Chinese Muslim literature

Hān kitābCentral AsiaTrukestanŞūfismQing dynastyPersianDaoist literatureBuddhist literature

The oldest surviving texts that can properly be described as **Chinese Muslim literature**—sustained literary compositions reflecting a distinct orientation towards both Chinese and Muslim traditions of writing—were composed in the middle decades of the eleventh/seventeenth century. The translations, summaries, guides to Muslim theology and practice, and apologia produced from this period through to the early twentieth century, collectively referred to as the *Hān kitāb*, introduced to a Chinese readership the corpus of Islamic texts that achieved canonical status by association with the late Tīmūrid courts of Central Asia. A contrast is drawn between the Sinophone or traditionalist school that produced the *Hān kitāb*, which saw the emperors of the Qing dynasty (1054-1329/1644-1911) as legitimate sovereigns, and the Şūfī schools, which had their legitimacy conferred either directly or indirectly by the Khoja lineages of eastern Turkestan.

The oldest surviving texts that can properly be described as **Chinese Muslim literature** were composed in the middle decades of the eleventh/seventeenth century. The Chinese language has not sustained a popular and diverse Islamic literature in the manner of Arabic, Persian, and many other languages. For most Chinese Muslims until the middle of the twentieth century, as in many remote Muslim communities in China today, a basic education involved memorising and learning to read common Arabic phrases used in worship and daily life, and an advanced education entailed a first-hand acquaintance with the Persian and Arabic books taught in *madrasas*; literacy in Chinese tended to come after at least a basic Islamic education, and only for those whose livelihood brought them into regular contact with Chinese official culture. The relatively few Chinese texts produced by Muslims that were of an overtly religious nature can be seen as written intermediaries between the spoken language of local Muslim communities and Arabic, Persian, and Turkic textual traditions, and between local Muslim communities and the imperial state.

Most Chinese Muslim texts produced between the eleventh/seventeenth century and the early twentieth century, known as the *Hān kitāb* (Chinese-language Islamic books), are primers, summaries, translations, and adaptations of Arabic or Persian works that were circulating in China at the time. Some of these served Sinophone Muslims as learning aids in the early years of a *madrasa* education. The intended readership for other texts, especially those that situate Islamic teachings and ritual in relation to the orthodox written tradition of the Chinese bureaucracy, is not readily apparent.

Several major *Hān kitāb* authors are introduced below, with attention given to the Arabic and Persian texts that they drew upon and to political developments that affected the status of Muslims in the Qing empire (1054-1329/1644-1911). Some of the more interesting Islamic texts produced by Sinophone Muslims that fall outside of this tradition are mentioned briefly, particularly prose and poetry works of a devotional nature. The Muslim literature produced by the Turkicspeaking communities of what is now Xinjiang province, a subcategory of the extensive Muslim literature of Turkestan, is not discussed, nor are the largely oral literatures of the Salar, Dongxiang, and other non-Sinophone Muslims in China. The extensive written and oral Chinese literature produced by Muslims or heavily influenced by Muslim literary traditions that is not of an overtly religious nature, including substantial geographic, medical, and astronomical works, as well as ghost stories and other popular tales, are not discussed here.

1. Origins and sources

Chinese texts that relate in various ways to Muslim traditions of writing and storytelling were produced from the third/ninth century through to the end of the imperial era. The earliest surviving Chinese tomb inscriptions date from the last decades of the southern Song dynasty (521-678/1127-1279) after northern China and central Asia had been incorporated into the Mongol khanate. During the Yuan dynasty (669-769/1271-1368), brief Chinese compositions were inscribed on stone tablets outside mosques and on tombstones, often with loosely corresponding Arabic or Persian text recorded on the same tablet. A distinct style of Chinese Muslim monumental writing emerged between the mid-tenth/sixteenth and mid-eleventh/seventeenth centuries that was used in documents of a public or semi-official nature, such as epitaphs, plagues commemorating the foundation or renovation of Muslim public buildings, and placards adorning the entrance ways of mosques. These short texts are characterised by the use of a standard Chinese vocabulary for common terms such as "Islam," "Medina," and "the Prophet" and allusion to themes and metaphors from Arabic and Persian religious poetry. The tradition of Chinese Muslim monumental writing has been better preserved and catalogued than other forms of Chinese Muslim literature, partly because of the high esteem in which monumental writing in general is held by Chinese scholars and literary collectors (Yu and Lei; Wu Wenliang; Guojia minzu shiwu).

