differences in diet create major gaps between Hui and Han relations. Chinese Han eat more pork per capita than any other nationality, the word for meat *rou* used in isolation is assumed to mean pork. Hui could never eat with any utensils that have been used to prepare or serve pork (Stewart, Alexander Blair 2009). Eating is an important part of human social and cultural life, thus the food sharing system between Han and Hui create a major social gap between these two major societies. In china other Muslim nationalities have linguistic and ethnic distinctions to set them apart from others, but the Hui participate in inventing ethnic traits out of the arbitrary unity of a common diet. These dietary restrictions encourage Hui to take in traveling coreligionists and open hotel and restaurants for Muslims who will not eat or sleep in ritually unclean Han establishments. This situation may create a certain amount of interdependence and community among the Hui, but it could do the same among all Muslim nationalities as well (Stewart, Alexander Blair 2009). These restaurants also display Hui identity as a practical Muslims and provide Halal food to Muslims and save them from Haram food (Strictly prohibited). From Islamic point of view “It is the moral responsibilities of all Muslims in the world to save Muslims from taking haram foods and involving in haram activities in any parts of the world”. The special Hui Muslim restaurant and Hotel is the part of the above mentioned Islamic views. It could be wrong to say Hui Muslim hotels and restaurants are only to attract Muslim travelers from the country and other parts of the world. All over the world Muslim travelers first search Muslim hotels and restaurants only to save himself or herself from haram foods.

#### g) *State Discrimination with Hui and Uyghur*

In PRC Hui Muslims are much freer to practice Islam throughout china than Ugher, although Hui Muslims in Ningxia suffered persecution during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and '70s. Hui Muslims never suffered the same level of repression as faced by Uyghurs because they have been much more assimilated into Chinese culture, says Uyghur writer Ghulam Osman. Majority community in PRC has accepted Hui Muslims as a Chinese Muslims, but Uyghurs are not because they belongs to different race other than Chinese. Hui Muslims have never been a nation-state demand, they always lived together with the Chinese, because they belong to the same ethnic group as the Chinese, Ghulam Osman said. The Hui, whose forefathers were traders from Central Asia and other places in the world who accepted Islam, live throughout

China. Hui are the only ethnic group to be defined on the basis of their religion, rather than language or genealogical differences. Uyghurs are different, they had their own land and were invaded by China, Ghulam Osman said, referring to Xinjiang's past before it came under Chinese control following two short-lived East Turkestan Republics in the 1930s and 1940s. China, facing a separatist movement in Xinjiang, represses Uyghurs' religious freedom because Islam is significant in the survival of their identity. But if China is worried about an independence movement blossoming among Uyghurs, such a movement would be more likely to be spurred in reaction to repressive religious policies than religion on its own, Gladney said. All the Uyghur movements against the Chinese government were caused by frustration that resulted from the heavy-handed repression of the Chinese government in the region, not by radical religious forces,” Gladney said (<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/hui-113020121-72354.html>). Islam allowing all Muslims in the world to maintain their Muslim Identity by look, by faith and by practice, Separate them self from Non-Muslim cultural practices which Islam forcibly forbidden, as for example, all Muslims in the world should be beard on their face, if a Muslim doesn't have beard on their face, he has assimilated himself into a Non-Muslim fashion, means he has involved himself into a non Islamic fashion that is not allowed by Islamic teachings. In other words from Islamic point of view a Muslim cut his beard and assimilate himself into a Non-Muslim look, on the other hand he is involve in “Haram activity”. Cutting beard is Haram in Islam. Uyghur's cultural and religious practices separate them from rest of the Chinese culture and should not be underestimated. It will not be an exaggeration to say, all political movements of Uyghurs are caused by the heavy handed policy of Chinese government and not by other communal or religious forces in the nation. However, Religion plays a significant role in Uyghur's religious and cultural survival in china. Islam and the Uyghur language are deeply embedded in Uyghur identity. They maintain and strengthen their racial and historical differences with Han Chinese.

## II. CONCLUSION

As mentioned above Hui Muslims are one of the Major ethnic groups in china, living together with other ethnic groups of china from centuries, sharing different languages and cultures. Despite that Hui Muslims are marginalized in all sphere of life including education and politics. Hui Muslims availing less Governmental facilities as compare to other ethnic groups in china especially Han. Hui Muslims continuously striving for their political, social, cultural and religious rights. Hui representatives rarely seen in government body, as proportion to their population. It is the needs of time

more and more Hui representatives should be in government body that's the fundamental rights of Hui community. When the study looks on the top key positions finds that majority of the Han enjoying key Post. Hui ethnic minority should be given special grant for the betterment of Hui society and also given more religious freedom to build their own Islamic institutions (Madrasa) to save their Muslim identity and culture.

Cultural and religious diversity is the beauty of any good nation in the world. Good Humanities are learned in a diversified religious and cultural practice. Best personality always develop in a pluralistic culture. It is the needs of time Chinese government should provide equal religious freedom to all ethnic groups in PRC. All human right activists should demand equal religious freedom in china. Ban on religious practices are the violation of world human rights. By viewing the Uyghur statuses in china it can be easily and strongly said Uyghur's condition are worst in the world. Uyghur's Ethnic Identity is on stake.

In this world no religion taught about religious extremism. Religion always teaches how to live in a simple, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society. Religion also teach how to save yourself, your family and society from different kind of social deviation and social evils. If any kind of unrest seen among Uyghur and Hui in past and present are the emergence of brutal discriminatory behaviour by the Chinese government. In every society in the world little and great differences are seen among the general people but major division among Han and Hui are due to oppressive behavior of Chinese Government. Conflict always takes a shape of violent by the involvement of government machinery. Beurocrats always divide society into different segment. Religious, linguistic and cultural unity always seen among general and common people. Society always disturbed only the involvement of beurocrats. Religious minority in china are living under the umbrella of fear in one party system rule.

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