

THE TUNGAN REBELLION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES OF THE MUSLIM REBELLION IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY NORTHWEST CHINA

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“Seek knowledge, even to China”

– The Prophet Muhammad

The Tungan Rebellion was a great uprising of the Hui¹ in the Northwest of China during the mid-nineteenth century. The rebellion began in 1862 as a series of local level conflicts between Hui and Han militias in the Wei River Valley in Shaanxi province but grew to encompass the entire province as well as those of Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang. The Rebellion itself took place during a period of great unrest when a number of rebellions were raging throughout China. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that the Qing managed to maintain themselves as a dynasty. Nevertheless, the Qing did recover and managed to defeat the majority of the rebels by 1873, although Xinjiang was not subdued until 1878. However, the Tungan Rebellion, unlike the Taiping Rebellion, or even the other great Muslim Rebellion in Yunnan, has not received a great deal of attention from Western scholars. Those who have addressed it tend to gloss over the specific causes of the rebellion, either blaming it on religious antipathy between the Hui and their Han neighbors, or focusing more on the outcome of the rebellion.

There are a number of reasons for the actions of the Hui in northwest China in beginning the rebellion. Most importantly is the very breakdown in social order at the time. The Tungan Rebellion was the last in a series of rebellions that were anti-Qing in sentiment and were occupying the regime. With the outbreak of several other rebellions, the Qing were forced to withdraw soldiers from various areas in order to fight other rebels and relied on local militias to keep the peace and even to defend their respective provinces. In addition, Hui and Han antagonism had been growing since the end of the Yuan dynasty and the Qing tended to take the side of the Han in conflicts between the two. Furthermore, new religious traditions had been spreading among the Muslim communities of northwest China since the eighteenth century. These new traditions were looked at suspiciously by the Qing and tended to be anti-Qing as a result, although, for the most part they were occupied with fighting other Muslims. All these factors, combined with the increasing militarization of Chinese society in the nineteenth century were at the root of the Tungan Rebellion. However, it would seem that it was the breakdown in the social order that was most responsible for not only the Tungan Rebellion but other rebellions as well.

During the nineteenth century, the ruling dynasty of China, the Manchu Qing dynasty, began to weaken and lose control over the country. China faced social strife, economic stagnation and a huge growth in population which strained food supplies. In the

¹ Chinese Muslims, also called Huihui, Dungan or Tungan

middle of these economic troubles, the European powers began to assert themselves in East Asia. Though the Europeans had been trading with China since the seventeenth century, it was after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century that European merchants became a real presence in East Asia. At the same time, however, the Qing were seeking to reduce trade to a minimum and only allowed goods to be traded at the port of Canton. Indeed, when Britain dispatched Lord Macartney to China in 1793 in order to convince the Qianlong Emperor to ease trade restrictions on British merchants, as well as to display the latest in British manufactured goods, the Emperor not only refused the requests but said that “We possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures”² and invited King George III to do homage to the Emperor. Unable to trade their own goods for those of the Chinese, the British were forced to pay in silver, which they, being on the gold standard, were forced to acquire from the continent. Alarmed at their dwindling supplies of silver, the British began trading opium into China in the 1830s and when the Chinese attempted to ban opium, the British responded by declaring war.

The First Opium War (1839 – 1842) was a crushing defeat for the Qing and exposed the weaknesses of the dynasty. The British fleet greatly outclassed that of the Chinese and their soldiers, equipped with modern rifles and artillery easily outgunned the Chinese forces in ground battles. The Treaty of Nanking, signed in 1842, was humiliating for the Qing. It required the cession of Hong Kong to the British, reparation payments as well as lower tariffs and extraterritoriality for British citizens. The devastated Qing were weakened in the eyes of the world as well as their own subjects and became a prelude to a series of widespread domestic revolts and foreign invasions.³

The first and largest of these revolts, the Taiping rebellion erupted in 1850 and was not suppressed until 1864. At its height, the Taiping managed to control large swaths of southern China including the city of Nanjing. As Qing soldiers were withdrawn from elsewhere in China to fight the Taiping, further revolts erupted. In 1851, the Huang He River, in northern China, burst its banks and flooded hundreds of thousands of square miles and causing immense loss of life. The government, its finances having been depleted after the war with Britain, was unable to provide effective relief to those affected by the disaster, which sparked the Nien rebellion. The Nien movement, an anti-Qing secret society, began engaging in guerilla warfare against the Qing and formally rebelled in 1853. While the Nien and the Taiping revolts were ongoing, a series of Muslim rebellions on the periphery of the empire broke out. The first was the Panthay Rebellion, which began in 1856 in Yunnan province, and resulted in the establishment of the Sultanate of Dali, ruled by Du Wenxiu, an ethnic Hui. The sultanate was ultimately recaptured in 1872. In 1862, another rebellion of Muslims began, this time in central China. This rebellion, called the Tungan rebellion began in Shaanxi and spread to Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang, which became separated from China as the Kingdom of Kashgaria, under the rule of the Tajik adventurer Yaqub Beg.

