
A Lingua Franca in Decline?

The Place of Persian in Qing China

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The Qing dynasty (1636–1912) inherited a large community of Chinese-speaking Muslims from the Ming, and in the eighteenth century incorporated a new population of Turkic-speaking Muslims, the inhabitants of Xinjiang (or Eastern Turkistan), into its territory. The conquering Manchus also took possession of an existing Chinese infrastructure of translation, which had served the Ming court in its dealings with Persophone neighbors. Across this imperial expanse, the question of the place of Persian can therefore be considered on two levels: the institutional level and the level of Muslim society. These two lines of inquiry provide the structure for this chapter, which looks at the place of Persian in the Qing, both in terms of the language's position within the empire's bureaucracy, and the production and consumption of Persian texts among Chinese-speaking and Turkic-speaking Qing Muslims.

Given that the scholarly literature tends to depict the use of Persian as declining through this period, it is worth beginning this discussion with a look back at earlier periods of Chinese history. In the case of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), strong claims have been made for the role of Persian in China, where it is said to have been both a “lingua franca” and an “official” language.¹ Viewed in such a light, the situation during the Qing would indeed represent a decline in the language's status. Recently, though, Stephen Haw has subjected these claims to extensive criticism, arguing that both the place of Muslims among the foreigners who served in the Yuan bureaucracy and that of Persian-speakers among these Muslims have been exaggerated. While there undoubtedly were Persian-speakers in the service of the khans, far more “Semu ren” (as the Yuan classified them) can be confidently identified as speakers of Turkic: among them the Uyghurs, who held a prominent position in the Yuan bureaucracy, but also various Qarluq, Qangli, Öngüt, and Qipchaq migrants to China. Contrary to the received wisdom on Marco Polo, the Venetian's travelogue does not in fact offer conclusive evidence for the preeminence of Persian. Here, and elsewhere in sources on the Yuan, Turkic toponyms and terminology crop up just as frequently as Persian, including, for example, the

name (*khanbaliq*) by which the Yuan capital was known among foreigners, or the name for the dynasty's Mongol-Muslim trading enterprises (the *ortog*). From his wide-ranging discussion, Haw draws the conclusion that Turkic, not Persian, was “the predominant language of the Semu ren” in the Yuan.²

Haw's contribution highlights a methodological issue that is equally important for the following period. Chinese authors frequently confuse the distinction between script and language, but strictly speaking, references to “Muslim writing” (*Huihuizi*, *Huizi*, *Huiwen*, etc.) refer only to the Arabic script, and tell us nothing about the language of the text in question. Only when we have further evidence at hand can we identify the language intended. Surviving records show, for example, that during the Ming, staff of the “Muslim” office of the College of Translators studied Persian. It would be wrong, though, to infer from this that all Ming references to “Muslim writing” or “Muslim language” (*Huiyu*) should be interpreted to mean Persian. All this really tells us is that during the early Ming, Persian was a language of diplomacy between China and its Muslim neighbors. Equally, it seems excessive to infer from the fact that its bureaucracy had some facility with Persian that the language had any kind of “official” status under the Ming dynasty. Leaving aside the question of whether the concept of an “official” language is applicable to an empire such as the Ming, it was in any case standard diplomatic practice to permit tributaries to present letters in their own language, and the Ming invested in translation expertise accordingly. If Persian was an “official” language of the Ming, then the dynasty had many such languages.

In the case of Xinjiang, too, there is reason to be wary of a simplistic narrative of decline. The fall of the ruling Chaghataiid dynasty at the end of the seventeenth century is commonly associated with the end of a Persianate courtly culture, the isolation of the Tarim Basin from the rest of the Islamic world, and a decline in standards of Persian learning. There is some evidence that the Chaghataiids were participants in a common post-Mongol Turco-Persian cultural synthesis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Chaghataiid khans and princes kept up correspondence in Persian with their neighbors in Western Turkistan, India, and occasionally China.³ The dynasty's founder Sa'id Khan (1487–1514) spoke Persian, and could versify in the language, as could his son, 'Abd al-Rashid Khan (1508–60).⁴ Yet on the whole the Chaghataiids were no great patrons of Persian letters. There was never a sizable community of native Persian-speakers in the Tarim Basin, and the language never occupied the position in Yarkand that it did in neighboring Khoqand or Bukhara. Naturally, allowance must be made for the vagaries of manuscript survival, but to this date little evidence has come to light for court sponsorship of poetry or prose in Persian. Nor was Persian the language of administration: the textual record shows that the Chaghataiid chancellery made exclusive use of Turkic.⁵

These facts would seem to rule out the idea that Persian ever had “official” status across the territory that became the Qing Empire, or that it served as a lingua

franca (whether that term is intended to mean a common spoken language or a medium of written communication). From this more modest, but realistic, starting point, we are in a better position to appraise the role of Persian in the Qing. The language was not incorporated into multilingual expressions of Qing imperial universality, in which the empire's Muslim constituency was addressed exclusively in Turkic. Persian did, though, play a limited role in imperial diplomacy, and for a brief period connected the Qing to parts of the Islamic world. Persian was not a language of daily use among any of the empire's Muslims, and very few original works were written in the language, but a canon of Persian texts continued to be studied in madrasa networks across China. In examining the state of Persian literacy and learning among the empire's Muslims, this chapter treats the Chinese-speaking Hui and the Turkic-speaking Muslims of Xinjiang (today's Uyghurs) side by side. While there are significant differences between the intellectual histories of these two communities, there are also enough commonalities to justify this approach. Particularly striking is the simultaneous emergence in these communities around 1700 of traditions of translation into Chinese and Turkic.

