SINI CALLIGRAPHY: THE PRESERVATION OF CHINESE MUSLIMS’ CULTURAL HERITAGE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI’I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
IN
ART HISTORY

MAY 2012

By
Hala Ghoname

Thesis committee:
Kate A. Lingley, Chair
Paul Lavy
James D. Frankel
Contents:
I. Introduction-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------3

II. Chapter 1: History and Origins of Sini Calligraphy
   - The Story of Arabic and Chinese Writing------------------------------------------10
   - Islam in China---------------------------------------------------------------------24
   - Chinese Arabic Calligraphy (Sini Calligraphy)--------------------------------------29

   - Definition of Sini Script in the Modern Day--------------------------------------41
   - Function and Style-----------------------------------------------------------------42
   - Development of Style and Relations with Islamic Countries-----------------------47
   - Change of Tools and Practice------------------------------------------------------51
   - Case Study; The Calligraphy of Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang----------------------54
   - Haji Abdul Hakim-------------------------------------------------------------------60
   - Sini Calligraphy Outside of China-------------------------------------------------62

IV. Chapter 3: Challenges facing the preservation of Sini Calligraphy.
   - Sinicization and the use of Arabic language---------------------------------------67
   - Sini-Calligraphy and the Chinese Islamic Education---------------------------------71
   - Sini Script and Islamic Identity---------------------------------------------------76
   - Sini Calligraphy and the PRC’s International Relations, and the needs of the Art Market-----------------------------------------------78

V. Conclusion------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------83

VI. Bibliography-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------85

VII. Figures----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------89
**Introduction:**

It is needless to say that the artistic production of a specific group of people reflects their identity and culture. What we see on the walls of the Egyptian tombs and temples, or even papyrus leaves, gives us ideas about the life of people in ancient Egypt. Artistic production is a form of the cultural heritage of nations. I am using this paper as an example and a case study for one aspect of the cultural heritage of Chinese Muslims, which is the art of calligraphy, and exploring the changes and challenges facing the preservation of this art as part of the World’s heritage.

The number of Muslims in China is a controversial issue. Although the PRC says that they comprise around 20-25 million, Muslims in China according to some theories number over 50 million; some researchers increase the number up to 80 million.\(^1\) Muslims are represented in ten distinct ethnic groups, the largest being Sinophone Muslims who are known in the modern times as the Hui; they comprise almost half of China’s Muslim population, distributed throughout the various provinces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).\(^2\)

Sini calligraphy is the most famous artistic fruit of Muslim existence in China. It is an Arabic script that has been used by Chinese Muslims in China in mosque invocations, vessel inscriptions, or in hanging scrolls decorating their houses. The script’s distinctiveness rises from its hybrid style, which presents Arabic writing with Chinese flavor and technique. Although generated in non-Muslim surroundings, Sini maintained its existence for hundreds of years among Chinese Muslims. It has developed several

---


variants that have reached us in the form of tombstones like those in Quanzhou, or interiors of mosques in eastern China, the script’s birthplace, or early copies of the Qur’an, along with ceramic and bronze vessels. An early form of simple Arabic writing existed from the early years of Muslims’ residence in China, but the peak of Sini was during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), when Chinese Muslims started to build their own calligraphic system.

The survival of Sini calligraphy as part of Chinese/World cultural heritage faces several challenges. The major challenge is the absence of the idea of a formal style of the script. Despite the distinctive artistic and stylistic features of Sini, it seems that the style itself has not been standardized by calligraphers. Sini calligraphers who practice the art today have not agreed upon a specific form of the script to be considered the formal style of Sini. Having a formal style identified as a major variant of Sini would enable it to establish itself among the other major Arabic standard scripts. Hence, the script would be recognized among others in the Islamic world and this will protect the style from being compromised or altered due to the market’s needs.

In this paper I argue that there is a classic form of Sini that developed in the late Yuan (1279-1368)/early Ming period. Upon this classic form, many scholars such as Bashir, Garnuet, Oktasari, and others have built their definition of Sini script as being a rounded, flowing script with thick and tapered effects, much like Chinese calligraphy. This is due to the huge amount of materials received from this period that carry a uniform style of Sini that is hybrid and distinctive (possessing both Arabic and Chinese calligraphic features). But the style thus defined is less and less practiced today.
I argue that this problem has resulted from the limited access to artistic education within the Chinese Muslim educational network. Despite the fact that the mother tongue of Sini (Arabic) has been maintained through the Chinese Muslim educational network in China, the script’s origins, variants, and characteristics were generally ignored by this educational system. With the absence of a solid artistic education, and upon the political and economic opening towards the Muslim world, Chinese Muslim calligraphers started to produce works to suit the taste of their customers outside China, compromising or even ignoring the idea of a formal style of Sini. Thus the script is starting to lose its distinctive features.

In Chapter One of this paper, I explore the origins and the development of Sini script, by tracing the history of Chinese Muslims in China. I focus in the first part of this chapter on the history, material, and practice of both Arabic and Chinese calligraphy, and then I examine the stylistic development of Sini, and how/why it evolved as a form of Naskh script rather than Kufic.

In Chapter Two, the status of the script in the present day is discussed through comparing scholars’ definitions with the historic development and function of the script and with modern-day practice. This is done by analyzing the works of one of the most famous Sini calligraphers, Haji Noor Deen. To support the idea of the development of a hybrid style of Sini by modern day calligraphers, examples of works of other Sini calligraphers from China and elsewhere are also included and discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter Three of this paper, I explain the major factors affecting the change of style, and challenges facing the preservation of this script as part of the Chinese
Muslims’ cultural heritage in detail. This includes the influence of Sinification and Arabization, the Chinese Muslim educational system, and China’s external policies.
Chapter I: History and Origins of Sini Calligraphy

“Through the pen existence receives God’s orders; from Him the candle of the pen receives its light. The pen is a cypress in the garden of knowledge, the shadow of its order spread over dust.”

- Qadi Ahmed, 17th century Iranian Calligrapher.

Faith and beliefs are major factors that influence themes and characteristics of any regional or ethnic art. Religion can either offer a source of inspiration, or enforce restrictions on the artistic production of its followers. A representation of a lady and an infant sitting on her lap with haloes on their heads is usually understood as a depiction of the Virgin Mary and the baby Christ. A sculpture of a man sitting in a yogic pose with a bump on his head, a dot between his eyes, and long earlobes, is identified as the Buddha.

Like other religions, when the Christian and Buddhist faiths spread to different places, their artistic themes stayed the same, but gained the local flavor of the new place. For example, while the Buddha statues in Mathura, India have more Indian stylistic characteristics, those from Japan or China have a more East Asian flavor and regional artistic features. One can apply this rule not only to sculpture and painting, but to other forms of art as well.

Calligraphy has been an important companion of representative art for the elites and the educated of many cultures around the globe. In China, besides being an important form of art, writing accompanied painting in the form of narrative texts, colophons, and/or artists’ signatures. In medieval Europe and Persia, pictorial representations sometimes

---

played a secondary role; they existed to illustrate scenes described by the text, and this became what art historians call Miniature art. There is one major culture in which writing does not only represent an independent genre of art, but is considered the main art form and most important artistic achievement.

Islamic art is considered a largely aniconic tradition. Despite the fact that there are no verses in the Qur’an that forbid iconography, pictorial representations were widely rejected according to the Hadiths reported by the Prophet Mohammad’s companions and wives. Besides the Qur’an, the Hadiths constitute another body of religious texts. One of the Hadiths about iconography was narrated by Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, who reported the Prophet saying, “People who make these statues and images will be punished by Allah on the Day of Judgment; Allah will ask them to breathe life into their creations. No angel will enter a house in which there are images.” The prohibition of imagery paved the way for the art of calligraphy to evolve, and become the major mode and the most famous achievement of Islamic art.

The revealed word, the Qur’an, played a fundamental role in developing and inspiring the calligraphic art of Islam. The Qur’anic verses played a pivotal role in encouraging Muslims to learn the skill of writing and elevated the status of those who are educated in the Islamic society. The knowledge of writing distinguishes man from Allah’s other creatures, and the importance of writing runs throughout the Qur’an. The first words revealed to the Prophet emphasize clearly the importance of writing: “In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Recite: In the name of thy Lord who created,

---


created Man of a blood-clot. Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by
the pen, taught man that he knew not.”

Also Chapter 68 (Surat al-Qalam), another early
revelation, opens with the words: “Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe.”

From this belief grew a powerful culture of the book and love for the written word
that turned calligraphy into Islam’s most famous and noble art. Moreover, with the
expansion of the Islamic state, copying the Qur’an became a necessity, which helped the
calligraphic art to evolve even more. Islamic calligraphy, which started with two major
Arabic scripts, became over time one of the richest and the most beautiful arts in the
world, and with the expansion of the Islamic lands, more scripts developed in the new
Muslim territories.

This chapter focuses on the origins and the characteristics of one of these various
Arabic scripts, known as Sini calligraphy. Sini calligraphy offers us a unique art with a
rich cultural and ethnic heritage. The script is not only important because it was
developed by Chinese Muslims; the most interesting point comes from the ability of this
script to evolve, survive, and live in non-Arab/non-Muslim surroundings. Moreover, its
contemporary importance comes from Sini script’s ability not only to exist, but to also to
compete with other famous Arabic scripts in both Arab and international art galleries. Sini
calligraphy developed without going through the same phases of evolution and
refinement that the other famous Arabic scripts have gone through. It gained importance
and fame through its hybrid style, and its historic value is related to the hybrid nature of

---

6 Qur’an. Chapter 96.

the Chinese Muslim ethnic group, known as the Hui. The script is an outgrowth of the educational system of Islamic madrasas in China. This chapter explores the origins of Sini script and why/how it evolved to be a round form of Arabic script rather than an angular one. It highlights the classic characteristics of the script and how different it is from other major Arabic scripts.