The Tungan rebellion exposed the antagonism between the Hui and their Han neighbors and called into question the status of the Hui. Much has been written about the

² Qianlong, “Emperor Ch’ien lung to King George,” 1793, <<http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~jobrien/reference/ob41.html>>

³ Wen-Djang, Chu, *The Moslem Rebellion in Northwest China, 1862-1878* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966), 8.

causes of this rebellion. Some blame it on the difference of religion; others argue that it was not an organized revolt, but rather a series of local conflicts between Han and Hui. The most important factor, however, is the breakdown in social order that was occurring at the time. Indeed, the Tungan broke out in the midst of a series of rebellions that were crippling China and demonstrating the ineffectiveness of the Qing. Additional factors in the outbreak of the rebellion include Qing persecution of the Hui, the growing militarism of Chinese society, and new religious sects with millenarian dreams placed emphasis on the jihad and increased the willingness of the Hui to use violence. All these combined to bring about the Tungan rebellion.

Islam has had a long and illustrious history in China. There is no real certainty of when Muslims first began to appear in China, but many myths have grown up which describe the origins of Islam in China. The likely apocryphal *Ancient Record of the Tang Dynasty* claims that Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas, the maternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, was dispatched with an envoy in 650 ce by the Caliph Uthman to take the Qur'an to China, where they were received by the Gaozong Emperor of the T'ang dynasty.⁴ According to the record, the Emperor found the teachings of Islam to be compatible with Confucianism and, though he did not himself convert, allowed the preaching and practicing of Islam in his domain. A second story is that the Taizong Emperor⁵ had a dream about the Prophet Muhammad and the power that he had and thus sent several missions to him. In response, Muhammad sent his uncle with a copy of the Qur'an to China to give to the Emperor, who then edited it and promulgated it throughout the empire.⁶

Neither of these stories has any historical evidence to support them and both are almost assuredly mythological. Nevertheless, Arabs had been trading in China since at least the sixth century a.d. and Muslim merchants certainly were trading in China a few decades after the founding of Islam. The first recorded Muslim political envoy to China is in 713 a.d. According to Chinese records, the Muslim general, Kutaiba , who had successfully campaigned in Central Asia and defeated a Chinese army, sent an envoy to the Emperor. The emissaries refused to perform the koutou and demanded tribute, which was granted.⁷ Further Muslim threats to China's territorial integrity ended with the ascension of the Abbasids in 750 a.d. However, Muslims continued to trade in and eventually reside in China. When the first Muslims began to live in China is unknown, but by 758 a.d. a group of foreign Muslims, allied with the Arab and Persian merchants of Canton laid siege to that city and demanded the right to settle and marry in China. Chinese records claim that they sacked and burned the city. And in 787, the T'ang Records show that a group of some 4,000 Muslims, unable to return to their own countries by overland routes, requested and were granted permission to live in China.⁸ Thus the first community of Muslims in China was founded. However, it was not until the Mongol Yuan dynasty⁹ took power that the Chinese Muslim community began to

⁴ r. 649 - 683

⁵ r. 629 - 649

⁶ Jonathan N. Lipman. *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997, 24.

⁷ Marshall Broomhall. *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1996, 17.

⁸ Ibid. 28.

⁹ 1271 - 1368

flourish. Although the original settlers had become sinicized, they were still viewed as foreigners and as the Yuan dynasty, being a foreign dynasty itself, tended to appoint foreigners to high positions. Indeed, under the Yuan dynasty, Muslims were second only to Mongols and a multitude of Muslims were in high levels of government. The Ming dynasty¹⁰ saw the greatest assimilation of Chinese Muslims; indeed, it is in this period that Chinese Muslims, rather than Muslims in China, can be spoken of.¹¹