THE INSTITUTIONAL USE OF PERSIAN IN THE QING

As Graeme Ford describes in chapter 3 of this volume, the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) established the College of Translators (*Siyiguan*) within the prestigious Hanlin Academy as the dynasty's main institution for the training of translators. *Siyiguan* literally means the "Bureau of the Four Barbarians," where "four" refers to the four cardinal points (i.e., "all directions"). However, the *Siyiguan* usually had at least eight subdivisions. Of these, two dealt with the languages of peoples and polities that were part of, or were becoming part of, the Islamic world during the Ming: the Gaochang Office, whose name reflects the proximity to Ming China of the Turkic-speaking people of Gaochang, the Chinese name for Turfan; and the Muslim Office, which received envoys from the Timurid realm and beyond. These designations give the impression that geographic or cultural divisions determined each office's jurisdiction, but the division of labor was based on the scripts that they dealt with. In the Gaochang Office, translators studied the Sogdian-derived Uyghur script; in the Muslim Office, translators learned Persian in the Arabic script.⁶

The divisions of the *Siyiguan* reflected the state of the world outside China at the time of the Yuan-Ming transition in the mid-fourteenth century. This picture was constantly changing, though, and political and cultural shifts in the international environment increasingly brought these bureaucratic forms into conflict with reality. The spread of Islamic rule in Turkistan at the expense of the remaining Buddhist principalities is a case in point. Following the eastward expansion of the Muslim Chaghataiids in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Arabic script displaced Uyghur for written communication in the Tarim Basin, as well as in the

principalities of Turfan and Hami. In his *Siyiguan kao* (1580), a late-Ming description of the Siyiguan, Wang Zongzai points out that in his day, tribute missions from Gaochang were led by Muslims, who wrote, not in the Uyghur script that was still studied in the Gaochang Office, but in Arabic script. “Although Gaochang originally fell within the Gaochang Office for translation,” he writes, “recently there have been a lot of Muslims among them. When they bring tribute they use the Muslim script, so they too come within the purview of the Muslim Office.” Ming officials referred to these Turkic letters in Arabic script as the “Gaochang language in the Muslim script” (*Gaochanghua Huihui*zi).⁷

Despite these growing incongruities, the Siyiguan survived the end of the Ming era. The Qing initially maintained the bureau’s divisions intact, and there is some evidence that the Muslim Office kept up the study of Persian into the early Qing.⁸ As time went by, though, the bureau atrophied, dwindling to a skeleton staff, with infrequent recruitment of new pupils. In 1748, the Qianlong emperor issued a decree significantly downsizing these institutions of translation, merging the Siyiguan into the Bureau of Interpreters, and reducing its eight subdivisions to two: one for the Western Regions (*Xiyu guan*), and one for the Hundred Barbarians (referring to peoples to China’s southwest). The restructuring led to the dismissal of the entire staff of the Gaochang Office, with only a small group retained from the Muslim Office.

The main reason for the Qing court’s neglect of this inheritance from the Ming was that it had alternative organs for the conduct of foreign affairs. In 1636, at the proclamation of the new dynasty, Hong Taiji created the Mongolian Office (*Monggo yamun*) as his regime’s main institution for handling relations with its Mongol allies. In 1638 he enlarged the Mongolian Office into the Court of Colonial Affairs (*Lifanyuan*). Although this ostensibly widened its remit, the primary task of the new Court of Colonial Affairs was still to manage relations with the Mongols. At the same time, the Grand Secretariat’s Mongolian Copying Office (*Menggufang* or *Menggutang*) also played an important role in translating incoming correspondence and preparing outgoing letters and decrees. Insofar as these institutions reflected a view of the Muslim world, it was one quite different from that of the Ming. The first foreign Muslims with whom the Qing court had contact were members of Junghar Mongol trading missions, men who were bilingual in Turkic and Mongolian, drawn from that group of Turkistani Muslims who were in the service of the Junghars. For this reason the Qing court saw no need to add Muslim staff to either the Court of Colonial Affairs or the Mongolian Copying Office. Archival evidence indicates that when the Mongolian Copying Office encountered texts in “Muslim script,” it relied on ad hoc intermediaries to translate via Mongolian into Manchu.⁹

As the Qing extended their sway from Jungharia into the Tarim Basin in the 1750s, they encountered a complex linguistic situation, and officials became aware of the linguistic diversity of the Islamic lands. Yet for the most part, this diversity

was treated in terms of discrete geographic spheres, with little recognition given to the idea that the local learned tradition was itself multilingual, with texts circulating in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic. The first officially published gazetteer of Xinjiang, the *Qinding huangyu xiyu tuzhi* (commissioned in 1755), situated each of these three Islamic languages in distinct territories: “There are a total of three languages in the Muslim territory. From Hami and Pichan as far west as Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan, the language is basically the same, and they call it Turki. Among foreign tributaries such as Badakhshan, Bolor, etc., the language they use is called Parsi. There is also the language of the Quran [*He-er-ang*], which is only spoken in the Muslim homeland of Mecca and Medina, and differs from Turki and Parsi.”¹⁰

In this account, typical of Qing reports on Xinjiang, we see that linguistic identity aligns not only with geography, but with political status: the language of Muslims incorporated into the Qing empire is Turkic; Persian belongs to the empire’s immediate tributary rim, while Arabic is a language of the far-flung western regions with which the Qing had no direct contact. Qing scholars and officials writing on Xinjiang would occasionally note that local toponyms, or individual items of vocabulary derived from Persian, but the prevailing view of Persian was thus strictly as a language of diplomacy, and limited to a sector of its frontier stretching from the khanate of Kokand to the kingdom of Ladakh.

As is the case for the Ming, so too in the Qing, we cannot confidently identify the language intended in every reference to “Muslim script” (i.e., Arabic letters). By the middle of the eighteenth century, though, the default meaning of “Muslim language” had settled decisively on Turkic. It was in a form of literary Turkic that the corpus of official “Muslim language” texts commissioned during the Qing was written, including the inscription of the mosque that the Qianlong emperor had built in Beijing in 1764 (with Turkic alongside Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese), along with the “Muslim” sections of Qing dictionaries and linguistic handbooks.¹¹ In the Tarim Basin itself, a distinctive idiom of Turkic “translationese” emerged within the Qing bureaucracy. Here too, officials customarily referred to Turkic simply as the “Muslim language,” while Persian texts were specified as Persian (Manchu *parsi*).