A national survey of texts of historical interest relating to China's minority nationalities was carried out in 2005-7 by the Ancient Books Office (Guji bangongshi), with subsidiary surveys for the Hui nationality, as well as Uighurs, Salar, Dongxiang, and other official Muslim nationalities of the People's Republic of China. Catalogues of Hui historical texts were published in 2008 for several provinces in China proper (Shandong, Henan), along with the first volume of the national catalogue on Hui historic inscriptions, based largely on previously published material. Of greater historical interest are several draft catalogues prepared in 2007-8 as part of the same national survey for various locations in northwestern China (unpublished as of 2013), which provide the most detailed evidence available about the Arabic and Persian texts that were circulating in China between the twelfth/eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Editions of most of the Chinese texts mentioned below can be found in one or both of the compilations listed at the head of the bibliography (QZDD and HZDC), while library holdings of the remainder are listed in the bibliography compiled by Donald Leslie, Yang Daye, and Ahmed Yousef.

2. The Hān kitāb

The oldest surviving texts that can be properly described as Chinese Muslim literature—sustained literary compositions reflecting a distinct orientation towards both Chinese and Muslim traditions of writing-were composed in the middle decades of the eleventh/seventeenth century. The received tradition relates that a Sinophone school of Islamic learning emerged in the tenth/sixteenth century, but, until new texts come to light, it can be assumed that any distinct Sinophone tradition took the form of an oral tradition of commentary on Persian and Arabic texts rather than on a corpus of Chinese texts. The translations, summaries, guides to Muslim theology and practice, and apologia produced from this period through to the late nineteenth century, collectively referred to as the Han kitab, introduced to a Chinese readership the corpus of Islamic texts that were produced in, or achieved canonical status by association with, the late Tīmūrid courts of Central Asia. The four Islamic texts most frequently cited and translated were Persian works of theoretical Sufism associated with the school of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 637/1240), written between the late seventh/thirteenth and late ninth/fifteenth centuries: Mirsād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ilā al-ma'ād, by the Khwārazmī scholar Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256), trans. Hamid Algar, The path of God's bondsmen, from origin to return (1982); Maqşad-i aqşā ("The furthest goal"), by 'Azīz al-Nasafī (d. 661/1263); and two works by 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1493), Ashi 'at al-lama at ("Rays of the flashes") and Lawa in ("Gleams"). These and other Persian and Arabic works commonly cited by the Han kitab authors, such as the Hanafi figh (jurisprudence) commentary Mukhtasar alwiqāyat ("Summary of the Wiqayat," i.e., the Wiqāyāt al-riwāya, "Protection of the transmission," by Mahmūd b. Şadr al-Sharīʿa al-Mahbūbī, d. c.680/1281) by Şadr al-Sharī at al-Thānī (d. 747/1346), the Qur ānic commentary (*tafsīr*) by Ḥusayn Vā iz Kāshifī (d. 910/1504-5) titled *Mavāhib-i ʿaliyya* ("The high gifts") (also known as *Tafsīr-i Ḥusaynī*), and the collection of *ḥadīth qudsī (ḥadīth* recording the transmitted word of God) titled *Kitāb al-arba īn*, "Book of forty (traditions," by Abū Zakariyyā ʾal-Nawawī (d. 676/1277-8), were popular texts taught in Ḥanafī *madrasa*s throughout Turkestan and in much of the Mughal and Ottoman empires in the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries and are well represented in the national survey of Islamic manuscripts in China conducted in 2005-7. The same survey revealed a few copies of Persian poetry and other literary works by Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1390), Rūmī (d. 671/1273), and Jāmī— though the *Gulistān* of Sa dī (d. 690-1/1291-2) was well represented—suggesting that Chinese Muslim scholars endorsed the orthodox high culture of Islamic but emphasised texts pertaining to the principles of the Islamic faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*) (Murata, Chittick, and Tu; Petersen; Allworth; Chittick, *Self-disclosure;* Morris, 110-4).