**The Story of Arabic and Chinese Writing:**

Sini Calligraphy is the product of the incorporation of two of the most famous major schools in the history of calligraphic art: the Arabic and the Chinese. Sini is Arabic script written in the Chinese spirit and with Chinese tools, producing a distinctive style of calligraphy. To be able to understand the sources of the hybrid nature of Sini calligraphy, one needs to know the origins of both the Arabic and the Chinese writing systems, styles, and writing tools.

The Arabic writing system is an ideographic system; it is based on symbolic alphabets that may or may not in some cases have a relation to the meaning (not images, but symbols indicating sounds and meaning). There are many theories and hypotheses regarding the origins of Arabic writing, but the concept of alphabets historically originated in the Fertile Crescent, the region that extends from Egypt to Mesopotamia.

---

8 The term Hui in this paper refers only to Sino-Muslim communities who are the descendants of the Arab and Persian (Dashi/Bosi) merchants and soldiers who lived for centuries in China and intermarried with Chinese women forming what is now the largest Muslim ethnic group in the PRC. In the past, the term Huihui was used to refer to non-Muslims who converted to Islam, especially the Uygurs, to whom it first applied. Since the Qing and through the modern times the term has been used exclusively to describe Muslims who are ethnically Chinese. Scholars such as Marshall Broomhall, in his book, *Islam in China*, and Jonathan Lipman in his book, *Familiar Strangers* explain the development and the history of the usage of the term Hui to describe Muslims in China.

9 Khan, *Arabic Script*, p.7
The most common belief is that Arabic alphabets came to the Arabian Peninsula from more complex neighboring cultures in Iraq, Syria, and/or Yemen. According to archaeological findings from the Syro-Palestinian region, some inscriptions which date from the first through sixth centuries CE show the development of a pre-Islamic writing system. In pre-Islamic Arabia there were two major languages and scripts of Arabic: Ancient North Arabian (e.g., Taymanic, Dadanitic and Dumaitic) and Ancient South Arabian (Sabaric, Madhabic and Himyaritic, among others).\(^\text{10}\) Linguistically, old Arabic, which is the origin of the Quranic script, was closely related to Ancient North Arabian. Until around the late fifth century CE, Arabic was written in scripts associated with the local language of prestige such as South Arabian at Qaryat al-Faw, and Nabataean at Hegra. However, inscriptions dating back to fourth century Arabia show that the native Ancient North Arabian scripts seem to have disappeared, and to have been replaced by Nabatean.\(^\text{11}\) Some of these inscriptions are the 250-271 CE Nabatean scripts of Umm al-Jimâl, the 328 CE An-Namara Nabatean funerary inscriptions, the 512 CE Zabad inscriptions, and the 518 CE Hurran inscriptions.\(^\text{12}\) These inscriptions give an idea about the gradual evolution of the Arabic writing system out of Nabatean/Syrian scripts (see fig. 1). Umm al-Jimâl script is a fully Nabatean script, but has what looks like proto-Arabic letters, like hamzah (also referred to as the alif) (fig. 2). The An-Namara funerary inscription refers to the famous pre-Islamic poet Imra-ul Qais, known as the king of all Arabs. The script has some signs of early Arabic inclination, and it closely echoes


\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., p. 22

\(^\text{12}\) Dar, *The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy*, p.5.
contemporary Nabataean inscriptions (fig. 3). While the Zabad inscriptions are bilingual scripts in Greek and Arabic, the Hurran are trilingual scripts in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic. Another Nabataean inscription from Umm al-Jimāl, dating from the sixth century, is similar to the fifth century formal Arabic alphabet in use among the Hira and Anbar tribes in northern Arabia (map fig. 4), and was introduced to Mecca by Bishar ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (fig. 5). This script was later used by the Prophet Muhammad and scribes to write the Qur’an. These archaeological discoveries invalidate the earlier hypothesis, which was very famous among Arab historians, about Arabic alphabets evolving out of the Himayeritic writing system in Yemen (fig. 6).13

The use of this system of writing in pre-Islamic Arabia was very limited; the Arabs were dependent on their memory. Literature, knowledge, and poetry were passed down by word of mouth. Despite this, the Arabs developed two styles of writing; one was known as the monumental script, and the other was the cursive script. The monumental system is an angular geometric script, used on hard materials, like camel bones, flat white stones, wood and metals. The cursive system, a rounded script, was known to the Bedouin poets, and was employed in daily life use, written on parchment and leather.14 These two styles of writings existed side by side, and developed over time to four distinguished types of pre-Islamic Arabic scripts: the Hiri script from al-Hira; the Anbaari from Anbaar; al-Makki from Mecca; and al-Madani from Madina. The first two

13 Khan, Arabic Script, p. 9.
developed in Iraq, while the other two developed in the region of Hijaz (Arabia). These styles of writing were the seeds of the later two major Islamic scripts: Kufic and Naskh.\textsuperscript{15}

The advent of Islam in the 7\textsuperscript{th} century CE changed and elevated the status of writing. It was essential to record the verses of the new revelation (the Qur’an) to preserve it. Although early Muslims were able to memorize the Qur’an by heart, it was necessary to record the verses precisely. As soon as the Quranic verses were received from God, the Prophet Muhammad used to dictate them to some scribes, who gained the honor of being titled as \textit{Kātib al-wahi} (كتاب الوجي), which means “the writer of the Revelation.” The famous historian, al-Baladuri (d. 892 CE) mentions the names of 17 such scribes in his book \textit{Futuh al-Buldan}, فتح البلدان. The most famous figures among those 17 scribes are three of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs: Umar, Uthman, and Ali.\textsuperscript{16} Other famous figures among those scribes are Abu Sufyan ibn Harib and his two sons, Mu’awiyah and Yazid, who founded the later Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE). It is very interesting to note that Abu Sufyan’s father, Harb ibn Umayah Ibn Abd al-Shams, is believed to be one of those who introduced the Arabic script to pre-Islamic Mecca.\textsuperscript{17}

Islam made writing a sacred thing, and encouraged early Muslims to learn it. The pen is mentioned four times in the Qur’an, starting with the very first verses revealed to the Prophet. Ink is also mentioned in Qur’an several times, one of which is in \textit{Sura al-Kahf}, where Allah says: “Say: If the oceans were ink for the words of Lord, the ocean would run out, before the words of Lord run out, even if we doubled the ink

\textsuperscript{15} Dar, \textit{The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy}, p.7.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 8.

\textsuperscript{17} The Arabic Calligraphy Encyclopedia: http://sawwan1600.jeeran.com/archive/2008/3/515902.html, Dec. 5\textsuperscript{th}. 2010.
supply” (18:109). Also through many life situations and Hadiths attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, he emphasized the importance of writing to preserve his message. As the Prophet’s sufferings grew, he exclaimed: “Bring me writing tools, that I may set down in writing what will save you from error after me.” In one of his Hadiths he mentions the pen, as recorded by Imam Ahmed and al-Tirmidhi: “The first thing God created was the Pen, with which he wrote out the totality of creation on the preserved tablet.”

Moreover, Islam elevated the status of writing in many situations. After battles in which Muslims were victorious, the Prophet Muhammad ordered captives whose families could not pay the ransom to be released on condition that each of them would teach ten Muslim children how to read and write. It was reported that Zayd ibn Thabit al-Ansari, one of the scribes entrusted with the task of recording the Revelation in writing, had been one of those taught reading and writing at the hands of the captives of the Battle of Badr.

Islam also urges Muslims to excel in writing. According to the traditions, mastering calligraphy and good writing were encouraged. Many sayings attributed to prominent Islamic figures encourage good writing. One of these famous figures was Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet’s son-in-law and one of the scribes of the Revelation. Ali is believed to have said “Whoever writes ‘In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the

---

18 Al-Bukhari, The sayings of the Prophet (Title 3, 39:4).


Merciful’ in beautiful writing will enter the paradise without account," and “I recommend to you the beauty of calligraphy for it is among the keys to sustenance.”

Calligraphic art was not new to the Arabs; they received the traditions of this art from the ancients. M. Ziauddin argues that the Arabs learned to write their sacred books with great love from Jews and Christians in Arabia. He also writes about the origins of the Arabic calligraphic art, “Although the Syrians were the first to initiate the Muslims into the art of molding words into graceful forms, it was the Manichaean tradition [of fine writing and illuminated manuscripts] that spurred it on to artistic heights.” With this, the Islamic opposition to figural representation enabled the Arabs to express their artistic genius in calligraphy, which made calligraphy the greatest product of Islamic art.

The spread of Islam and the expansion of the Islamic lands increased the need for preserving and copying the Qur’an. And to avoid erroneous readings of the Qur’an, in 651 CE the third Caliph, Uthman, prepared around six official copies of it; those copies were sent to the new Muslim territories. Most of those copies were written in the Hiri/Hijazi script, which evolved from the old monumental angular script that the scribes of the Prophet Muhammad used in many of his messages to the non-Muslim leaders of neighboring domains in Byzantium, Persia, Egypt, and Ethiopia (figs. 6-9). This script later came to be known as the Kufic script, after the city of Kufa (in present day Iraq), founded in 638 CE.