Persophone interactions between Qing China and its neighbors to the south and west of Yarkand built on the Chaghataiid court’s earlier exchange of letters with this region. The great majority of Persian letters in the Qing archive belong to the first fifteen years following the conquest of Xinjiang (1760–75), when the Qing actively intervened in diplomacy across the Pamirs and Himalayas, and local elites saw an opportunity to exercise regional hegemony with Qing support. An initial count of surviving Persian letters in the Manchu section of Beijing’s First Historical Archive has yielded more than a hundred such documents.¹² Badakhshan, as well as the surrounding Pamiri principalities of Ghund, Shughnan, and Shakhdara, were the source of much of this correspondence. The Wakhan Corridor, being the

Qing court's gateway to Afghanistan, was an important supplier of intelligence. Further east, Ladakh and Kashmir also wrote to the Qing in Persian in the 1760s. Following this initial flurry of contact, though, the flow of communication all but ceased, and from the 1780s on we have only the highly formulaic letters that representatives of Hunza (or Kanjut, as it was known to the Qing) brought with them on their semi-annual tribute missions to Yarkand. Local sources from Hunza add to the evidence for this ongoing communication: Qudratullah Beg's history of Hunza, for example, contains the text of Persian letters to the Qing.¹³

Before they reached Beijing, letters from regions bordering Xinjiang were usually rendered into Manchu by local translators, known as *tongchi* (from Chinese *tongshi*). This system worked well for Turkic, but not, it seems, for Persian. The corps of *tongchi* largely consisted of Muslims from Hami and Turfan, the oases most closely involved in the long-running Qing-Junghar conflict, and scribes from this part of Xinjiang were more likely to know Mongolian than they were to know Persian. As a consequence, translating incoming and outgoing correspondence from Persian-speaking neighbors tested the capabilities of the fledgling Qing bureaucracy in the Tarim Basin. We know this from a report sent by an official in Yarkand in 1763, describing a complicated three-step translation process:

The letters that places such as Afghanistan, Badakhshan, Bolor, Wakhan, Tibet, or Kashmir submit to the emperor or to the *ambans* (Manchu high officials) are all written in Persian, but among the mullahs and *akhunds* (a synonym for mullah), there are very few here who know this language. Since only the Akhund Shah 'Abd al-Qadir knows Persian, whenever the *begs* [local governors] and heads of these various countries send a Persian letter, it is entrusted to him. He translates it into Muslim [*hoise gisun*, i.e., Turkic], and transmits this to a mullah who knows how to write in Muslim. The Muslims in the Seals Office then translate it into Mongolian and give it to the *ambans*, who translate it into Manchu.¹⁴

Following this lengthy procedure, and having digested the letter's contents and replied, Qing officials filed a report on the emissary's arrival to the court, attaching to it the original letters with translations. There is little evidence for the nature of outgoing correspondence, though it seems likely that the reverse procedure applied: official missives would be issued exclusively in Turkic, with local officials commissioning translations into Persian (if they were translated at all) before sending them on. Although multilingual imperial decrees in Manchu, Mongolian, and Turkic have survived, nothing of comparable significance was ever written in Persian. Not surprisingly, therefore, it seems that neighboring polities equipped to communicate in Turkic came to realize that this was the best medium for dealing with Kashgar and Yarkand. While the Khoqand court did occasionally dispatch letters to Xinjiang in Persian, it tended to write to Qing officials in Turkic.¹⁵ Bukhara, as far as we can tell from limited records, also wrote to the Qing in Turkic.¹⁶

A rare, possibly even unique, exception to this rule is an inscription that was erected in the western Pamirs in 1768, the only instance of the quasi-official use

of Persian that I have encountered in my research. This text was set in stone to delineate the domains of the *amir* (emir) of Ghund from the district of Suchan, subordinate to the *amir* of Shughnan, in an effort to mediate a dispute between the two. The text is a quatrain, which reads: “By decree of the emperor of China, with worldly and spiritual support, this is his pronouncement on the boundary between Ghund and Suchan [*bi-farman-i haqan-i Chin / bi-‘umda-i dunya-u-din / dar miyana-i Ghund-u-Suchan / in ast ada-yi suhan*.”¹⁷ The poetic form seems to conform to a distinctly Pamiri style of proclamation, in which such quatrains were inscribed onto the naked rock of the steep mountain valleys.¹⁸ The production of the inscription was indeed an entirely Pamiri affair, with the authority of the Qianlong Emperor delegated to the *ishikagha beg* (deputy governor) of Sarikol (the valley through which the Chinese-built highway between Kashgar and Pakistan now runs), a man by the name of Abu al-Hasan. It was presumably Abu al-Hasan who was responsible for the choice of language and the wording of the inscription.

Unfortunately for Qing officials in Xinjiang, this intervention did not achieve its intended goal of ending raids between the mountainous Pamir principalities to the south of Yarkand. Ongoing feuding in this region was among the reasons that the court gradually withdrew from an active role in the Pamirs in the 1770s, and in so doing, withdrew from the world of Persophone diplomacy. As the authority of the *khaqan-i Chin* receded, local memory transposed this inscription to a more remote past. In 1885, the British explorer Ney Elias approached the western Pamirs through Badakhshan, entering territory that was now at the center of the Great Game between Britain and Russia. Along the route he heard of the inscription in the Ghund Valley. Locals told him it was some six hundred years old, and Elias wondered what purpose it might have served: “It is difficult to see what concern the Chinese Emperor can have had in the boundary disputes of villagers.” When Sayyid Haydar Shah wrote the first narrative history of Shughnan in the early years of the twentieth century, he told a similar story: the Qing inscription was a relic of unknown antiquity, from a time when Shughnan had been part of the Chinese emperor’s realm, before the Chinese were succeeded by pagan fire-worshippers, and in turn, by the arrival of Shughnan’s first Muslims. To Shughnanis such as Sayyid Haydar Shah, the time when China spoke Persian was well and truly ancient history.¹⁹

PERSIAN AMONG THE QING EMPIRE’S MUSLIMS

Kashgar and Yarkand have never been thought of as great centers of Islamic learning. Still, it is surprising to think that it was hard for Qing officials to find *anyone* capable of translating letters written in Persian in the middle of the eighteenth century. As I have suggested, this difficulty may reflect the fact that the cohort of translators that the Qing invasion brought with it had likely served as go-betweens in earlier Muslim-Mongol liaisons and may not have had any kind of madrasa education. In the case of Western Turkistan, it has been argued that the employment

of Tatars as translators in the Russian administration contributed to the declining status of Persian in the nineteenth century, and something similar may have occurred in Xinjiang in the eighteenth century.²⁰ It is also probable that knowledge of Persian survived best among sections of Tarim Basin society that were less likely to collaborate with the Qing at this point, for example, among Sufi networks, whose activities involved the communal reading of Persian texts.