With the fall of the Ming, a new foreign dynasty came to power in the Manchus. Initially, as foreigners themselves, they sought not to punish Muslims or Chinese but only evildoers. It is debated whether the Manchu ever truly became assimilated. Wen-Djang Chu argues that they did indeed become assimilated and that “In 1644, when a small but strong army of Manchus stormed over the Great Wall, they were sturdy horsemen and sharp-shooters. They were brave and ready to fight. But by 1844 this gallantry had gone. Manchus were so adapted to Chinese civilization that they had lost nearly all of their own culture, including their many virtues.”¹² Indeed, Chu further argues that the physical and moral corruption that came to the Manchu with assimilation was ultimately responsible for their inability to hold the Empire together. Manchu assimilation was viewed as a point of fact during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, recent scholarship has indicated that while Chinese was spoken and Chinese dress was worn at the Manchu court, records continued to be written in Manchu to which Han Chinese had no access. Additionally, the Qing dynasty was viewed as a foreign dynasty even after adopting Chinese culture. Still, though the Manchu may have assimilated only incompletely, they did adopt many aspects of Chinese culture and with this adoption, they also adopted the traditional Han disdain for the Hui. The official policy of the Qing dynasty was “Equal benevolence toward Chinese and Muslim.”¹³ However, local and provincial officials often raised the specter of Hui bestiality and violence and requested strict actions against them. Indeed, some officials even argued that the mosques should be destroyed and that the practice of Islam itself should be prohibited. The court typically refused to promulgate laws against the Muslims, but the local officials who governed mixed areas of Hui and Han continued to argue for strict laws against the Muslims. Still, the Qianlong Emperor opened the door to discriminatory practices. In 1762, he approved a plan to make local Muslim religious leaders responsible for the crimes committed by any Muslim in their respective communities. Additionally, punishments for various crimes were increased if the culprits were Muslim. Even when Han and Hui were punished equally, they would still be distinguished from each other.¹⁴ The Hui instigated several revolts between 1781 and 1862 which came to nothing. Indeed, these incidents were usually instances of conflict between Muslims rather than Muslims against the Qing. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, the eruption of the Taiping Rebellion and the ensuing breakdown in social order led to more revolts. The Nien Rebellion erupted in northern China in 1851 and was not put down until 1868. Several Hui rebellions also took place. The Panthay Rebellion in Yunnan province began in 1856 and resulted in the separation

¹⁰1368 - 1644

¹¹ Raphael Israeli. *Islam in China*. New York: Lexington Books, 2002, 296.

¹² Chu, *Moslem Rebellion*, 7.

¹³ *Han Hui yishi tongren*; Jonathan Lipman. “A Fierce and Brutal People’: On Islam and Muslims in Qing Law.” in *Empire at the Margins*, ed. Pamela Kyle Crossley et al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, 88.

¹⁴ Lipman, *Qing Law*, 94.

of Yunnan from China until 1873. In 1862, as the Taipings approached the provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi, a great Muslim Rebellion flared up in these provinces as well as in Ningxia. This rebellion, called the Tungan or Dungan Rebellion, as well as the Muslim Rebellion, was characteristic of the mixed nature of revolts against the Qing during the mid-nineteenth century. Although it was nominally a revolt of Muslims against Han Chinese, it is simplistic to describe it as such. Rather, it was a series of unorganized local conflicts that pitted Muslim militias against Han militias as well as Qing soldiers. Nor did all Muslims take part in the revolt. Some revolted initially then surrendered quickly, others simply lay low, and still others took an active part in the suppression of the rebellion. Nevertheless, the revolt was fairly widespread, and though it was suppressed in Gansu, Shaanxi and Ningxia by 1873, it had spread to Xinjiang in 1863 where it resulted in the secession of the province as the kingdom of Kashgaria under the rule of the Tajik adventurer, Yaqub Beg. The province was not re-conquered until 1877.

The contemporary mainland Chinese view of the Tungan Rebellion is unsurprisingly, a Marxist view. According to this outlook, expressed by Chen Chongkai, the reactionary and oppressive policies of the feudal Qing dynasty sparked a rebellion against religious prejudice and economic exploitation. A similar argument, presented by Wu Wanshan, considers the rebellion to be the struggle of an ethnic minority against the oppression of the reactionary and prejudiced Qing. Though focused on ethnicity, rather than class, Wu Wanshan's view is nonetheless Marxist because of its emphasis on the oppressed nature of the Hui minority. Indeed, the very language used to describe the struggle invokes the idea of the *minzu* paradigm. *Minzu* is usually translated as "nation" or "people" and has been used since the era of Nationalist China to categorize the various ethnic groups that inhabit China while still emphasizing the idea of *Zhonghua minzu*, the Chinese Nation. Therefore, every inhabitant of China falls into one of the fifty-six ethnic *minzu* while also being a part of the Chinese Nation. In the Chinese Marxist view then, the Hui rebels were *minzu* heroes who were fighting for the independence and unity of all of the *minzu* of China against Manchu hegemony.¹⁵ These Marxist views on the Rebellion mischaracterize the struggle as one of class and ethnicity. Rather, the Muslims who did revolt came from all classes, merchants, gentry and peasants all contributed to the rebellion. Additionally, not all Muslims joined the rebels and some even took part in the suppression of the rebellion. Also, the rebellion was not organized by any means. Rather, there were sporadic local conflicts between Muslims and Chinese throughout the provinces affected. The Marxist views are misguided in that they seek to impose a Marxist worldview on this rebellion. They assume class where there is none and they assume ethnic solidarity when it is not present. Further, they are not objective in that they laud the "righteous" Muslims who struggled against the "feudal" and oppressive Qing.