The *Hān kitāb* texts upheld the orthodox language and political standpoints of the late imperial state. The linguistic register and vocabulary employed by the better known *Hān kitāb* authors reflects the neo-Confucian literary style of the bureaucracy rather than the style of Daoist or Buddhist literature, the vernacular used by storytellers, or the language of everyday communication in Chinese mosques. This orientation of the *Hān kitāb* towards an elite, state-sponsored Chinese literary culture has been explained in terms of the emergence of a group of Muslim Confucian scholars (*Hui-ru*), amongst whom these new texts circulated (Benite, *Dao of Muhammad*). The historical emergence of the *Hān kitāb* texts may also be related to the political imperative to define the place of the Sinophone Muslims within the Qing empire. Seen from this perspective, the *Hān kitāb* affirmed the connection of Chinese Muslims to the mainstream of Islamic learning while denying connections with internal and external enemies of the sovereign rulers of China.

The *Hān kitāb* books were composed and printed during three distinct periods, corresponding to the successive extension of Qing imperial authority over the

former Ming territories (1045-92/1635-81), the Zunghar khanate (1101-68/1690-1755), and the semi-independent Muslim polities established from 1855 to 1874 (Wakeman; Perdue; Zhu; Atwill). The *Hān kitāb* authors presented Islam as a religion that, like Buddhism, originated in the West but had well-established roots within China and few connections with vital scholarly traditions outside the Qing imperial realm. They acknowledged their loyalty to the Qing throne and marked their distance from rival sovereignties. In particular, they provided no *silsila* (scholarly pedigree) linking them to schools outside China and promoted the notion that their knowledge developed through direct engagement with certain Islamic (usually Persian) texts that had been in China since ancient times.

3. THREE GENERATIONS OF CHINESE MUSLIM SCHOLARS

Wang Daiyu (d. c.1068/1658) is the best known of the first generation of *Hān kitāb* authors whose lives straddled the Ming-Qing transition. As with other *Hān kitāb* authors of this generation, Wang's biography is known primarily through the books he wrote and the prefaces to the many published editions written by his peers and students. He spent much of his adult life in the southern metropolis of Nanjing, and certain aspects of his writing can be seen to be in dialogue with the Jesuit project to produce a Sinophone corpus of Catholic Christian texts, which was also centred in Nanjing (Benite, Western gods). He spent the last period of his life in the newly established Qing imperial capital of Beijing, and the conversations about Islam that he had there with Qing scholar-officials and others is the subject of one of his books, *Qingzhen wenda* ("Islamic dialogues"). His writing is intended to render Islamic concepts in the neo-Confucian idiom of official discourse and served as a model for later prominent Hān kitāb writers such as Liu Zhi (d. c.1136/1724), Ma Zhu (d. c.1121/1709), and Ma Dexin (d. 1874). In his Qingzhen Daxue (trans. Murata, Chinese gleams), Wang explains the Islamic concept of unity (tawhīd) as understood in the Ibn 'Arabī school, using aspects of the form and much of the vocabulary of the neo-Confucian classic The great learning. The book concludes with a diatribe against "heretical teachings and wrong Taos," denoting those who presented themselves as Muslims but were deluded in their beliefs (Murata, *Chinese gleams*, 104-5).

While Wang does not single out any group by name, his mention of those who proclaim themselves "to be of equal honour with the son of heaven, without regard to propriety" (i.e., those who rebel against the emperor), suggests Wang's political interest in defining a community of Muslims loyal to the Qing, in contrast to Muslim contemporaries who had resisted Qing authority in northwestern and southwestern China.