It is tempting to think of the use of Persian as in decline in this period, coinciding with the demise of the Chaghataiid court, but the available evidence does not map easily onto that narrative. Surviving Persian compositions from the Tarim Basin only begin at the very end of the Chaghataiid period. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Mahmud Churas penned two works, the hagiographic *Anis al-Talibin*, and a continuation of *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, known to scholarship simply as the “chronicle” of Mahmud Churas.²¹ Following Churas, the eighteenth century saw a series of hagiographies in the Naqshbandiyya-Afaqiyya tradition, leaving little doubt that the language was best kept up in Sufi circles: Mir Khal al-Din Yarkandi’s *Hidayat-nama*, Shams al-Din Ibn ‘Ali’s *Siyar al-Mukhlisin*, Kafshin Khoja’s *Jami’ al-Asrar* and *‘Iqd al-Gawhar*, and anonymous works such as *Tazkirat al-Hidayat*.²² Although best known for their Turkic compositions, eighteenth-century authors Zalili and Khoja Jahan ‘Arshi also wrote mystical poetry in Persian.²³ There were certainly more such texts in the eighteenth century than in the seventeenth, permitting the hypothesis that the dominance of the Naqshbandiyya following the fall of the Chaghataiids gave the Persian language a temporary boost in the Tarim Basin. Following this, there was no local writing in Persian for around a century, until the anti-Qing uprising of the 1860s. Among the flurry of historical writing that these events inspired were two *masnawi* poems in Persian describing the rebellion in Kucha and praising its leader Khwaja Rashid al-Din.²⁴

The Sinophone Hui community presents a similar picture, with only a handful of original compositions in Persian. The earliest Persian work written in China seems to have been *Minhaj al-Talab*, a description of Persian grammar from the early seventeenth century, which has been tentatively attributed to a Bukharan migrant to China, Chang Zhimei (or Yunhua).²⁵ This book seems to have circulated widely, with copies being found as far afield as Qarghiliq (Yecheng) in the south of Xinjiang.²⁶ The late nineteenth century saw the publication of a second work on Persian grammar by a Sinophone Muslim, Ma Lianyuan’s *Kimiya al-Farsiyya*.²⁷ Apart from these grammatical studies, as in Xinjiang, it seems to have been Sufi networks that kept alive a tradition of Persian composition. In his recent study of Sinophone Muslim intellectual history, Nakanishi Tatsuya has edited and translated a doctrinal work called *Khulasat al-Ma’rifa*, a Qadiriyya text kept in the library of a shrine in Linxia, a religious center in the south of Gansu Province.²⁸ Nakanishi also brings to our attention *Nuzhat al-Qulub*, a hagiographic text belonging to the Beizhuang brotherhood (*menhuan*), which describes a chain of transmission connecting the Beizhuang lineage to the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya of Afghanistan.²⁹

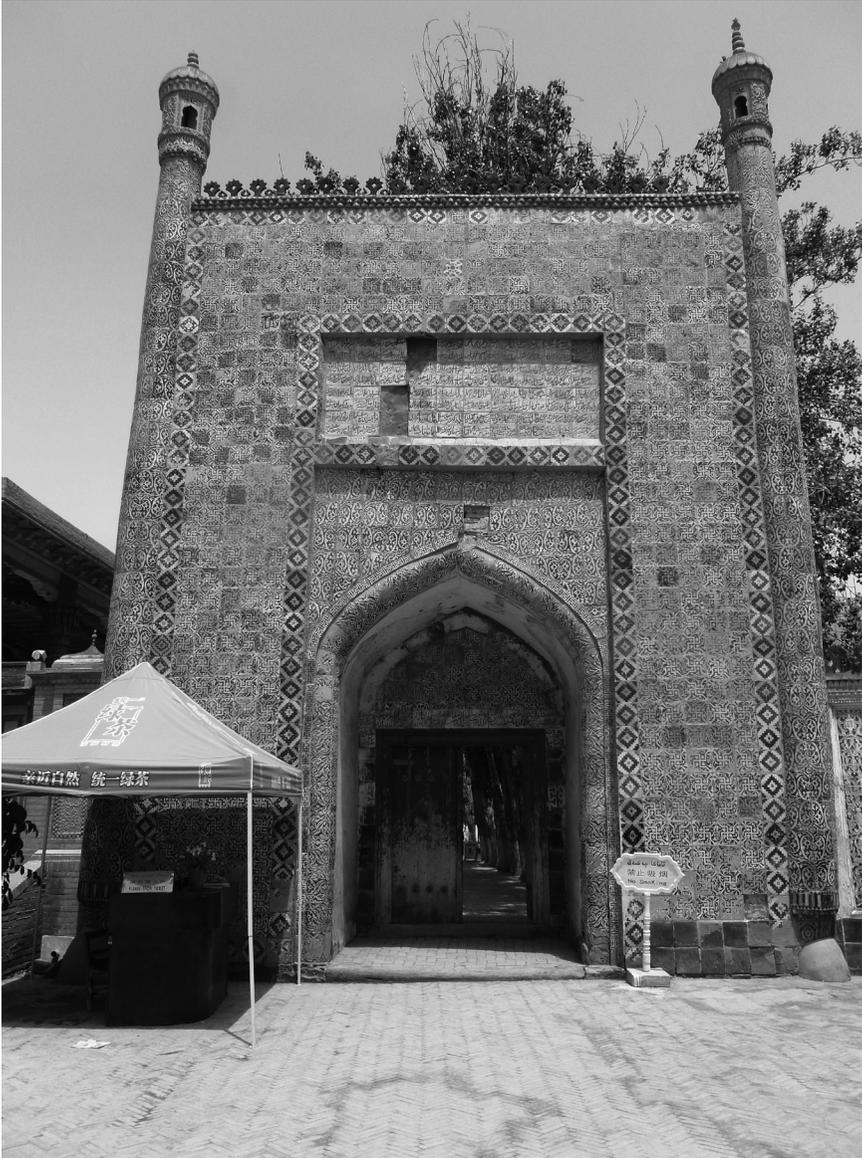


FIGURE 8. Xinjiang's Sufi bastion of Persian: the gateway to the shrine of Afaq Khwaja (d. 1694) near Kashgar in China's far west. Photograph by Nile Green.