In contrast to the Marxist Chinese view of the struggle, Taiwanese scholars do not use the *minzu* terminology. Rather, what is emphasized is the state's lack of virtue. Thus, in the view of Taiwanese scholars, the Hui were acting as good Chinese when rebelling against the Qing.

Other scholars view the conflict differently. Raphael Israeli and Chu Wen-Djang both concur that the rebellion was primarily religious in nature. Chu Wen-Djang claims that "These differences of religious faith led to constant conflicts between Chinese and

¹⁵ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 117.

Moslems.”¹⁶ Raphael Israeli takes this argument further and argues that the rebellion was a result of the rise in prominence of a new Muslim sect: “This new Islam [the *xinjiao*], which started by disseminating Islamic puritanism among Muslims, partly through the use of jihad, turned into an extremist Mahdi movement which attempted to use jihad to bring the millennium, and end up as a multifarious range of sects and sub-sects which, in effect, set themselves apart from Islam and turned to ritual introspection.” (Israeli, *Muslims* 204) Certainly the view that the rebellion was inspired by Islam was shared by the Qing. Zuo Zongtang, the general who put down the rebellion claimed that it was because of the “New Teaching” that hitherto loyal Muslims had rebelled. However, too much emphasis can be placed on religion. Though it likely did play some role, it would seem that local tensions between Hui and Han were a far more important factor in the rebellion. As Jonathan Lipman argues: “We may thus conclude that religion did indeed play a role in the violence of mid-nineteenth century northwest China, but it was neither a consistent or dominant role.”¹⁷

Chu Wen-Djang also emphasizes the disintegration of the Manchu Banner Armies and the Green Battalions. The Banner Armies were originally organized by the Manchu chief Nurhaci, who divided his men into four companies of 300 men each, distinguished by their different colored banners: yellow, white, blue and red. Eventually, as further conquests brought more men to his size, the number of companies increased and these were distributed under the four Banners. In 1615, he divided each of the original Banners into, thus were the Eight Banners formed. Eventually, separate Mongol and Chinese Eight Banners were formed and by 1644, there were twenty-four Banners in all. The Banner Armies were the most trusted military units of the Qing dynasty. However, with the conquest of China proper, it was discovered that the Bannermen were too few to guard the entirety of China and their ability to fight from horseback did not serve them in the mountainous and swampy areas of southern China. Thus the Green Battalions were formed out of surrendered Ming soldiers. The Green Battalions were used primarily for garrison duty while the Banner Armies were expected to do most of the fighting. Yet, the strength and ability of both the Banner Armies and the Green Battalions eventually declined. As early as 1657, it was admitted that the Eight Banners were not as strong as they once had been. Indeed, when the Manchu were attempting to conquer northwest China and Formosa, the Banner Armies required the assistance of the Green Battalions. And by the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, the Banner Armies were no longer an effective fighting force. Chu Wen-Djang also points out the degenerated state of the Green Battalions. For them, pay was too low, the soldiers were scattered, and as a result of rarely being used, the soldiers and officers were unfamiliar with each other and were unable to cooperate effectively. The degeneration of the armed forces of the Qing necessitated the development of the local militias (*tuanlien*) which were organized by local communities when the need for self-protection arose. So to Chu Wen-Djang, the disintegration of the central army units and the militarization of local communities contributed to the outbreak of the Tungan Rebellion.¹⁸

This militarization of local Chinese society did indeed play a part in the outbreak of the rebellion. When the Taiping revolted, the Qing found that their regular armies, the

¹⁶ Chu, *Moslem Rebellion*, 4.

¹⁷ Lipman. *Familiar Strangers*, 137.

¹⁸ Chu, *Moslem Rebellion*, 9-14.