---

21 Mcwilliams and Roxburgh, Traces of the Calligrapher, p. 3.
23 Dar, The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy, p. 8.
The Arab linguist Ishaq ibn al-Nadeem (767-849 CE) used the word Kufic for the first time in his book *al-Fehrest* (The Index), to refer to the angular Hiri/Hijazi script, which has been traced to about a hundred years before the foundation of the Kufa. The script received official recognition in the town of Kufa, from which it got its name. For the first five centuries of Islam, the Qur’an was exclusively written in different forms of the Kufic script. The angularity and the geometric qualities of this script were the script’s major characteristics. The script is codified along the lines of a geometric grid to achieve the angularity of the letters.\(^\text{24}\) At the beginning the script was simple; at first the letters were extended into the form of simple foliate and floral ornaments which did not interfere with the basic outlines, but by the beginning of the eleventh century CE, the letters themselves began to be used as ornaments. New geometric elements started to appear in the form of plaiting, knotting, and intertwining the verticals of certain letters (fig. 10).\(^\text{25}\)

The script became more and more decorative and complex, and with the addition of the diacritical marks and dots it became even more difficult to continue using it as the script for the Qur’an, as it would take more time and effort to work with, especially with the problems that evolved from adding different diacritical marks with different colors to the words.\(^\text{26}\)

As the use of Kufic script became strictly ornamental, this paved the way to adopt the common cursive style for the Qur’an. The cursive script existed side by side with the Kufic, but was quicker, less angular, and less decorative. The system of diacritical marks

\(^{24}\) George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 56.

\(^{25}\) Safadi, Yasi. *Islamic Calligraphy*, Shambhala, Boulder, 1979, p.11.

\(^{26}\) The Arabic Calligraphy Encyclopedia website: http://sawwan1600.jeeran.com/archive/2008/3/515902.html, Dec.5\(^\text{th}\). 2010
and letter-pointing that was enforced by the powerful Umayyad viceroy al-Hajjaj ibn Youssif al-Thakafi, in charge of the eastern wing of the Islamic empire (694-714 CE), was more readily incorporated into the cursive style than into Kufic, and has ever since been an integral part of these scripts.\textsuperscript{27} This cursive round style that was used by the Arabs for ordinary matters was developed by two famous calligraphers during the Abbasid Caliphate (751-1258 CE) in Baghdad, Ibn al-Maqla (d.939) and Ibn al-Bawab in the early 11\textsuperscript{th} century. Since then it has come to be known as Naskh; Naskh in Arabic means “to copy”, as the cursive script became the principal script used for copying and writing frequently.\textsuperscript{28}

Being free of angular and geometric elements, the vitality and fluidity of Naskh writing enabled calligraphers to be more creative when dealing with this script. Islam spread even more, and many people from different cultural backgrounds learned Arabic to be able to practice their religious rituals and carry on the Caliphate’s administrative matters. This in turn increased the importance of writing and enhanced the creativity and the development of several new calligraphic styles and schools, which evolved chronologically and regionally. Many calligraphic schools, in particular those in the Asian wing of the Muslim empire, adopted the Naskhi script and developed new styles and variants of the script with local flavors, such as the Nasta’liq in Persia, as well as the Diwani, Diwan-Aljali, and Tughra in Turkey. Besides the Naskhi script, a few schools adopted the Kufic script, such as those in the westernmost region of the Islamic lands;

\textsuperscript{27} Safadi, \textit{Islamic Calligraphy}, p.14.

\textsuperscript{28} Siddiqi, \textit{The Story of Islamic Calligraphy}, pp 11-16.
the early Maghribi script in North Africa and the Andalusian script in Southern Spain are rounder forms of Kufic (figs. 11-15).29

Materials used to write Arabic Calligraphy:

a. Supports:

In the early years of Islam, the Qur’an was written on different kinds of supports including animal bones, flat pieces of white stone, and other materials. Of these materials, the three main support types used in the Islamic lands were: papyrus, parchment, and later paper, which was introduced to the Arabs by the Chinese. The use of papyrus, or what was known in the Qur’an as the Qirtas (قيرطاس), was the most limited both chronologically and geographically.30 Egypt maintained a monopoly on the production of papyrus, and papyrus remained the main writing support in Egypt till the late tenth century CE, when it was replaced by paper. In the early Islamic period, papyrus was reserved for documents and letters. Muslims thought papyrus was very fragile and inappropriate to support and preserve the divine revelation. There are a few papyrus fragments bearing Quranic verses for personal anthologies and talismans, but no complete copies of the Qur’an are known to be written on papyrus.31

In the early Islamic times, Muslims used parchment, or Riqq (رئق), to make codices. They received the tradition of writing the revelation on parchment from Jews and Christians. In Islamic lands, and despite the extensive preparation of parchment, it is

29 The Arabic Calligraphy Encyclopedia website.
30 Blair, Islamic Calligraphy, p. 41.
31 Ibid., p. 43
often possible to distinguish the hair from the flesh side. Traces of scraping were often visible on the flesh side. Parchment was very expensive due to its ability to be tanned and also to be reused.\textsuperscript{32}

The third most important support of writing in the Islamic land is paper. It was the last to be introduced to the Muslims, but it became the most common and cheapest writing support. The material and the technology for making paper started in China several centuries before the Common Era, and traveled westward along the Silk Road.\textsuperscript{33} It is believed that the old Arabic word for paper Kaghad (کَحَدَ) was derived from the Chinese word for paper gu-zhi, which was replaced in the ninth century by the word Waraqah (وراق), literally meaning foliage. The Arab historian al-Tha’alibi (d. 1038) mentions in his Book of Curious and Entertaining Information that paper was introduced to the Muslims by Chinese prisoners who were captured by the Arab commander Ziyad ibn Salih, in Samarqand, after the Battle of the Talas River in 751 CE.\textsuperscript{34}

Paper became the main support for copying books by the ninth century CE. It is also believed by many Muslims historians that the use of paper played a major role into the shift to use cursive script (Naskh), as Kufic was used on harder materials.\textsuperscript{35}

b. Pens:

The most important and most famous tool of writing Arabic calligraphy is the reed pen, or qalam (قَلَم). According to the tenth century geographer al-Maqqaddasi, good

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p. 44.
\item Ibid., p. 45.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., p. 46
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
quality reed pens were made from yellowish white reeds, which were cut from beds in wet and marshy areas, in places like the marshes of Iraq or the swamps of Egypt and Persia (Fares). The reed pen can be nibbed in several ways: oblique, even, upright, and inclined. How the nib of the reed pen was cut controlled the shape and the form of calligraphy. For example, to write angular scripts, the nib was usually trimmed flat, but for the cursive round script, an oblique cut became popular.  

36

c. Ink:

Two types of ink were traditionally used in the Islamic lands: carbon-based ink, midad (میداد), and metal based ink hibr (حبر). While midad’s most important ingredient is soot or carbon mixed with oil or plant gums that produced black ink, hibr’s most important ingredient is gallnuts and ferrous compounds that produced a dark-brown color. A variety of colored and metallic inks were also used by Muslim calligraphers for rubrics, vocalization, and other decorations.  

37

Chinese Calligraphy:

Chinese script is considered one of the world’s oldest written languages. By contrast to the ideographic nature of Arabic, Chinese is a pictographic language, which consists of some fifty thousand characters.  

38 The earliest known Chinese script system dates back to the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) and consists of engravings on turtle shells and ox shoulder blades, known as the oracle bone inscriptions (fig 16). The

36 Ibid., p. 58.
37 Ibid., pp. 63-65
Chinese oracle bone inscriptions developed through a slow process that was documented through archaeological findings among the ruins of Neolithic cultures in China. Some pottery shards from these sites carried abstract and pictographic scratch-marks, which researchers think might have been used by potters to convey certain messages. Examples for these are the pottery shards that carry abstract forms of characters, which date back to 4800-4300 BCE, found in Banpo village near Xi’an (fig. 17). Another example researchers thought of as primitive pictographs or precursors to Chinese characters were excavated from the site of the Dawenkou culture, located along the Lingyang River in Shandong Province (fig. 18).  

Pictographic marks and pictorial writing traces were found in many sites in the vast area of China, suggesting that Chinese characters are closely related to imagery. In other words, Chinese characters originally were related to the objects they represented. This connects to the later idea in the mind of Chinese calligraphers that calligraphy and painting are one thing. When looking at archeological finds, one can notice the pictographic nature of the early Chinese characters in the early bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou dynasty that dates back to 1000 BCE, which depicts what looks to be two human figures, with one holding an ax (fig. 18).  