In both the Chinese and Turkic traditions, the transition to Qing rule coincided with an increase in translation from Persian into the dominant literary language, be it Chinese or Turkic. Among Chinese-speaking Muslims, the mid-seventeenth

century saw the emergence of a body of Sinophone Islamic texts that eventually became known as the “Han Kitab.”³⁰ Incorporating both translations and original compositions, these Chinese works represent a body of Islamic texts in a distinctly neo-Confucian idiom. Hui studies scholars have done much to identify the original Arabic and Persian works behind these translations and adaptations, showing that the most popular texts derive from a Timurid-period canon in which Sufi doctrinal and hagiographic works in Persian predominated.³¹

Meanwhile, from the late seventeenth century on, there was also an increased output of translations from Persian into Turkic in Xinjiang. Beginning with Sufi and *beg* patrons in the 1680s, this wave of translation continued through the Qing period, encouraged by the rise of a new local aristocracy in collaboration with the Manchus (primarily the hereditary *wang* dynasties, but including lesser *beg* families). Today’s manuscript collections hold some thirty such Turkic translations of Persian works. Some of these translations belong to the same corpus of Sufi works as those translated by Chinese Islamic scholars, but the *beg* patrons were interested in a wider range of genres than this. As in the case of the Khiva school of translation, described in chapter 10 of this volume by Marc Toutant, some texts were translated more than once, and the period also saw revisions of Chaghatai classics into more colloquial form.

Translation testifies to an ongoing interest in the translated text, but it may also reflect the declining utility of the text in its original form. Not surprisingly, the turn to translation is often treated as a measure of the declining knowledge of Persian (see Devin DeWeese’s discussion in chapter 4 of this volume of a potential “tipping point” into Turkic literary dominance in the Russian Empire). Certainly, evidence can be found that standards of Persian were not high at this time. A ditty from a Sinophone Islamic schoolroom included in *Jingxue xichuan pu* (Register of Lineage and Transmission of Classical Learning) describes Persian texts as “a hundred times harder than the Confucian classics” (*jiao ruzhu bai bei nan*), an indication of how difficult the language was seen in such settings.³² As Nakanishi points out, in the preface to his *Minhaj al-Talab*, the seventeenth-century Sinophone Muslim scholar Chang Zhimei mourns the fact that scholars in his day preferred the study of Arabic grammar to that of Persian. Nakanishi credits Chang’s work with reviving the study of Persian to some extent, at least in northeast China. The accounts of early twentieth-century Hui intellectuals would seem to support this view. These identified the madrasas of Shandong, Beijing-Tianjin, and Manchuria as giving equal emphasis to Persian and Arabic texts, while the so-called Shaanxi school taught a curriculum that was almost exclusively Arabic.³³

Among Turkic translations of Persian in Xinjiang, the difficulty of the Persian text is typically given as the primary reason for the translation. This, for example, is from the preface to a Turkic translation of a hagiography of the Sufi saint of Samarqand, Makhdum-i A’zam: “Since some Turk devotees were worried that they couldn’t grasp its meaning, they requested from me that I translate this important

treatise into Turkic, so that it would be easy to understand, and that readers and listeners would obtain the full benefit of its blessings.”³⁴ By this time, though, such introductions were highly formulaic: the patron requests that a text to be translated into Turkic, the translator wrestles with his conscience for a while and then commits to the task. A nineteenth-century translation of *Tazkira-i Bughrakhan* begins in this way:

One day there was a private party in which many learned men were honored. Stories were told from all sides—not just stories but traditions. Finally, *Tazkira-i Bughrakhan* was read, and we were greatly enlivened by it. But because it was composed in Persian, many could not comprehend its meaning. I served as translator for the gathering, or indeed as reciter. As I explained the meaning, I clarified it for those who had not understood. Then the *amir* declared to me: “You should translate this and gain merit! It was written in Persian, you should get to work on a Turkic version. [The book] has been very beneficial for Persian speakers, let the Turkic speakers enjoy it too!” With the *amir* making such a request, there was no way that I could refuse.³⁵

Here the translator’s depiction of the communal consumption of the *tazkira* has a realistic feel, and no doubt Xinjiang’s Turkic-speakers would have found a Persian text like this difficult. Yet his picture of the linguistic situation in Qing Xinjiang may be misleading, and his reference to distinct Persian-speaking (*farsi eli*) and Turkic-speaking (*turki eli*) communities is a trope of the genre, deriving from earlier translations in communities that really were divided between native speakers of Persian and Turkic, in Mawarannahr.³⁶ Clichéd stories such as this do not tell us very much about the actual state of knowledge of Persian in Xinjiang.

Literacy in Persian must have been a relatively rare accomplishment in the Qing, but it is difficult to show that the state of Persian learning in the eighteenth century was significantly different from the situation in the sixteenth: it was weak, that is to say, but still appreciated and cultivated in certain spheres. It seems that most translations had only limited distribution, and whether or not a translation of a text existed, the ideal was still to read it in the original Arabic or Persian. Take, for example, Najm al-Din Razi’s *Mirsad al-‘Ibad*, a popular thirteenth-century Persian instructional work on Sufism, which was rendered into both Chinese and Turkic versions during the Qing. In 1651, Wu Zunqi (or Zixian) translated it into Chinese as *Guizhen yaodao* (The Essentials of Returning to the Truth), but forbade its printing, and his translation did not circulate widely until the end of the Qing.³⁷ In Xinjiang, one Muhammad Rahim Kashghari translated the text into Turkic in Aqsu in the 1760s, known from a lone copy in Ürümchi. Meanwhile, multiple manuscripts of the Persian original have been found in China.³⁸ Matsumoto Akiro makes a similar point regarding the Chinese translation of Jami’s *Ashi‘at al-Lama‘at*, arguing that “the Persian version . . . might have exerted greater influence on Sino-Muslims than its Chinese translation did.”³⁹

Descriptions of madrasa curricula are unfortunately lacking for much of the Qing period, yet late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts show that