Hān kitāb authors of the second generation, such as She Yunshan (d. c.1115/1703), Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi have been the focus of academic research on Chinese Islamic texts. Liu Zhi is widely acknowledged as the most accomplished of the *Han kitab* writers, producing, in a mature and consistent style, a trilogy of books on the fundamental principles of Islam, Islamic practice, and the life of the prophet Muhammad, as well as a translation of Jāmī's Lawā'ih, two popular poems about the Islamic path of learning, and several other works. The *Tianfang* xing li (Nature and principle in Islam, see Murata, Chittick, and Tu), is philosophically and linguistically the most sophisticated of the Han kitab texts. Liu provides a systematic exposition of the principles of religion (uşūl al-dīn) as expounded by scholars such as Jāmī in the Ibn 'Arabī tradition, in a language familiar to Chinese scholar-officials of the early Qing. Liu states that the book was written for "the reader who thoroughly understands and practices the Three Teachings [i.e., Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism], but has never known the rites of our Teaching [i.e., Islam]" (Frankel, Uncontrived concord, 48-9). While more successful than other *Hān kitāb* authors in reaching a largely non-Muslim audience of Qing officials, Liu Zhi also gained a popular reputation in northwestern China as a great walī (Ṣūfī saint, one "close" to God). His name appears in hagiographic texts from northwestern China as the spiritual forbear of several prominent shaykhs, and his poem Wu geng yue ("The five hours of the moon"), describing the stations in the spiritual journey towards God, is especially highly regarded (Matsumoto; Murata, Chinese gleams; Murata, Chittick, and Tu; Frankel, *Rectifying God's name*).

She Yunshan, another author of the second generation, who went by the sobriquet Ponachi ("Fool in an old cloak", a creative translation of the word *şūfī*

that sounds like the Persian number *panj* "five" favoured by mystics), produced three of the most accomplished translations of Persian texts: Tui yuan zheng da ("The realisation of the original and the attainment of correctness"), a translation of Rāzī's Mirṣād al-'ibād; Zhao yuan mi jue ("The mysterious secret of the original display"), a translation of Jāmī's Ashi' at al-lama āt; and Gui zhen bi yao ("Essential knowledge for the return to the real"), a translation of Magsad-i agsā ("The furthest goal") by the seventh/thirteenth-century scholar 'Azīz Nasafī. She Yunshan's books were not reprinted in the early twentieth century and so are not as well-known as those of several other Han kitab authors, even though he occupies a more central position in the Chinese tradition of mosque-based learning than the authors mentioned above. One of She Yunshan's students, Zhao Can (d. after 1127/1715), compiled a collection of biographies of teachers in Chinese Islamic learning *(jingxue, "study of the classics," or, in contemporary* academic writing, *jingtang jiaoyu*, "scripture-hall education"), founded by the semi-legendary figure Hu Dengzhou (d. c.1005/1597), acknowledged as the founder of the traditionalist school of Chinese Islam (*Gedimu*), as distinct from the Chinese Sufi orders (menhuan) and modernist schools (Benite, Dao of Muhammad). She Yunshan is presented here as a student of Chang Zhimei (d. c. 1081/1670), the leading figure of the Shandong branch of the traditionalist school, which like the Shaanxi branch of the traditionalist school traced its origins to Hu Dengzhou.

The early teachers of Chinese Islamic learning, as presented in Zhao Can's biographies, each gained special insight into the hidden meanings of a Persian text through a mystical encounter, rather than by taking instruction in the normal way from a *shaykh* licensed to teach the text. Thus, Hu Dengzhou was apprised of the hidden meanings of a text referred to as *Maqāmāt* (possibly a Persian interpolation of the *Qaşīda al-burda*, "Ode of the cloak," by the Egyptian poet al-Būşīrī, d. 693/1294) from a nameless merchant from Central Asia who was thought by some to be the prophet Khiḍr (contraction of al-Khaḍir, "the Green One," often associated with the companion of Moses mentioned in the Qur'an, who in Sufi biographical texts is wont to appear by a riverbank or in the wake of a

storm to guide those who have no *shaykh*; see Franke); the second person in the genealogy received Miftah al-ulum ("The key to knowledge," presumably a commentary on the Arabic rhetoric text of the same name by Khatīb al-Qazwīnī, d. 739/1338-9) from a similar Khidr-like figure; and the fourth person was guided in a dream to a copy of Mirsad al- ibad. In one of the prefaces to Zhao Can's book, the virtue of the Persian books taught by the followers of Hu Dengzhou is contrasted with the deluded learning found in the books taught by a certain Sharif of Ganzhou, in western Gansu province, at least some of which relate to practical rather than purely theoretical aspects of Central Asian Sūfism. A political tension is apparent here between the Sinophone or traditionalist school, which saw the Qing as a legitimate sovereign, and the Sūfī schools, which had their legitimacy conferred either directly or indirectly by one of the Khoja lineages of eastern Turkestan, an area that was incorporated into the Zunghar empire in the late eleventh/seventeenth century (the Khojas or khwājagān, from the Persian khwāja or khoja, "master", refer to various chains of Central Asian Sūfī masters from the fourth/tenth to the tenth/eighteenth century, and here particularly to two lines of descendants of Makhdūm-i Azam (d. 949/1542), a disciple of the great Naqshbandi shaykh Khoja Ahrar, d.895/1490).