Banner Armies and the Green Battalions, were ineffective and unable to defeat the rebels. Thus, they turned to the local militias in order for assistance. However, these militias, being organized by the local groups, were not necessarily loyal to the government. Indeed, the outbreak of the Tungan Rebellion itself began when the Hui and Han militias, organized for the defense of Shaanxi from the Taiping, instead started fighting each other, which touched a more widespread conflict.

Jonathan Lipman and Raphael Israeli are two of the foremost English language scholars on the subject of the Hui. Both have written extensively on the subject of the status of the Hui throughout Chinese history. However, in his characterization of the Tungan Rebellion, Israeli places too much emphasis on the effect of the “New Teaching.” Ignoring that not only had Muslim rebellions broken out before the spread of the “New Teaching” but that the Tungan Rebellion took place in a era of social upheaval, he claims that the “New Teaching” was the sole cause of the rebellion. Lipman, on the other hand, argues that although religion likely did play a role in the outbreak of the rebellion, the underlying social tensions as well as the economic and political conditions had a much larger contribution. In examining what evidence is available, it would seem that Lipman is more correct. The rebellion was caused by the alien nature of the Hui and the contentious relationship that they had with their Han neighbors as well as the breakdown in social order that contributed to outbreak of several other revolts.

The Tungan Rebellion brought to light the strange status of the Hui in China. Unlike other minorities, i.e. Uyghur, Mongols and Tibetans, the Hui did not have any historical claim to any Chinese province. Nor were they a majority in any province, but rather, though highly concentrated in Gansu, Shaanxi, and Ningxia, were spread throughout the country. The Hui had large contingents in every major city in China and after the Yuan dynasty, were the largest minority in China, with a population of approximately 4,000,000.¹⁹ The pervasiveness of the Hui was a cause of much tension with their Han counterparts. Additionally, high placed Muslims in the Yuan dynasty had sometimes acted capriciously and cruelly, leading the Han to characterize all Muslims as such. With the advent of the Qing dynasty, Muslims were initially treated in the same way as other groups. Indeed, early Qing policy was to keep various groups divided from one another, in order to prevent revolts against their authority. Even so, the Hui were a strange case. Linguistically Chinese, they were nevertheless distinct from the Chinese. As such, they were placed in the Chinese category of the Qing, and were subject to the queue and anti-miscegenation regulations that prevented them from marrying non-Chinese Muslims. Still, despite their categorization as Chinese, they were viewed as a violent and bestial people. Eventually, when the Qing had been sinicized and adopted the Chinese view of Muslims, several anti-Muslim actions were taken. Indeed, Muslims were punished differently for the same crimes that their Han counterparts committed and Muslim community leaders were made responsible for the actions of the Muslims in those communities.²⁰ These discriminatory attitudes exacerbated the tensions between the Hui and the Qing and contributed to the outbreak of the Tungan Rebellion.

Nor was violence from Muslims a surprising thing for the Qing. The Muslims had revolted several times before. In 1658 Muslims joined with Ming loyalists in an attempt to cast out the Manchu invaders. In 1781, an inter-Muslim struggle between the adherents

¹⁹Israeli. *Islam in China*, 285.

²⁰ Lipman, *Qing Law*, 93.

of the “Old Teaching” and the “New Teaching” became classified as a rebellion when several Qing officials were killed. This rebellion led to a crackdown by Qing authorities on Muslims in general. Indeed, the very characterization of the Muslims by the Qing and most Chinese was of a violent people who existed outside the Chinese order. As the Manchu became more Chinese in culture they further and further saw Muslims as a threat to their control. The Muslims, with their devotion to a single God, did not pay proper tribute to the Son of Heaven and thus the Qing looked askance at them. In particular, the rise of the “New Teaching” caused great anxiety amongst Qing officials.