Persian was still accessible to Muslims in China, if not widely taught. Within the so-called “scripture-hall education” (*jingtang jiaoyu*), as Islamic schooling among Sinophone Muslims became known, Persian texts were studied up until the middle of the twentieth century. The “thirteen books” that Sinophone Muslims read in the madrasa always included some Persian works—such as Razi’s *Mirsad*—though the emphasis was on Arabic. In Xinjiang, primary schools would provide a limited introduction to Persian classics such as Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, while reading ability in Persian could be obtained in a madrasa, though possibly only in a few locations in the province. In the 1890s, a Tatar visitor to the town of Astana in the Turfan oasis found a teacher (*mudarris*) who had great expertise in Persian. Chief among the texts that he imparted to his pupils was *Maktubat* by the great Naqshbandi Sufi ‘renewer’ Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), no doubt among the most widely read and recited Persian texts in late Qing Xinjiang.⁴⁰ Apart from this, a madrasa education might have included Persian literary and hagiographic works such as Rumi’s *Masnawi*, the *diwan* of Hafiz, and Jami’s *Nafahat al-Uns*. Martin Hartmann offers an interesting observation from his visit to Kashgar in 1902, that Persian literature and poetry was studied in the hot summer months, while the more difficult fields of jurisprudence and grammar were tackled during the winter, primarily on the basis of Arabic texts.⁴¹

These twin traditions of translation sprang up alongside the ongoing study of Arabic and Persian, therefore, not as a substitute for it. In the case of the Sino-Islamic school of translation, scholars such as Jonathan Lipman and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite have highlighted a series of social and cultural factors at work among Chinese-speaking Muslims in the early Qing era: the growth of a new Islamic schooling network; the influence of Chinese literati, and Chinese moral discourse, on learned Muslims; along with a desire to reconcile the foundational narrative of Islam with Chinese tradition. Such studies also point to the turbulence of the Ming-Qing transition, and the fact that these works could serve to demonstrate Islam’s compatibility with Confucian orthodoxy, at a time in which the loyalties of China’s Muslims were being questioned. The complexity of this interpretative question reflects the fact that translation from Persian (and Arabic) into Chinese was a double motion: to do so was to render the text both into the native language of its intended audience, and into the prestigious intellectual language of the environment. It was also an innovation—these were the first such translations to be carried out.⁴²

Xinjiang represents a more straightforward case of vernacularization, and one that drew on well-established precedents of translation from Persian to Turkic. At the same time, the cultural history of Qing Xinjiang has not been as well studied as the Sinophone Islamic tradition. Scholars of various parts of the globe associate the choice to patronize the vernacular in the early modern period with a range of factors, including rising literacy, and the increasing wealth of nontraditional elite groups. Some emphasize the importance of the new cultural forms to the

cultivation of loyalty, and political mobilization, in a period that saw increasing competition between elite actors.⁴³ Political instability from the late seventeenth century to the period of the Qing conquest may well have provided a pressure such as this. If it is the case, as I suggested above, that Persian was most closely identified with Xinjiang's Sufi milieu, this may have also been a reason for the *wangs* and *begs* to eschew it. For this stratum at least, the fact that Turkic had become the default "Muslim language" of the Qing would equally have enhanced its suitability as a literary medium. Patronage of translation, then, represented an effort to maintain a semblance of courtly culture in Qing Xinjiang, while mediating between Qing officialdom and local society. This involved drawing on texts such as those narrating local royal traditions (the Bughra Khan cycle), the mirror of princes genre (e.g., *Qabus-nama*), as well as more accessible historical and hagiographic vignettes from the Islamic tradition (such as Nawbahari's *Durr al-Majalis*, Kashifi's *Rawzat al-Shuhada*, and *Qisas al-Ghara'ib*, a compendium of translations).⁴⁴

This literary activity during the Qing breathed new life into works that seem to have been poorly known in Xinjiang by the eighteenth century. To give one example, while hardly any Persian copies of Mirza Haydar's *Tarikh-i Rashidi* have come to light in Xinjiang, several Turkic translations received wide circulation. While serving as *hakim beg* of Yarkand in 1805–11, Yunus ibn Iskandar commissioned Muhammad Sadiq Kashghari to produce one such translation. Kashghari's preface depicts Yunus as conscious of the significance of *Tarikh-i Rashidi* as a repository of local traditions of royal authority. Outlining his instructions to the translator, he says:

The rise of Chinggis Khan, the end of the 'Abbasid caliphs, Sultan Muhammad Khwarazmshah's martyrdom, and his conquest of the world—all of these events are recorded in detail in *Zafar-nama* and *Timur-nama*, which were incorporated into *Tarikh-i Rashidi*. The events beginning with Tughluq Temür Khan down to 'Abd al-Rashid Khan are recounted in *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, along with an account of what rights these Moghul khans had in this region, which khan exercised justice and was praised for it and came to a good end, and which acted cruelly and fell into ruin and destruction. But this book was composed in Persian, with delicate expressions and subtle wording, and much obscure vocabulary. It relies on allusions and similes, and is full of rhyming prose. Because of this, the historical narratives in this book were hidden from the people of Mughulistan like a veiled virgin. Thus it is necessary for you to render this into the Turkic speech that is current in Kashgar, so that the common people can understand it and gain insight into its secrets.⁴⁵

In associating himself with *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, Yunus was not simply advertising his interest in models of good governance. The translation can be read as part of a deliberate policy to link his Turfani family (of obscure origins) to the Chaghataiid heritage of Yarkand. During his tenure there, Yunus also funded the restoration of one of 'Abd al-Rashid Khan's constructions—the shrine of Muhammad Sharif, a Sufi shaykh prominent at the court in the sixteenth century. The long Persian

inscription in the rebuilt shrine's interior, a text linking Yunus to Muhammad Sharif's deputy Mir Wali Sufi, is a rare exception to the preference for Turkic among the *begs*.⁴⁶

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has touched on a variety of ways in which Persian was encountered and utilized in China in the period 1600–1900 (if not all such ways, as seen in Alexandre Papas's chapter 8 in this volume on the ritual and magical applications of Persian in Xinjiang). The evidence is incomplete, and still leaves room for speculation; both in the Chinese interior and in Xinjiang, there is important work yet to be done in cataloguing Islamic manuscript collections. Nonetheless, the picture that emerges is of a limited role for Persian in a series of disconnected spheres. From the viewpoint of the court, the "Muslim language" of the empire was Turkic, not Persian or Arabic. From the second half of the eighteenth century onward, Turkic served as Xinjiang's interface with the cosmopolitan linguistic culture of the high Qing. For Qing officials, Persian was the language of a set of relatively insignificant tributary polities to the west of Xinjiang. Although the Manchus inherited translation capacity in Persian from the Ming, it was never utilized, and Persian correspondence was filtered at the frontier. The court had little to no knowledge of Iran as a distinct political actor, nor did it have direct diplomatic contact with Mughal India, and it therefore saw no need to enhance its ability to communicate with the outside world in Persian.