When tracing the origins of Chinese characters, one can see that the work of compiling and standardizing the Chinese writing system reached its climax during the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) under the unified state, but the diversity of calligraphic styles developed mostly during the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). A famous legend

---

39 Ibid., p. 48
40 Ibid., p. 51
indicates that the Chinese writing system was invented thousands of years before the Han dynasty. Zhang Huaiguan, a famous calligraphic theorist, claimed in his book, *Critical Review on Calligraphy*, that Cang Jie, who served the mythical Yellow Emperor, was the legendary creator of the Chinese script.\(^{41}\)

Regarding the stylistic development of Chinese characters, oracle bone inscriptions represent the earliest known Chinese script system. It was used during the late Shang dynasty for almost two hundred years. The system is highly pictographic, with rough representation of real objects. *Jinwen*, found in inscriptions cast or engraved on bronze objects from the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-300 BCE), is chronologically the second form of Chinese writing. It was used on ceremonial and formal occasions during these two dynasties. The script in its earlier form was highly pictographic, but after the middle period of the Western Zhou (1046-771 BCE) the pictographic nature diminished and lines became straighter, and characters started to take the square form.\(^{42}\)

During the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE), the Small-Seal script was in common use. Its lines were of an equal thickness, and the main parts of the characters were concentrated in the upper half, while the lines of the lower part were fewer. From the Seal Script evolved the Clerical Script, which was used during the late Warring States Period and Qin (475-221 BCE). The script reached its climax after the reign of the Han emperor Wudi (140-87 BCE). In Clerical script the characters are more broad than tall. The

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 55

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 56
Clerical script was considered the conclusion of the stage of pictographic script and the beginning of the current writing system.\textsuperscript{43}

During the Han dynasty, and from the hurried writing of Clerical script evolved the Cursive script of the Han, known as the \textit{Zhangcao}, which was a shorthand of the Clerical script. \textit{Xingshu}, the running script, first appeared towards the end of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE). It is simpler in form, and it incorporated several elements from the Cursive script. \textit{Kaishu}, or standard script, was the last of the Chinese scripts to emerge; it evolved from the early running script during the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420CE). The script reached it maturity during the Tang dynasty (618-907CE), when strict rules were applied to its strokes, dots, and brush methods and its characters’ structure.\textsuperscript{44} Figure 20 shows the gradual development of Chinese calligraphy, and its different scripts.

Chinese writing tools:

The most important tool in writing Chinese calligraphy is the brush. It is made from animal hair, like that of rabbits and wolves. The use of the brush allows for more expressiveness in the form of characters and the tonality of ink, as the brush can either fan out or form a precise tip. The way the calligrapher uses the brush controls the shape and the form of the produced characters through pressing, lifting, concealing, or exposing the tip of the brush.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 61
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 65
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 58.
Supports:

Supports used to write on by the Chinese developed gradually from bones and stones in the Neolithic period to bamboo or wood strips, bronze in the bronze period, silk, and then paper.

Ink:

Ink cakes were made from soot ground and mixed with glue. This is the carbonic ink mentioned earlier and was known to Muslims as “Chinese ink.”

Islam in China:

China has never been a Muslim domain, but the relationship and early contacts between the Muslim world and China were of great influence in different aspects of life including trade, the arts, and crafts. Islam spread through Central Asia without China being conquered or included as a part of the Islamic empire. The Chinese emperor was recognized by the Arabs as being one of the great monarchs of the world; he is depicted as such in one of the fresco paintings of the Umayyad desert palace at Qusayer Amarah, in Jordan. Silk, ceramics and other admired Chinese products were exported to the West and the Islamic world, transmitting Chinese motifs to the Muslim schools of art. The battle of the Talas (in present day Uzbekistan), in 751 CE, where the Abbasid Muslim army defeated the mostly Turkish troops in the service of the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE), led to the capture of Chinese papermakers, who were used to set up a

---

papermaking industry in Samarqand by the mid-eighth century, whence the technology of paper making later spread to the Abbasid capital of Baghdad.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite the great distance, with the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad, “Seek knowledge, even if it is in China” in mind, Muslims migrated to China in search of opportunity, trade being one of their chief motivations.\textsuperscript{48} Although the major land trade routes were cut off after the battle of the Talas River, maritime trade between the Tang Chinese and Gulf ports of the Abbasid Caliphate flourished. Muslim merchants came to coastal cities in southeastern China, traded, lived, and intermarried with Chinese women. They were encouraged by successive Chinese dynasties to settle in different cities all over China. Occasional hostility, sometimes extending to massacres, like the 878 CE Huang Chao Rebellion that targeted the foreign merchant colony in Guangzhou (Canton), did not deter Muslim merchants from coming to China. It was reported that by the early ninth century half of the population of the Chinese port of Guangzhou was Muslim.\textsuperscript{49} Muslims were dominant in the import/export businesses in China during the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), but the greatest movement of Islam into China took place in the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 CE), as the Mongols’ conquest of Islamic lands in the West brought more Muslims to China, who enjoyed a better status than the Han Chinese.\textsuperscript{50} It seems that the Mongols were not willing to trust their new subjects in China, so they decided to create a governing body of non-Chinese administrators, known as the \textit{semu

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 231


\textsuperscript{49} Irwin, \textit{Islamic Art}, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{50} Okatsari Wiwin, \textit{Sino-Arabic Calligraphy}, p. 5, International Islamic University, Malaysia, 2009.
guan (officials of various categories), whom they brought from the lands they had conquered in the West (Central Asia and the Arab lands). This period witnessed the influx of Muslims of many talents and professions, able to hold ministerial and high official positions, such as Sayyid Ajall Shams ad-Din, who became the governor of Yunnan, and the Persian Jamal ad-Din, who became Qubilai Khan’s (1215-1294CE) favored calendrical scientist. Another famous Muslim figure was Qubilai’s Central Asian Finance Minister Ahmed Fanakati, who is perhaps the most controversial figure in the history of Chinese Muslims in China.

Preferring foreigners, especially Arabs, Central Asians, and Persians, in holding official positions created anti-Muslim sentiment among the majority Han population during the Yuan period. Despite this fact, during the early years of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE), the Ming tried to acculturate Muslims in many different ways, and Muslims were employed by the Ming emperors in high offices such as court astrologers. According to Jonathan Lipman, Zhu Yuanzhang had Muslim commanders in his army. Zhu Yuanzhang was even said to be married to a Muslim and converting to Islam. The story of Zhu Yuanzhang converting to Islam is a popular Chinese Muslim legend, claimed by the Chinese Muslim scholar Haji Yusuf Chang, but as Lipman indicates this claim was generally rejected by many scholars. The most famous Muslim figure of the Ming

---


52 Lipman tells a brief biography about Ahmed Fanakati and how he became Qubilai’s advisor for twenty years, and how his end was not as expected for such a high ranking official. Ahmed was described in Chinese text as guilty of all kinds of corruption including nepotism. He was assassinated and his corpse was dug out and humiliated. See Lipman’s *Familiar Strangers*, p. 35-37.

53 Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 39

54 Ibid., p.39
dynasty is Zheng He, who came from a Yunnanese Muslim family. Zheng He was appointed by the Yongle emperor (1360-1424 CE) to be the principal envoy of six major expeditions to the Western Ocean, between 1405-21 CE.\textsuperscript{55}

Despite these achievements and courtly connections, many Muslims suffered from discrimination under the Ming. Lipman mentions a story of a Muslim family from Shaanxi who were known for their honesty for several generations, but one of the family members had a dispute with a Chinese man who brought a suit before the magistrate. The magistrate accused the Muslim of the crime and sent troops to arrest him.\textsuperscript{56}

The Ming during the early years of their dynasty were threatened by powers from Central Asia, such as those in Hami. During the mid and late Ming, in order to enhance revenue and frontier security, and due to the instability of economic conditions in China, they had to enforce strict commercial regulation that to some extent limited and controlled Muslim communication with the heartlands of Islam in the West. These policies contributed more to the acculturation process of Muslims and to their isolation (mostly in eastern and coastal cities in China).\textsuperscript{57} After the 1430s the Ming government ceased trading voyages and limited connections across its borders.\textsuperscript{58}

Despite these restrictions, changes kept happening in the religious, artistic and intellectual aspects of the life of Muslims in China. Although Muslims are distributed all over China, one can divide the Chinese Muslim communities in the late Ming and early

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 44
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 40
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.41
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 45
Qing (1644-1911) on regional and intellectual bases into two major groups: a group that lived in northwestern China and the region of Gansu, and the second group including the Muslim communities in central China, the eastern, southern, and port cities. In other words, the Muslims during the Ming can be categorized into the Silk Road Muslims and the maritime trade-port Muslims. This categorization is based upon the cultural and intellectual production of these two groups and their ability to establish connections with the Central Asian and other Muslim lands. The northwestern Muslim communities were more influenced by changes in the heartlands of Islam, and the fruits of their access to Central Asia appear in the advent of Sufism in the hands of wandering Khojas, such as Hidayat Allah, and the establishment of the Sufi menhuan system.  

Historical records show how these communities were highly influenced by the heartlands of Islam, and how some major religious figures such as Ma Laichi (1681?-1766?) were able to sojourn in the Muslim lands to the West and bring back knowledge to his fellow Muslims in China.  

On the other hand, Muslims living in central China and closer to the eastern and southern cities and provinces (e.g. Jiangsu, Beijing, and Nanjing) were highly influenced by Chinese culture and they became exclusively Sinophone. As the later Ming policies forbade and discouraged maritime trade and contact with the outer world, the attention of Muslims in these regions was directed inward. In addition to being the birthplace of a new genre of Islamic literature, the Han Kitab, which is a set of intellectual productions about Islam written in Chinese Neo-Confucian terms by Chinese Muslim elites starting  

---

59 Ibid., pp. 59-72  
60 See Lipman 65:72 for more information on Ma Laichi’s journey and religious career.
with Wu Sunqie (1598-1678) through Zhang Zhong (1584-1661), Wang Daiyu (1570s-1650s?) and reaching its climax with Ma Zhu (active in 1680s) and Liu Zhi (1660-1739), the Eastern cities were also the birth place and the cradle of Sini Calligraphy.  

**Chinese Arabic Calligraphy (Sini Calligraphy):**

Culturally and artistically, the late Yuan and the Ming periods offer an abundance of tangible material on the artistic production of the Chinese Muslims. These materials enable researchers to trace the development of this unique script. The broadest definition of Sini script is a Chinese Islamic calligraphic form of the Arabic writing. The term Sini calligraphy is commonly used to refer to a rounded, flowing script with thick and tapered effects, much like Chinese calligraphy (fig. 21). This definition is based upon the majority of examples that survive from Ming dynasty, which is taken as the period when the script reached its climax.  