The “New Teaching” arose in the eighteenth century as part of a wave of Islamic revivalism that saw similar movements in other Muslim areas. It came out of the Naqshbandi sufi order that was widespread amongst Chinese Muslims. Two sufi revivalists, Ma Mingxin and Ma Laichi, had studied in Yemen and Mecca and began teaching. Both had studied with prominent Naqshbandi Sufis, but had learned different lessons. Ma Laichi practiced the silent dhikr²¹ that was characteristic of the Naqshbandi order. Ma Mingxin, however, studied later at a time when vocal dhikr came to be seen as permissible and taught that to his own disciples. Though seemingly trivial, the issue of the dhikr was one of many contentious concerns among the Chinese Muslims. A greater issue was that of tajdid, the commitment to the political, social and religious renewal of Islam. Ma Mingxin, when he returned to China in 1761, intended to purify Islam as practiced in China and remove the Chinese influences on it. As a practitioner of the vocal dhikr, he named his new sect the Jahriya, after the Arabic word *jahr* meaning aloud. Ma Laichi and his disciples, the Khafiya, from the Arabic for silent, resented the upstart sect for rivaling their hegemony in the northwest. The Khafiya found the Jahriya practices to be superstitious, heterodox and immoral. The Jahriya, on the other hand, criticized the excessive donations demanded by the Khafiya, the emphasis on saints and tombs, and the development of hereditary succession.²² Beyond the differences in practice, the Jahriya were committed to the purification of Islam and to its renewal. This made the Jahriya much more militant towards the non-Muslim state and heterodox Muslims. Indeed in the 1760s and again in the 1780s, there was much violent conflict between Jahriya and Khafiya adherents. In 1780, the Jahriya organized large contingents of armed men to attack the Khafiya, who organized themselves but faced great losses. The Khafiya then turned to local Qing officials, who, instead of holding trials and administering punishment, dispatched troops with the intention of exterminating the followers of the New Teaching. The Jahriya responded by eliminating a platoon of troops and killing the accompanying officials. These actions caused the Qing to view the New Teaching as a threat to the stability of the region.²³

The arrival of Sufi orders in China also marked a departure from traditional Hui society. Formerly, the Hui were organized into communities based on the local mosque. Society revolved around the mosque and the Hui went there to learn, practice their religion and to practice fighting arts. With the arrival of Sufism, the mosque based Hui

²¹ The dhikr is the remembrance or invocation of God. It marks the climax of a Sufi gathering regardless of how it may be expressed.

²² Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 86 - 90.

²³ Lipman, *Qing Law*, 100.

began calling themselves Gedimu, from the Arabic word *qadim*, meaning old.²⁴ The Khafiya branch was the first to arrive and thus with the arrival of the Jahriya teaching, the Qing distinguished between the two, calling them *laojiao*, “Old Teaching” and *xinjiao* “New Teaching,” respectively. The Jahriya were viewed as latecomers who were destroying the social order.²⁵

These conflicts between rival adherents emphasize the changing nature of Chinese society in general. Over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, China began to become more militarized. Individuals came to possess weapons for protection, including firearms, and single villages or local alliances built forts and stockades. For the Muslims, mosque communities began to develop paramilitary capabilities. As the society became militarized, the Qing dynasty began to be viewed as corrupt and ineffective. In particular, the defeat in the first Opium War and the ineffectual response to several natural disasters did little to endear the Qing to their subjects. As the Qing became further and further reviled by the populace, a number of revolts erupted. In 1850, the Taiping Rebellion, the first and largest of these, erupted. Lasting until 1864, the Taiping managed to gain control over a large area of southern and central China. Soon after the Taiping began, in 1851, another revolt in northern China began, the Nien Rebellion, lasting until 1868. The Nien took large swaths of territory from the Qing and cut the lines of communication between Beijing and the Qing armies that were fighting the Taiping. Eventually, the death of the leader of the Nien led to them merging with the Taiping. The Taiping Rebellion provided the near proximate cause for the Tungan Rebellion, for as the Taiping moved to invade Shaanxi, the Qing authorities began organizing the Han into *tuanlian* militia units. Frightened that these militias might be turned against them, the Hui began forming their own militias in response. An incident in a market in 1862 led to a brawl, which is considered the starting point for the Tungan Rebellion.

The Tungan Rebellion began ostensibly in 1862. In April of that year, a group of Taiping rebels invaded Shaanxi from Sichuan. Meeting little resistance, they laid siege to the provincial capital of Xian, but failing to take it they scattered and began conquering others cities and towns. Because of the shortage of troops, the authorities in Xian encouraged local leaders to form *tuan lien* units to repel the Taiping. Independently of each other, the Chinese gentry organized the Chinese units and the Muslim leaders organized those of the Muslims. After the Taiping had departed, the Han accused the Hui of assisting the rebels. During this period of rising tensions, a group of Muslims in the county of Hua-chou went to buy bamboo poles from a Chinese merchant. The merchant raised the price and a quarrel developed with turned into a fight. Some Muslims died while others were injured. The fight was stopped, but that night, the Chinese snuck into the Muslim village and started a fire. In response, the Muslim militia attacked the Chinese unit and violent and large scale fighting erupted throughout the Wei Valley. The fighting spread to Wei-nan and Ta-li, and thus the rebellion began.²⁶

When the rebellion had initially begun, local officials were still unsure of how to quell it. Zhang Fei, a scholar from Xian, came to Lintong in order to encourage the

²⁴ Johnathan Lipman. “Ethnic Violence in Modern China: Hans and Hui in Gansu, 1781-1929.” In *Violence in China*, eds. Johnathan Lipman and Stevan Harrell. State University of New York Press, 1990, 75.