Among the empire's Muslims, Persian texts were collected, read, and valued, although the language never became a popular vehicle for original literary or scholarly expression. The trajectories in this period of Persian in Qing China and further west in Central Eurasia, for example—particularly in a place like Khiva, where there was little or no native Persian-speaking population, in contrast to Khoqand and Bukhara—had much in common. While Sufi circles and madrasas kept up the tradition of reading Persian texts, considerable intellectual energy was expended during the Qing on translation from Persian into Chinese and Turkic. Of these two traditions, it is the Chinese Islamic scholars, who rendered Sufi discourse into the scholarly lexicon of Confucianism that not unsurprisingly attracts the most interest today. Hui studies specialists continue the painstaking task of identifying the originals of these texts and analyzing the translation techniques of China's Muslim literati. These translations made some of the Persian tradition's most significant religious and historical texts available to a wider readership, though in both the Chinese and Turkic traditions, the question of how these texts were received calls for further study.

In the People's Republic of China today, Persian survives in restricted ritual form among Chinese-speaking Muslims, with only a few Islamic schools providing instruction in the language. Outside the religious sphere, Peking University

teaches Persian language and literature, and acts as a focal point for a small circle of scholars of Persian studies in China. A few dedicated language institutes also offer instruction in Persian, producing Persian-speaking graduates to service the nation's needs in trade and diplomacy. In Xinjiang, there have been various efforts to revive the study of Persian, which is an important accompaniment to the study of the Chaghatai Turkic tradition, but even at Xinjiang University it has never become an established part of the curriculum. This may in part be due to the political sensitivities that surround Islamic studies in Xinjiang, though it can equally be seen as a product of the modernist and nationalist critiques of Persian that Turkic-speaking intellectuals participated in from the late nineteenth-century on. Will this picture change in the age of Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road"? Certainly, the policy seems to signal a new level of economic and diplomatic investment in the Eurasian continent. Time will tell whether or not this will be accompanied by a revival of China's interest in the history and culture of its Persophone neighbors.

NOTES

This research was carried out with the support of an ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE170100330), funded by the Australian Government.

1. The most commonly cited source for this view is Huang Shijian, "The Persian Language in China during the Yuan Dynasty," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 34 (1986): 83–95.

2. Stephen G. Haw, "The Persian Language in Yuan-Dynasty China: A Reappraisal," *East Asian History* 39 (2014): 5–32, primarily a response to David Morgan, "Persian as a Lingua Franca in the Mongol Empire," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012), 160–70.

3. E.g., a set of Persian letters from the Chaghataiids to eminent Bukharan shaykhs were copied into Badr al-Din Kashmiri's *Rawzat al-Rizwan wa Hadiqat al-Ghilman* (1589), IV RUz 2094.

4. Mirza Haydar, *Mirza Haydar Dughlat's Tarikh-i Rashidi: A History of the Khans of Moghulistan*, trans. W.M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1996), 76; Shah Mahmud Churas, *Khronika: Kriticheskii tekst, perevod, kommentarii, issledovanie i ukaziteli O. F. Akimushkin* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 11–2 (Persian text).

5. At the very least, all surviving decrees are in Turkic. See Hodong Kim, "Eastern Turki Royal Decrees of the 17th Century in the Jarring Collection," in *Studies on Xinjiang Historical Sources in 17–20th Centuries*, ed. James A. Millward et al. (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2010), 59–119.

6. Parts of this discussion draw on David Brophy, "The Junggar Mongol Legacy and the Language of Loyalty in Qing Xinjiang," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 73, 2 (2013): 231–58.

7. See, e.g., Xia Yan, *Nangong zougao* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), *juan* 4, 15b.

8. *Neige daku dang'an* (Grand Secretariat Archive), Academia Sinica, Taipei, doc. 186729–001.

9. E.g. *Dayičing gürün-ü dotuyadu yamun-u Mongyol biçig-ün ger-ün dangse*, ed. Zhongguo di-yi lishi dang'anguan and Nei Menggu daxue Mengguxue xueyuan (Hohhot: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 2005), 15: 491, 512.

10. *Qinding huangyu Xiyu tuzhi, Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng*, comp. Fu-heng, vol. 1 of *Shengzhi ji: Xinjiang, Qinghai, Xizang* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2012), 820.

11. Most notably, the five-language Manchu dictionary, *Wuti Qinwenjian* (published 1794). For linguistic handbooks, see E. Haenisch, "Ein dreifacher Sprachführer Mandschu-Mongolisch-Turki in

kurzer Auswahl von 110 Beispielen,” in *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun-kagaku Kenkyusyo* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1954), 184–91, and Chen Zongzhen, “‘Han Hui hebi’ yanjiu,” *Minzu yuwen* 5 (1989): 49–72.

12. For transcription and translation of a selection of these letters, see David Brophy, “High Asia and the High Qing: Persian Letters in the Beijing Archives,” in *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift for Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.’s 70th Birthday*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 325–67.

13. Qudratullah Beg, *Tarikh-i ‘Ahd-i ‘Atiq-i Riyasat-i Hunza* (Rawalpindi: Hafiz Shafiq al-Rahman, 1980), 150–51.

14. *Qingdai Xinjiang Manwen dang’an huibian*, ed. Zhongguo di-yi lishi dang’anguan and Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu zhongxin (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2012), 65: 314–5.

15. See, e.g., Onuma Takahiro et al., “An Encounter between the Qing Dynasty and Khoqand in 1759–1760: Central Asia in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” *Frontiers of History in China* 9, 3 (2014): 384–408.

16. An early nineteenth-century Bukharan *insha* compilation, which is otherwise entirely in Persian, contains a letter to Kashgar written in Turkic. *Maktubat wa Manshurat*, IVR RAN A212, fols. 115b–116b.

17. Sayyid Haydar Shah, “Istoriia Shugnana,” *Protokoly zasedanii Turkestanского kruzha liubitelei arkhologii* 21 (1917): 1. A Manchu memorial describing the carving of this inscription can be found in *Qingdai Xinjiang Manwen dang’an huibian*, 88: 372–73.