Stylistically, the script resembles the cursive Thulth script (an ornamental variety of the Naskhi style) that was popular in Persia and Central Asia during the Mongol Ilkhan period (fourteenth century CE). The resemblance to Thulth comes from the long vertical strokes for the vertical letters like the *alif* and *lam*. Slender

---

61 Wu Sunqie translated the thirteenth century text of Abu-Bakr Abd-Allah, known as the *Mirsad*, adding his comments to the translated text; so did Zhang Zhong on other Arabic and Persian Islamic texts. Wang Daiyu published his *Zhengjiao zhenquan* on the interpretation of Islamic orthodox teachings in Chinese. Ma Zhu’s most famous Han Kitab book is the *Qingzhen zhinan* which includes sections on orthodoxy and orthopraxy and contemporary issues of Muslim Chinese. Liu Zhi, the most famous among the Han Kitab scholars for his books and writing, put Islam in direct comparison with the Neo-Confucian values. Lipman offers a summary on those scholars in *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 82-92.


63 Ibid.
ankles and fat, tapered endings are typical of the Sini script in this period. Sini script has very fine lines with exaggerated roundness of curves of letters like final *sins, ras, sads* and so on (Fig. 22). It is also similar to the fourteenth century Indian/Afghani Behari script in the use of wide, heavy, and extended horizontal lines, which contrast markedly with its thin and delicate verticals. The similarity between the Behari and the Sini script comes from the writing tool itself, as the brush is used to write both scripts rather than the pen. The script is noted for its elegance in style, fluidity and balanced proportion. A purely ornamental style was derived from Sini, retaining its roundness, but is distinguished by its very thick and almost triangular verticals and its comparatively thin horizontal lines. The tips and endings of both vertical and left falling letters are thick and tapered, similar to the 漏劤 botiao (tapered goose tail like ending of strokes) of the Han Clerical script (fig 23). In some variants of Sini, one can notice the integration of the 飛白 feibai “flying white” characteristic typical of the running script and resulting from the use of a dry brush in writing calligraphy. This characteristic can only be seen in some variants of the Sini script, as solid and oblique ink is a must to write any other form of Arabic calligraphy (fig 24). Couplet format is also a Chinese characteristic that was applied to Sini script. Other characteristics are the use of square format of characters (the character is written in an imaginary square) typical to Chinese writing and applying it to

---

64 Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 28.

65 Ibid., p. 29

66 Botiao is an effect that appears in left-and right-falling strokes of a Chinese character. To obtain this effect the brush tip is turned slightly upward toward the ending to form a tapered ending like the tail of a wild goose. See Wang Yuch. *Chinese Calligraphy*, p.61.
Arabic, or turning the square on its side to create a diamond-shaped pattern of words (fig. 25).

This definition, as mentioned earlier, is built upon analyzing samples of the script from the late Yuan through the early Qing periods. The definition describes the stylistic features and the characteristics of the script, but it does not give information about its origins. According to this descriptive definition, one might think that the Sini script developed during the Mongol period in China, as a variety of the Thulth script, because of the resemblance between the two scripts, and because Thulth was commonly used in Central Asia at that time. Another hypothesis suggests that the period of the Ming dynasty was the time when Muslims in China began to develop distinct traditions of Chinese Islamic writing. I will argue that a primitive form of Chinese Islamic calligraphy had existed earlier than the Yuan and the Ming, and that both periods represent phases in the evolution and refinement of what may now be called the classic form of Sini calligraphy.

Sini Script Origins and Development: Why Naskh and Not Kufic?

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Arabic calligraphy in general went through phases of evolution, where two forms of script existed side by side, had influence on each other, and served as the basis for later schools of Arabic writing: the monumental angular script from which came the Kufic, Maghribi, and the Andalusian scripts, on the one hand; and the cursive script, from which came Naskhi, Thulth, Diwani, etc., on the other. Sini calligraphy had its own evolution process, whereby its seed, the Arabic cursive script,

---

67 Okatsari, p.13.
found its way to China among the Arabs who lived there. There is no doubt that Arabic writing was introduced to China by the Arabs who came for trade or on official delegations. Here we must take into consideration the nature and usages of the two major Arabic scripts, the monumental being used for decorative purposes and writing the Qur’an and the cursive being used for ordinary matters. Since, the earliest Arabs who came to China were mostly merchants, they would most likely have used the cursive style rather than the monumental one, as the latter would take very long time to write in recording business transactions and contracts, because of its geometric and angular features.

Written and material sources of Arabic from the pre-Mongol period in China are fragmentary. Although it seems highly speculative, as part of the Australian National University’s project on Chinese Heritage, Anthony Garnaut uses archaeological evidence to trace the history of Islam in China in his article within this project. According to Garnaut, some of the evidence on early usages of Arabic calligraphy in China takes the form of inscriptions on ceramic shards and pieces of pottery; like the eighth or ninth century earthenware water pot that was unearthed in 1980 from a Tang dynasty tomb in Yangzhou (fig. 26). The under-glazed purplish brown glaze pottery ware has green Arabic motifs. The technique indicates that it was made at the Changsha kiln in Hunan. The inscriptions on the water pot were written in the cursive style, and have been interpreted as a rendition of “Allahu Akbar” (God is great). Another under-glaze pottery shard from the late Tang or Five Dynasties (907-960 CE) was found around the same time, and was

69 Ibid. Nov. 16th, 2010
also made at the Changsha kiln. It is marked with an Arabic motif of a human face made from a mirrored “Allah” (fig. 27), which was also written in the cursive style. Garnaut’s claim seems highly speculative, especially when looking at the second example, which has what looks like figurative representations which are typically rejected by Islam.

While the pre-Mongol period can be considered the time of early Chinese efforts to use Arabic script, the Yuan dynasty was the period of learning and copying from the styles of the Islamic lands. The tombstones of Quanzhou, known also as Zaitun, in Fujian province offer an important resource for tracing the development of Arabic writing in China. The poorly rendered intaglio inscriptions on the earliest Arabic tombstone of Muhammad Alkhalt dating from 1171 CE, during the Song Period (960-1279 CE) (fig. 28) show that Muslims in China tended to use very simple script, not paying attention to aesthetics or style. A later example from Zaitun, dated 1212, shows that the stone carvers started to develop a taste for a more decorative and neater style of writing that tried to mimic the Kufic script, but rendered in a rounder form and in a relief rather than intaglio (fig. 29).

Islamic artistic expression flourished after the consolidation of Mongol control over China, Persia, and Central Asia in the late thirteenth century. The Yuan conquest brought to China a great number of Muslims of many professions including traders, brokers, artisans, and architects. As Lipman mentions in his book, those artisans who came to China tended to stay, and artisans from Central Asia tried to establish themselves in proximity to Chinese taste, but in their own cities. Rashid al-Din reported a

---

70 Ibid.
Samarkandi town called Simali on the road from Khanbalik to Beijing, where almost three thousand HuiHui (Muslim) artisans were settled after Chinggis’s and Ogodei’s Central Asian conquest.\footnote{Lipman, \textit{Familiar Strangers}, p.35.} Those artisans and artists brought their ethnic artistic styles with them to China and influenced art production during this period and later. When looking at Zaitun’s tombstone samples from the mid-Yuan period, one can see the integration of Central Asian scripts (especially scripts similar to Thulth and Muhaqqaq, with very few examples of Kufic) in their artistic themes. Chinese Muslims followed the trend of using the Thulth cursive script, which became the standard script for invocations inscribed in mosques, and for verse headings of the Quran in Central Asia and Persia. This trend is seen clearly when examining two tombstones from Quanzhou, where one can see clearly the ornate Thulth script on the fourteenth century tombstone of Sadr Ajil Kabir\footnote{Ibid.} and the 1301 tombstone in which the Central Asian script is clearer (figs. 30 & 31).\footnote{Ibid.}

The tombstone of Sadr Ajil Kabir (fig. 30) is an important example in tracing the development of the style defined above and often referred to as a classic form of Sini. Most scholars who wrote comments on Sini tended to attribute this style to the Ming period, but when looking closely at several examples from the mid and late Yuan period, one can notice that the tendency towards creating a new style of calligraphy with Chinese spirit started during that period. Although the curves of \textit{ras} and \textit{lams} were not extremely exaggerated, the endings of the vertical letters in this example tended to get fatter and not to maintain the same thickness as the stem of the letter. Several other examples dated
back to the mid and later Yuan prove this claim. Figure 32 shows a 1310 CE tombstone from the Yuan carved in relief where one can see that the endings of the vertical letters are more tapered in effect and the curves of ras, yas, and lams are exaggerated even more than the previous example. Another 1321 CE (Fig. 33) example is carved in intaglio, showing the same tendency towards the new style of calligraphy in the very long vertical letter inspired by the Thulth and the tapered endings and exaggerated curves caused by the use of the brush.

The Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) was the period when Chinese Islamic calligraphy started to evolve to look more like what is today called Sini script. This period offered scholars an abundance of materials on which they based the theory of the Ming being the period of the flowering of Sini in China. The restrictions enforced by the Ming on trade and traveling in later years of their reign broke the links between the Muslim communities in China, especially those closer to the heartland of China and the eastern cities, and those of Central Asia. It seems that these links between Central Asia and the Muslim communities in northwestern China were so much stronger that they influenced their culture and Islamic education. This influence appears in the invention of two pinyin systems, the 小兒经 Xiao’er Jing and 经堂教育 Jingtang Jiaoyu, to facilitate their Islamic education (Also see chapter 3 for information on the Chinese Muslims’ educational system). In the eastern cities where Chinese Muslims were more influenced by Chinese culture and Confucian education, this led to the production of the Han Kitab,
which was an outgrowth of the *Jingtang Jiaoyu*.\(^{73}\) Being the birthplace of the hybrid literature of the *Han Kitab* (Chinese/Islamic), the eastern cities of China were also the cradle of Sini. The Central Asian influence on northwestern Muslim communities was not only limited to Islamic education and the advent of Sufism, but also extended to architecture and art. When looking at the mosque architecture of northwestern China, we see more Central Asian features, in contrast to those in eastern China (see the use of the stone screen and the onion-like dome in the architecture of the Great Mosque of Xinjiang\(^ {74}\) versus the very Chinese architecture of the Grand Huajuexiang Mosque in Xi’an (fig. 34 & 35). Regarding calligraphy, when looking at the decoration of the mihrab of a mosque in Xinjiang, one can notice the use of the round motif, known as the Star-plate, commonly seen as a decorative element in Central Asia and the heartlands of Islam (fig. 36). The calligraphy used in this example is mostly the Central Asian Thulth, done with a reed pen. On the other hand, in eastern China, this period witnessed the gradual change of the Thulth-based Chinese Arabic script to become more Chinese in style and influence. It is in the calligraphy of this period that we begin to see more of the slender ankles and fat, tapered endings so typical of the Sini script. This development appears clearly in a 1387 CE tombstone from Quanzhou (fig. 37), the latest of the dated Arabic tombstones from this area. Many of the materials we receive from the Ming show a

\(^{73}\) *Xiao’erjing* is a pinyin system invented by the Sino-Muslims in northwestern China, which adapts the Arabic script to represent spoken Chinese. *Jingtang Jiaoyu* is another system that utilizes Chinese phonetics to represent Arabic pronunciation. These two ways were invented by the Sino-Muslims in northwestern China to facilitate their Islamic education which was mostly influenced by Central Asia, in contrast to the Sino-Muslims living in the eastern part of China, see Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p.50.

\(^{74}\) The Great Mosque of Xinjiang is a Uighur mosque. Uighurs represent one of the ten non-Chinese Muslim ethnic groups in China. Another factor behind the high influence of Central Asia on the northwestern part of China, is that the Uighurs themselves are originally from Turkic origins.
continuous development of the style of Sini which was invented in the late Yuan to fit more within the decorative function of the script. Figure 38 is another example from Quanzhou, showing Sini in more decorative and more elaborate effect and more emphasis on the *botiao*-like endings of the vertical letters. In addition to tombstones, this decorative variant of Sini was used in Ming Muslim architecture and inscriptions on porcelain and bronze wares produced for Muslims within or outside of China (see fig. 39-42).

Examples from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and the 20th century show exaggerated curves, lithe and expressive strokes, which are the basic characteristics of Sini script as it is practiced today.75 The “Opening-up Policy” in China during the 1980s gave the chance to Chinese Muslim calligraphers to practice their art openly. Upon receiving this freedom, they were able to develop several variants of Sini calligraphy. According to geographic locale, Chinese-Arabic calligraphy can be divided into three branches: the Northern which is known as the monumental style of Sini calligraphy and is used for architectural decorations; the Southern which is known to be thin, rough, and slim; and the Western which is more decorative and looks similar to the Arabic of Tumari, Muhaqaq, and Thulth scripts. Moreover, some other variants of the script can be classified according to the style in which they appear: the scripts include the imitation Han Imperial; the Honor writ script (*bang Shu* script); the Tu-ma-ri script, drawings of Qur’anic letters; and the carved Arabic script [used for carved surfaces].76 Unfortunately,


76 Mi Guangjiang, Haji Noor Deen. *Arabic Calligraphy in the Chinese Tradition*, Zhengzhou, China: the Chinese House for the Arts of Islamic Arabic Calligraphy, 2009, p.1
with greater connections to the Islamic world, these styles are less and less widely practiced. This problem is to be fully discussed in the next chapter.

Sini script is a production of the long history of Muslims in China. The script, during its long process of development and modification, grew out of the round script rather than the angular Kufic. In addition to the script developed during the late Yuan and Ming dynasties, many later variants of Chinese Muslim calligraphy that we see today are in the round forms of Naskh. If we look at the history of early Arabs and Muslims in China, most of them were merchants, who were taught to use Naskh in writing their contracts and trade transactions. Moreover, the Islamic education system in China has contributed to the form and the style of Sini. In terms of artistic style, the Chinese madrasa education played a major role in the evolution of the style of Sini Calligraphy. As mentioned above, Chinese Muslim students at those madrasas were required to make proper copies of their text books. The fact that China has never been a Muslim domain makes it clear that Chinese Muslims would be more likely to receive copies of Arabic masterworks written in a form of Naskh, in contrast to the original work which would have been written in Kufic, especially the ones written before the eleventh century. Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang, one of the most famous Sini calligraphers, believes that the style in which the educational textbooks in madrasas were written influenced the development of the unique style of Sini calligraphy and oriented it towards the rounder forms of Arabic calligraphy. He mentioned having a 400-year-old copy of the Qur’an, which was completely written in the Rihani and Muhaqaq scripts [forms of Naskhi
script]; these types of scripts might also have played a role in adapting the round script rather than the angular script for Sini calligraphy.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{77} Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang, Phone conversation, Nov. 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2010.
Chapter II: The Status of Sini Calligraphy in the Present Day.

As mentioned earlier, when looking at samples of Sini calligraphy starting from the eighteenth up to the twenty-first century, one can notice many changes in both the form and the practice of Sini writing among Chinese Muslims. When looking at the development of Sini script over time, we see that the style and the form of the script moved from simplicity in the early phases to more complex and expressive decorative scripts. Links to the Muslim world play a major role in this change. When access to the outer Muslim world was limited, Chinese Muslims were able to maintain a style of calligraphy that reflects their hybrid nature, a style that was Arabic in origin and more Chinese in flavor. The easier communication became with the heartlands of Islam, the more the style started to gradually lose its “Chineseness” that distinguished it from any other Arabic script. Moreover, it seems that the absence of what one can call a major formal Sini script agreed upon by modern day Hui calligraphers was another major factor behind the different variants of scripts that have appeared during the present time. These variants, to some extent, could (falsely) be described as Sini, according to where they are produced and by whom they are produced, rather than using style as a criterion of categorization. Changes in the form and practice of Sini calligraphy, along with the absence of a standard style that lays out the characteristics of this unique script, may eventually lead to the loss of this style of calligraphy. To trace this change in form and practice, a number of works by a famous modern Sini calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen, have been chosen as a case study for visual and stylistic analysis. These works are also compared to supportive examples of contemporary works by other Chinese and non-
Chinese Muslims who practice Sini calligraphy, such as Haji Abdulhakim and Kouichi Honda. In terms of learning and practicing Sini calligraphy, changes in technique and materials used to make it are other major factors in the development of variation in the art form.

**Definition of Sini Script in the Modern Day:**

Scholars such as Safadi, Garnaut, and Okatsari when defining Sini script tended to focus more on its distinct visual and stylistic features caused by the use of the brush. Most of these scholars defined Sini as a rounded, flowing script with thick and tapered effects. At the end of his article, Garnaut adds that the distinctive feature of Sini practice is the tendency towards making exaggerated curves and lithe strokes. Garnaut also identifies several variants of the script and discusses some, such as the form of Sini calligraphy where the script is rectangular, with one of the names of God or the Prophet wrapped around an extended vertical stroke such as the *alif* or of the phrase *Ya Mustafa* (see fig. 43). When asked to define Sini, Haji Noor Deen, a modern Hui calligrapher, responded by saying:

Sini script is an Arabic form of calligraphy that is written only by using the Chinese writing brush. It is different from the Behari script of Central Asia, as it takes some features and themes of the already established Chinese calligraphic forms.

As a calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen, when asked to define Sini, focused more on the tools and techniques of making the script, rather than focusing on the visual

---


79 Haji Noor Deen, Interview, February, 2012.
characteristics. When asked about how different the script is from other Arabic styles, he said that the proportions of letters in one word in the standard Arabic scripts of the Islamic heartlands are measured by the dot unit (the length and thickness of each letter is determined on how many dots made by the reed pen it may contain), while in Sini achieving beauty of the overall composition is more important. When asked about the style of calligraphy that was identified in the previous chapter as the classic form of Sini, which evolved during the late Yuan, through the Ming and the early Qing dynasties, Haji Noor Deen said that this form is the oldest and the most famous among several forms of Sini, but not the only one. There are not enough written materials or scholarly works on the origins and the development of Sini as a script, so talking about a formal script that all modern Hui calligraphers in China agree upon to be the standard Sini does not really exist.\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{Function and Style:}

Changes in the style of Sini script are governed by change in the function and the purpose for which the script is used. It seems that there is a strong correlation between functionality and changes to the style of Sini calligraphy that can be traced back to the early forms of the script. When looking at the function of calligraphy in the initial phase of the history of Islam in China, the main purpose for using the Arabic script was to make as many copies as possible of the Qur’an for Muslims to use during their rituals. Earlier examples of Sini Qur’ans show an emphasis upon speed and volume of production. Thus,