²⁵ Lipman, *Qing Law*, 99.

²⁶ Chu, *Moslem Rebellion*, 25.

Muslim and non-Muslim *tuanlian* to cease fighting each other and concentrate on the “national enemy,” the Taiping. Ordering the non-Muslim militia to leave him unguarded and sought to parlay with the Muslims, however, they captured and killed him, making themselves “rebels” in the eyes of the Qing. After this, the local Qing commanders wavered as to the policy they should take against the Muslims: whether they should treat all Muslims as rebels or if they should separate good Muslims from bad Muslims. Though military contingency argued for the latter, the local non-Muslims were in favor of an option known as *xi Hui*, or “washing away the Muslims.”²⁷

Though the Muslims, too, were initially divided about which policies to pursue, eventually, the diplomatic option was discarded and in June of 1862, various groups of Muslim fighters began besieging Xian. They were unable to take the city but it was not relieved until the fall of 1863 by the Qing general Duo Long-a. Although at this point, Qing victory seemed certain, government troops were thinly spread throughout the province and anti-Qing Muslims counterattacked and remained in control of substantial parts of Shaanxi for five more years only submitting in 1868 after the arrival of Zuo Zongtang, the famed Qing general who had put down the last of the Taiping rebels.

Following the outbreak of rebellion in Shaanxi, a number of Muslims refugees had fled to Gansu and formed an army of “Eighteen Great Battalions” with the intention of taking back Shaanxi. However, although viewed with some sympathy by their coreligionists in Gansu, they were never fully integrated into the Muslim communities there. And their anti-Qing sentiments, stemming from the depredation that they had faced in Shaanxi, ensured that they would remain the nucleus of resistance to Qing pacification in Gansu.

In Gansu, the much larger and more dispersed population of Muslims prevented the Qing from inflicting a crushing defeat. Thus, focusing on the various centers of the Muslim insurgency, the Qing commanders developed different strategies for subduing the insurgents, depending on the resistance offered, the military options available and their perceptions of the Muslims’ motivations. After pacifying Shaanxi, Zuo Zongtang turned his attention to Jinjipu, the headquarters of Ma Hualong, the leader of the Jahriya sect. Ma Hualong had engaged in both battle and diplomacy with local and national Qing forces since 1862. On at least on occasion he had surrendered and changed his name to Ma Chaoqing (One Who Attends upon the Qing). However, Zuo Zongtang took his surrender to be insincere. Instead of disbanding his troops, Ma Hualong had extended his defensive fortifications and was actively aiding the Shaanxi Muslims in their attempts to return home by force.

In 1869, Zuo dispatched three columns into eastern Gansu. Overcoming strong resistance and two mutinies within the Qing ranks, the columns converged on Jinjipu in September of 1870. With their Krupp siege guns, they forced the surrender of Ma Hualong in January 1871 and executed him and as many of his family members as could be found. Thousands of Jahriya adherents were massacred after the siege during “pacification.”²⁸

Following the defeat of Ma Hualong, Zuo advanced against Hezhou, the town controlled by the rebel Ma Zhan’ao. Ma Zhan’ao was not an anti-Qing holy warrior; rather, he sought to maintain his political power and his territory. The leader of a group

²⁷ Lipman, *Strangers*, 123

²⁸ Lipman, *Strangers*, 125-126

associated with the Khafiya, Ma Zhan'ao, after seizing Hezhou in 1862, established a base for antigovernment activity and a haven for the Muslims seeking protection from the hostile Qing. After preparing his campaign against Hezhou, Zuo sought to overcome Ma Zhan'ao's carefully positioned troops, but was unable to do so. Following his victory over the Qing general, Ma Zhan'ao sent his own son to Zuo's headquarters with a proposal for immediate surrender. Declaring his loyalty to the Qing, Ma Zhan'ao offered his assistance to the Qing in defeating any rebels, including Muslims.

With the alliance with Ma Zhan'ao concluded, and bolstered by troops from Hezhou, Zuo marched to Xining, a rebellious city that sheltered a large number of Shaanxi Muslims. The city fell after three months and Ma Guiyuan, who commanded the Muslims, was captured and executed along with thousands of armed Muslims. Severe justice was not meted out however, rather, the surviving Shaanxi refugees were resettled in lands far from any Muslim centers.