18. For other examples of such inscriptions, see A. Z. Rozenfeld and A. I. Kolesnikov, “Materialy po epigrafike Pamira,” *Epigrafika Vostoka* 19 (1969): 92–102.

19. Ney Elias, *Report on a Mission to Chinese Turkestan and Badakhshan in 1885–86* (Calcutta, 1886), 23 (repr., London: Routledge, 2008), and Sayyid Haydar Shah, “Istoriia Shugnana.”

20. Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868–1910: A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

21. Churas, *Khronika and Anis al-Talibin*, Bodleian Library Ind. Inst. Pers. 45.

22. For descriptions, see N. D. Miklukho-Maklai, *Opisanie tadzhikskikh i persidskikh rukopisei Instituta narodov Azii, vypusk 2: Biograficheskie sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1961), nos. 196, 197, and 202. On the *Siyar al-Mukhlisin*, see Rian Thum, “Beyond Resistance and Nationalism: Local History and the Case of Afaq Khoja,” *Central Asian Survey* 31, 3 (2012): 307n16. Earlier Persian hagiographies in the Naqshbandi tradition touch on saintly activities in the Tarim Basin, e.g., the *Jalis-i Mushtaqin* and *Ziya al-Qulub* (Miklukho-Maklai, *Opisanie*, nos. 181 and 184), and were read and copied there, but the texts themselves give no indication as to the place of composition.

23. Unfortunately, Zalili’s Persian works were not included in his published *diwan*, but they are mentioned by its editor. See *Zalili Divani*, ed. Imin Tursun (Beijing: Millätlär nāshriyati, 1985), 22. Some of ‘Arshi’s Persian poetry is cited in Muhammad Sadiq Kashghari’s *Tazkira-i ‘Azizan*.

24. *Persidskie i tadzhikskie rukopisi Instituta narodov Azii AN SSSR (Kratkii alfavitnyi katalog)*, ed. N. D. Miklukho-Maklai (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), nos. 1709 and 3712.

25. Muhammad ibn al-Hakim al-Zinimi, *Minhaj al-Talab* (Isfahan: 1360/1981–82). On Chang Zhimei, see Ralph Kauz, “Chang Zhimei und der Islam in Shandong im 17. Jahrhundert: Akkulturation oder Abgrenzung? Zur Geschichte einer persischen Grammatik,” *Saeculum* 60, 1 (2010): 91–114.

26. Mozafar Bakhtyar, “China,” in *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, ed. Geoffrey Roper, 4 vols. (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1994), 4: 113.

27. Iraj Afshar, “Jung-i Chini ya safina-i Ilani (Pu si) 2,” *Ayanda* 8 (1361/1982): 485.

28. Nakanishi Tatsuya, *Chuka to taiwa suru isurāmu: Junana jukyu seiki chugoku musurimu no shisoteki eii* (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2013), 203–88.

29. *Ibid.*, 36, 353.

30. The term “Han Kitab” was first used only in the late nineteenth century, according to Barbara

Stöcker-Parnian, *Jingtang Jiaoyu: Die Bücherhallen Erziehung. Entstehung und Entwicklung der islamischen Erziehung in den chinesischen Hui-Gemeinden vom 17.–19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a./M.: Lang, 2003), 60n47.

31. Donald Daniel Leslie and Mohamed Wassel, "Arabic and Persian Sources Used by Liu Chih," *Central Asiatic Journal* 26, 1–2 (1982): 78–104.
32. Zhao Can, *Jingxue xichuan pu* (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1989), 117–18.
33. E.g., Fu Tongxian, *Zhongguo Huijiao shi* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1959), 205.
34. *Majmu' at al-Muhaqqiqin*, India Office Library Turki 7, fol. 2b.
35. Jarring Collection (Lund University Library), Prov. 155, fols. 4a–5b.
36. Some examples are given in Devin DeWeese, "Chaghatai Literature in the Early Sixteenth Century: Notes on Turkic Translations from the Uzbek Courts of Mawarannahr," in *Turkish Language, Literature, and History: Travelers' Tales, Sultans, and Scholars since the Eighth Century*, ed. Bill Hickman and Gary Leiser (London: Routledge, 2016), 99–117.
37. Min Chunfang and Ding Taoyuan, "'Guizhen yaodao' banben kaoshu," *Beifang minzu daxue xuebao* 2 (2015): 86.
38. Yusupbek Mukhlisov, *Uyghur klassik ädäbiyati qolyazmilirining katalogi* (Ürümchi: Shinjang yärlük muziyigha täyyarlıq körüş bashqarmisi, 1957), 34–35.
39. Matsumoto Akiro, "The Sufi Intellectual Tradition Among Sino-Muslims," in *Sufism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 2008), 2: 107.
40. Qurban 'Ali Khalidi, *Kitab-i Tarikh-i Jarida-i Jadida* (Kazan: Qazan universitetining tab'-khanäsändä, 1889), 17. A public reading of the *Maktubat* in Khotan is mentioned in Näüşirvan Yushef, "Törkestan-i Chinidä mäshräblär," *Waqit*, June 21, 1916, 3.
41. Martin Hartmann, *Chinesisch-Turkestan: Geschichte, Verwaltung, Geistesleben und Wirtschaft* (Halle a./S.: Schwetschke, 1908), 48.
42. Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).
43. See, e.g., Victor B. Lieberman, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Different Areas," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 481–96.
44. Rian Thum, "Untangling the Bughrä-Khän Manuscripts," in *Mazar: Studies on Islamic Sacred Sites in Central Eurasia*, ed. Jun Sugawara and Rahile Dawut (Tokyo: Tokyo Foreign Studies University Press), 281–94; L. V. Dmitrieva, *Katalog tiurkskikh rukopisei Instituta vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2002), no. 373; Mukhlisov, *Uyghur klassik ädäbiyati*, nos. 56 and 65; and T. I. Sultanov, "Medieval Historiography in Manuscripts from East Turkestan," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 2, 1 (1996): 25–30.
45. Muhammad Sadiq Kashghari, *Tarjama-i Tarikh-i Rashidi*, IVR RAN C569, fols. 8–9.
46. David Brophy and Rian Thum, "The Shrine of Muhammad Sharif and Its Qing-era Patrons," in *The Life of Muhammad Sharif*, ed. Jeff Eden (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), 55–75.