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
attention to style and decorative scripts was limited. In the few early Qur’ans in which the brush was used, Sini had very simple features: thick tapered effects of the letters due to the use of the brush (these are copies for the use by Muslims in general and not students practicing writing Arabic, where they used reed pens and not brushes), with some exaggeration in curves. When looking at early Chinese copies of the Qur’an, one can notice the thickness of letters and curves caused by the brush movement, but also one can notice the simple rendering of form, shapes, and roundness of curves.81

In eastern China and port cities, and with the development of the lifestyle and social status of Muslims in China during the Yuan dynasty and later, the purpose and the function of the script had to be modified to meet people’s needs. Eventually, need increased for an Islamic decorative art with the development of a wealthier class of Chinese Muslim traders, functionaries, and ministers of state, patrons of calligraphers and book-makers.82 Forms more decorative in style for writing the Quranic copies started to appear, with more and more curves and elaborate flourishes. Moreover, the patronage of Muslim art and the taste for Chinese Muslim themes helped not only in the development of different forms of decoration, but also in the emergence of Sini calligraphy as a decorative art in itself. Thus, the use of Sini as a decorative art appears not only in architecture and tombstones, as shown in the previous chapter, but also in the bronze vessels of the different dynasties made by the Hui, not necessarily for other Hui consumers, but mostly rather for export to the Muslim world as in the case of blue and


82 Ibid.
white porcelain, or ritual vessels for different religious and daily purposes. On these different objects the development of style and form of Sini script is also observable. For example, when looking at Muslim bronze incense burners from the fifteenth century, during the Ming dynasty one can notice that the style of writing Sini became more distinctive and elaborate.

During this period, which is generally considered as the pinnacle of Islamic art in China and of Sini calligraphy in particular, the script was developed and refined in an elegant way to fit the taste of patrons. Style-wise, examples from this period show that vertical letters do not keep the same thickness, but tend to be wider at the top, forming what looks like a wing, similar to the endings of the strokes in the Chinese script known as the Li Shu (Chinese Clerical Script). This effect is rendered by pressing and then lifting the brush, which indicates that the Hui artists followed the traditional Chinese way of writing inscriptions with a brush, then inscribing it or casting it into the bronze. Two early fifteenth-century incense burners are good examples of this famous form of decorative Sini script. The first one (fig. 40) is a tri-legged bronze incense burner from Gansu, made between 1426 and 1435, bearing an Arabic inscription that says “Lâ  illâha  illallâh” (There is no God, but Allah). The second example (fig. 41) is also from the same period and has a Fu dog finial. It carries the same characteristics of thicker upper endings of the vertical letters, while the horizontal ones are thinner and rounder. The inscriptions on the latter one say “Allâh Albarakah, Lellah, Allâh Arrahma, lellah” (Allah all blessing is for Allah - All Mercy to Allah). These two examples show how Muslim artists, and manufacturers of such works, developed a style of Sini script that enabled the adaption of
objects used for traditional Taoist, Buddhist or Confucian practices to Islamic rituals. A similar form of Sini calligraphy script is found on a plaque in the great mosque of Xi’an (fig. 42) originally founded in 742, which might indicate that the tendency to use Sini script as a decorative element started as early as the Yuan and Ming dynasties, as the mosque had undergone several restoration processes, and the structure of the mosque as it survives now is mostly from the Ming period.

Trade also had a major effect on the style of Sini calligraphy. Trade transformed Sini into a more decorative art. For example, in the Abbasid period (750–1258), trade between the Mediterranean and China encouraged Chinese Muslims to produce many works which show Chinese features in their shape, but often bear Quranic verses. One example of the same style of Sini script mentioned above, which can be traced back to the twelfth or thirteenth century CE (the style itself as mentioned in the previous chapter started to appear in the mid Yuan period, and this plate might be a more elaborate replica done by Hui artisans for tributes or gifts during the Qing, or influenced the earlier forms of Sini), is found in the Topkapi Saray Museum in Istanbul (fig. 44). The same style of script was used in the central decoration of a cloisonné enamel plate, commissioned in China for an Ottoman Sultan. By the end of the fifteenth century, blue and white porcelain started to be made in Islamic shapes with more elaborate Quranic verses for Muslims both inside and outside China (see fig. 39).

---

83 Okatsari Wiwin, *Sino-Arabic Calligraphy*, p. 10, International Islamic University, Malaysia, 2009

84 Khan, *Arabic Script*, p. 126.

85 Okatsari, *Sino-Arabic Calligraphy*, p.9
Examples from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and the twentieth century show even more exaggerated curves, lithe, and expressive strokes, which are the basic characteristics of Sini script as it is practiced today. Figure 45 a and b demonstrate the development from the less exaggerated forms of curves in an eighteenth century Qur’an leaf, to the more expressive more exaggerated style of a page of the Qur’an from Canton, dated 1892 CE. In figure 45 b, the older copy, the artist tended to maintain the same thickness of the vertical letters, such as the \textit{alifs} and \textit{lams}, while stretching the endings of the down-left falling strokes of the \textit{waws} and \textit{nuns} in one word to fall under the writing line and reach to the middle of the following word. On the other hand, in the 1892 copy the curves of the \textit{waws}, \textit{nuns} and \textit{ras} are exaggerated so that words seem to be interlaced. In contrast to the older copy, the calligrapher in the later copy, while maintaining the thick tapered top endings of the vertical letters, that are integral to Sini script, did not maintain the same thickness of either letters. Moreover, the curves of the \textit{waws}, \textit{ras}, and \textit{nuns} change throughout the text. This trend of changing the shapes of letters had existed in Chinese calligraphy and also in Sini script since the Ming dynasty, but became more obvious during the Qing period and more exaggerated in examples from the twentieth century.

Tributes given to, or objects commissioned by, foreign patrons provide a good sense of the development of new variations of Sini as well. The enamel on bronze decoration on a vase dedicated by the Chinese Emperor Qianlong (r.1736-1796) to the Ottoman Sultan Selim III (r.1761-1808) (fig. 46) indicates that the style was becoming

\footnote{China Heritage Newsletter Website: http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/editorial.php?issue=005. Nov. 16th, 2010}
more expressive rather than decorative. It seems that the artist was trying to produce a piece of art that suits the taste of the Ottoman Sultan through using cursive style similar to earlier forms of Thulth and the Ruqaa existing in the area of Central Asia with Chinese hints caused by the use of the brush, where vertical letters are longer, and their thickness is the same, while down falling strokes and letters are rounder in form and thicker, an effect caused by the brush.

**Development of Style and Relations with Islamic Countries:**

When tracing development of Sini calligraphy by comparing early samples from the Ming and Qing periods to examples from the modern period, one can find that the function of the script grew more towards being a decorative element, as a response to the taste of Muslims within or outside China, whereas at the beginning it had served an important added function of popularizing Islam in China (most likely using the status of calligraphy in Islam as a parallel to the status of calligraphy in China, and to show that both cultures appreciated calligraphy as a form of self-cultivation). For example, when Chinese Muslims in central and eastern China produced the *Han Kitab*, they were trying to write about their Muslim concepts within a Chinese frame during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The practice of Sini script presented a form of art capable of establishing itself among Chinese scripts. Joseph Fletcher pointed this out in his study of Arabic calligraphy in twentieth century China (1989), stating that Sini script was presented against the background of well-established motifs such as the Chinese square or circle, Sanskrit or Pali characters, Manchu or Mongolian motifs and designs, Chinese seal ornaments,
Chinese wall scroll arrangements and Chinese mystical formulas.\textsuperscript{87} The early Sinicization of Arabic calligraphy was a major factor in its early and what one can call classic characteristics, and many calligraphers produced pieces of works in the spirit of Chinese well known scripts, such as Liu Zhi, major Muslim literati and a scholar of the Han Kitab, who was active during the Qing dynasty. Unfortunately, I could not find any of Liu Zhi’s calligraphic works to include in this paper, but Bashir mentions that Liu Zhi produced works of Sini script within the shapes and forms of Chinese characters, which allowed him to blend Islamic prayers within Chinese characters that proclaimed the major Confucian virtues.\textsuperscript{88}

On the other hand, examples from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show major changes in the style and the practice of Sini calligraphy. When access to the heartlands of Islam became easier, changes started to appear more and more in the style and the practice of Sini. These changes happened especially upon recent political and social changes in China, such as the Opening Policy of the 1980s and the establishment of more extensive relations with Muslim countries, which allowed Chinese Muslims to travel for Hajj and also for education to the heartlands of Islam. Examples from the late Qing, early twentieth century, and after show a gradual, but rapid departure from earlier the Chinese calligraphic concepts and forms in the interest of producing styles more acceptable in the eyes of non-Chinese Muslims. Artisans’ and calligraphers’ tendency to sell works inscribed with verses from the Qur’an has increased according to the demands of the market. They have tended to modify and popularize their works to fit the new

\textsuperscript{87} Mohamed Bashir et al. \textit{Islamic Calligraphy}, p. 3
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. p. 4
period of cultural and economic exchange. In an example from a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century over-glaze enameled porcelain dish from China (fig. 47), the artist entirely gave up Sini calligraphy, in favor of more central Asian round script, in this case a form of Diwani Jali script, while keeping other non-calligraphic Chinese motifs of chrysanthemums, peonies, plum blossoms and lotuses, bamboo, crested pheasants, phoenixes, butterflies, roosters, an owl, peacocks, sparrows and grouses.