Now, Zuo sought to clear the road to Xinjiang with the aim of eventually recapturing that province. With this in mind, he moved against the city of Suzhou, which was defended by many Muslim commanders from all over the northwest, with overall command in the hands of Ma Wenlu, a Xining Muslim who had the loyalty of many Shaanxi Muslims. Moving cautiously, Zuo battered the walls of the city with his Krupp guns and forced Ma Wenlu's surrender. He then oversaw the execution of seven thousand Muslims and, to guarantee that the Gansu corridor would remain unthreatened, transplanted the few surviving Muslims from all the cities of the corridor, from Lanzhou to Suzhou, to southern Gansu. At this point, although Xinjiang itself was under the control of the Yaqub Beg, the Muslim Rebellion was effectively over.

The outcome of the rebellion was devastating. The provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu were both devastated and millions of people were killed. The once wealthy and populous Shaanxi Muslim community never regained its position. Indeed, the 1953 census found only fifty-four thousand Muslims in the entire province, far less than ten percent of what the population had been a century earlier.²⁹ Gansu too was decimated, according to one observer: "The population of Gansu was reduced from 15,000,000 to 1,000,000...nine out of every ten Chinese were supposed to have been killed, and two out of every three Mohammedans...All the villages and farmsteads for miles and miles in all directions were in ruins, and the huge culturable hills were for the most part deserted."³⁰ However, when examining the rebellion, it is important to note the much dispersed nature of the rebellion. Unlike the Taiping, Nien or Panthay rebellions, the Tungan rebellion had no central organization. Indeed there was little if any communication between the various Muslim leaders, never mind cooperation. As Johnathan Lipman points out, the only common connection between the diverse rebel groups were Shaanxi refugees, who did not engender or enable any unified leadership.³¹

With the lack of unified leadership and organization, it is difficult to claim that there was one single Muslim Rebellion. Rather, in the wake of the First Opium War, several natural disasters and famines, the Qing were increasingly unable to maintain the social order. In Gansu and Shaanxi, this was further exacerbated by the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion as well as underlying tensions between increasingly militarized Hui

²⁹ Lipman, *Strangers*, 124

³⁰ Broomhall, *Islam*, 155.

³¹ Lipman, *Strangers*, 129

and Han antagonists. It is also important to note that, although ethnically similar, the Han did not view the Hui as Chinese; rather, the difference in religion alienated and isolated the Hui from their Han neighbors. Indeed, the changing attitude of Qing towards the Hui reflects this divide. Initially, the Hui were classified as Han and were placed under the same rules as them. However, as the Qing became increasingly sinicized, they adopted the anti-Muslim attitudes of the Han majority and began classifying the Hui as bestial and violent people, going so far as to prescribe harsher punishments for the Hui with regards to the same crimes.

At its heart, the Tungan rebellion was an expression of discontent with the current order. The Muslims who participated tended to have differing motives and goals, but all Muslims affected by the rebellion experienced the same discrimination on the part of the state and antipathy on the part of their neighbors. The Tungan Rebellion was less a movement directed at bringing down the Qing dynasty than a series of violent conflicts that sought to resolve tensions existing and that had existed between the Hui and the Han since the end of the Yuan dynasty. In this way, the Muslim rebels failed in their goal, at least in the immediate sense, as the anti-Muslim sentiments that had prevailed before the conflict remained and were exacerbated as some saw the rebellion as a reason to eliminate the Muslim community entirely. Furthermore, none of the conflicts that affected the Muslims, whether Khafiya vs. Jahriya, or Hui vs. Han, were truly resolved. Indeed, in 1895, another conflict between the two sects broke out in Gansu. Though not nearly as devastating or as long, it too was classified as a rebellion by the Qing and had severe repercussions for the Muslims.

Still, over time, the Muslim community became more integrated into the larger Chinese community. Indeed, during the warlord era, the provinces of Gansu, Ningxia and Shaanxi were ruled by a group of Hui known as the Ma Clique, who remained in power until the rise of Communist China in 1949. Additionally, the Hui were perceived and treated differently both by the Nationalists and the Communists than they had been under the Qing. Both saw the Hui as integral parts of the *Zhonghua minzu*. Both co-opted the Tungan Rebellion as a historical event and turned it into a national epic dealing with noble rebels fighting against an oppressive regime. Thus, the Tungan rebels and the Hui in general, have been transformed from an alien and bestial people, into integral parts of a larger China. Perhaps, in this way, the Tungan rebels did indeed achieve their ultimate goals.