Similar antagonisms are manifest in the work of another *Hān kitāb* author, Ma Zhu, produced in Yunnan province at the other end of the Qing border with the Zunghar empire. Like Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu served as an intermediary between the Qing bureaucracy and local Muslim communities—he petitioned the Kangxi emperor unsuccessfully to be acknowledged as Shaykh al-Islām (a title bestowed by a legitimate sovereign to the religious leader of the Muslim community in a given territory)—and concluded his main work with a diatribe against deluded Muslims, in this case the followers of a Şūfī order with ties to the Zunghar realm referred to as "the Qalandars."

The collection of Persian and Arabic texts esteemed in the Ṣūfī orders overlapped with that promoted by the Sinophone school, although here texts of a devotional nature occupy a particularly prominent position. These include poetic texts recited in collective rituals, such as the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī, and

interpolations of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* and the Moroccan Ṣūfī al-Jazūlī's (d. 869/1465) *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* ("The waymarks to benefits," a collection of litanies), as well as hagiographies of prominent lineages of Ṣūfī *shaykh*s, often having the words *manāqib* (collection of feats) or *tadhkira* (collection of notes) in the title. Many original works of praise poetry and hagiography have been produced in China, some recorded in Chinese or in *xiaojing* (called also *xiao'erjin*, Chinese written with Arabic script) and others in Persian (Ma Guangde; QZDD; HZDC). The devotional literature of one Ṣūfī order, the Jahriyya founded in the 1170s/1760s by Ma Mingxin (d. 1195/1781), was introduced to a broad contemporary Chinese readership by Zhang Chengzhi, in his historical novel *Xinling shi* ("The history of the soul"; see Garnaut).

Few *Hān kitāb* works were written or printed in China in the eighty years from 1760-1840, following the Qing conquest of the Zunghar empire, a period also poorly represented also in catalogues of manuscripts from eastern Turkestan. A third generation of *Han kitab* authors emerged from the civil wars of the midnineteenth century. By far the most prolific of these was Ma Dexin, whose name is associated with more than thirty works in Arabic and Chinese, many put into their final form by his students. Ma Dexin was born into a prominent religious family in Yunnan, studied for eight years in Shaanxi, and then spent a further eight years at various places in India and the Ottoman Empire before returning to Yunnan. Ma Dexin played an active role in organising Muslim militias after communitarian conflict broke out in Yunnan in the 1850s. When this conflict evolved into the Panthay rebellion (1856-74), with Muslims fighting both for and against the Qing state, Ma Dexin held the title of a Qing official while simultaneously lending his authority in support of Muslim rebel forces. His writings include abridgements of the major works by previous generations of Han *kitāb* authors, such as Liu Zhi, and compositions, mainly in Arabic, on topics from geography and astronomy to Arabic grammar and principles of religion, some of which are available in Chinese translation and some in Arabic wood-block editions still produced in Yunnan today. While Ma Dexin's life and works have not been studied to the same extent as those of Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi, amongst

his legacies were a renewal of interest in earlier *Hān kitāb* writers and a marked shift in the focus of Islamic education in China from Persian to Arabic texts. Ma Dexin's life has many parallels with the founders of the Deobandī reform movement in India: prompted by adverse changes in the political status of Muslims at home to study in leading Ottoman centres of learning, he returned home to reform Islamic education through more rigorous teaching of the Arabic language and through the study of the Arabic texts that were, in many cases, the inspiration for, or antecedents of, the Persian works studied by his forbears. Ma Dexin's books were the most widely printed *Hān kitāb* texts from the midnineteenth to the early twentieth century.

From the 1920s, with the flourishing of a new Chinese nationalist literature written in the vernacular, a diversity of writers emerged to bring the Islamic tradition into dialogue with modern Chinese politics, most of whom drew on different strands of Arab modernist thought (Benite, From "literati"; Chérif-Chebbi).

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