Imitating what experts call “standard” Arabic scripts coming from the heartlands of Islam has had a great deal of influence on the change of style and form of Sini script. Imitation of the calligraphic styles of the Muslim heartlands always existed, despite the fact that within China, Chinese Muslim calligraphers managed to present their calligraphy in a number of styles already existing in the Chinese cultural context. The art historian and scholar Owen Jones in 1867 comments:

> We are led to think that this art must in some way have had a foreign origin; it so nearly resembles in all principles the art of the Mohammedan races that we may presume that it was derived from them. It would be no difficult task to take a work of ornament of this class, and, by simply varying the coloring and correcting the drawing, convert it into Indian or Persian composition. There is of course, in all these works something essentially Chinese in the mode of rendering the idea, but the original idea is evidently Mohammedan.\(^{89}\)

The consequences of recent political changes, such as the “Opening Up Policy” in China during the 1980s gave Chinese Muslim calligraphers the chance to practice their art openly. Upon receiving this freedom, they were able to develop several new variants of Sini calligraphy. Yet, the policy had its downside as well. As mentioned in the previous

\(^{89}\) Ibid., p. 3.
chapter, while non-Chinese Muslims in northwestern China practice Arabic calligraphy using styles that are extensively used in Central Asia, Sini calligraphy was developed and used by the Hui in central and eastern China, who were able to produce different variations of the script. Unfortunately, these styles are starting to lose their distinguishing features due to the increasing tendency among young calligraphers to imitate the incoming standard scripts of the Arabic heartlands.\footnote{Haji Noor Deen, Interview, 02/17/2012.} Despite the fact that those modern Chinese Muslim calligraphers in some of their works tended to keep some features of the style (flying white or curves), still, one can notice that most of the works we see today are standard Arabic scripts with a Chinese influence or composition, rather than being Chinese Muslim in the use of Sini script itself. Haji Noor Deen says that the tendency towards the imitation of standard Arabic scripts from the Muslim world increased in such a way that the three major variants of Sini are beginning to vanish gradually. Due to extensive contact with the Muslim world, young calligraphers are attracted to famous scripts from Egypt, Central Asia, and other Muslim countries.\footnote{Haji Noor Deen, Interview, 2/12/2012.}

These changes most likely occurred to meet the needs of the external market in the Islamic world, but in the case of well-established Hui calligraphers in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, the trend towards imitating some stylistic characteristics of the standard Arabic and Central Asian scripts might also have been motivated by a wish to recapture the heritage of the heartlands of their ancestors. Nowadays, many Chinese Muslims receive their religious education in Arab and Muslim countries, where they also learn Arabic besides other religious curriculum. In recent years, the China Islamic
Institute has sent nearly 200 students to study in Islamic universities in Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, etc. Most of these students go back to China to become Imams (religious leaders), who teach younger generations about Islamic teachings, Arabic, and Persian (fig. 48). Most Sini calligraphers receive their earlier education in Arabic through those Imams, and some famous Sini master calligraphers, such as Haji Noor Deen, received part of their education in Arabic speaking countries that emphasize the importance of Arabic calligraphy, such as Egypt.

Change of Tools and Practice:

When looking at the major characteristics of Sini Calligraphy, one can say that of the many forms of Islamic calligraphy in China, there is one that can be properly referred to as a classic style of Sini. Despite the common usage of the word for describing any distinctly Chinese forms of Islamic calligraphy, Sini specifically refers to a rounded, flowing script, whose letters are distinguished by the use of thick and tapered effects made by the brush. This only can be achieved by the one writing tool that distinguishes Sini from any other forms of Arabic calligraphy. The use of the Chinese writing brush instead of the *qalam* was a major factor in presenting Sini calligraphy in this form in earlier times. The script used for the placards bearing the *tasmiya*, or invocation, that almost habitually hangs above the main entrance or from a roof beam of the prayer hall in mosques in eastern China are mostly written with a brush first before being carved or

---


93 Chinese Heritage Newsletter: http://www.chinaheritagenewsletter.org/features.php?searchterm=005_calligraphy.inc&issue=005, 11/06/11
inscribed. For a long time, the brush was used to practice Sini in different parts of China as an inherited practice from the Chinese calligraphic tradition. The writing tool favored by Arabic calligraphers elsewhere is the wooden or reed pen, known as the qalam, shaped to a nib of a thickness and width that varies according to the calligraphic style. Up until fifty years ago, and despite the availability of a range of hair brushes used for Chinese and Sini calligraphy, the basic tools used for hand-copying Islamic texts and curriculum books in Chinese Muslim madrasas by students remained much the same as those used in Iran or Egypt. The same is the case for the choice of paper, despite the availability in China of fine paper of many different grades; hard parchment remained the material of choice for copying manuscripts.

The writing tools and material used for Sini ornamental calligraphy have not been standardized by calligraphers as they have been in the practice of hand-copying texts (in this case the use of the reed pen). Short bristled brushes and wooden spatulas are commonly used as well as many materials which can be embellished with calligraphic motifs: fine paper, wood, stone and porcelain (fig. 49 & 50). Nevertheless, despite the fact that using the reed pen has been the foundation of calligraphic artistry, and hand-copying of texts defines many of the formal characteristics of decorative calligraphy, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the introduction of the cheap printed books that turned hand-copying into an old-fashioned art, as students stopped copying books by

---

94 Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang, Interview, Nov. 12, 2011.
96 Ibid.
When asked, Haji Noor Deen stated that ornamental Islamic calligraphy in China today is most commonly written on fine paper using a wooden spatula or a broad, short-bristled brush, and not the round writing brush that is the Chinese calligrapher’s tool, but most likely hard brushes and reed pens are used in private calligraphy schools and workshops. He also stated that large calligraphic works and the very ornamental ones are most likely to use reed pens by contrast to the use of the brush in old times.98

Haji Noor Deen also categorized the style of scripts produced by writing tools used for Arabic calligraphy in China now. The use of the Chinese writing brush has become very rare, and was originally used to write on plaques for mosques and ornamental scripts in the copies of the Qur’an, as it produced a type of stroke that allowed the calligrapher to control how thin or thick the line should be. The reed pen is most commonly used by Chinese Muslim calligraphers nowadays and it produces lines that maintain the same thickness throughout the text, and was reserved mostly for writing religious books. Also new writing tools were welcomed, such as using a type of grass that grows in southern China, and creates a special decorative effect when used as a writing tool.99

On the other hand, Haji Noor Deen also talks about the change of writing supports in modern day China. Rice paper or 宣纸 xuanzhi paper, known in China, is replaced with a variety of materials that include enamel, leather, parchment, and cloth (mostly linen rather than the traditional use of silk). This change in support material is due to the

---

97 Ibid.

98 Haji Noor Deen, Interview, 11/06/11.

99 Ibid.
change of the writing tool, as linen and stronger types of paper are more durable and accepting to the use of the sharp reed pen or spatula.\footnote{100}

To be able to understand the changes in the style of Sini calligraphy, and the way the different forms of this script were compromised to fit within the frame of modern Arabic calligraphy, I have done a case study involving a list of works by the most famous Chinese Muslim calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen. I have analyzed his works stylistically while also taking into consideration his artistic practice, education, and to what extent he has preserved the major aspects of the classic Sini style. To consolidate the argument, another Sini calligrapher is taken as an example for better support, and to predict the future of this unique script in light of the ongoing changes facing it due to the absence of guiding standards for a common formal Sini script and the limited access to artistic learning in the field of Chinese Muslim Calligraphy and art.

**Case Study: The Calligraphy of Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang**

One of the most famous master Sini calligraphers in the twenty-first century is Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang (fig.51). According to his official website and biography in his latest book, *Arabic Calligraphy in the Chinese Tradition*, he was born in 1963, in Yucheng, Shandong Province.\footnote{101} His early education involved learning Arabic and studying the Qur’an at a mosque school (*madrasa* or *jingtang*), where he received basic calligraphic education under the Imam of the mosque. Haji Noor Deen’s interest in

\footnote{100}{Ibid.}

\footnote{101}{Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang official website: http://www.hajinoordeen.com/ach.html, October 14th, 2011.
Arabic calligraphy encouraged him to travel to Egypt, where he stayed in al-Minufiya Province, on the Nile delta, and studied calligraphy under a local calligrapher named Haji Mohammad Sa’d. Haji Noor Deen spent eight years in Egypt, where he learned the basics and the different styles of Arabic calligraphy. In 1997, Haji Noor Deen was awarded the Certificate of Arabic Calligrapher in Egypt, becoming the first Chinese artist to be honored with this prestigious award. In July 2008, Haji Noor Deen travelled to Istanbul and became the first Chinese student to study traditional Arabic calligraphy taught by the distinguished calligrapher and Shaykh, Hassan Çelebi, as well as the artist/calligrapher Davut Beletaş.

Upon returning to China, Haji Noor Deen tried to establish an educational system that would preserve Sini calligraphy through education. In 2000, Haji Noor Deen taught the first regular and systematic Arabic calligraphy course at the Zhengzhou Islamic College in Henan province. On October 31, 2009, Haji Noor Deen formally inaugurated the Chinese House for the Arts of Islamic Arabic Calligraphy Guang Ji De Studio, also in Zhengzhou. He mentions that planning and preparation for the Chinese House have been extensive, since the initial conception in December 28, 2000.

Haji Noor Deen's education, along with his mastery of calligraphic craft, has enabled him to give lectures and conduct workshops in some famous institutions around the world, including: The Zaytuna Institute in California (where he has lectured and displayed his work several times, most recently in 2010); Harvard University; Cambridge

---

102 Haji Noor Deen, Interview, May, 2010.
103 Haji Noor Deen Webpage.
104 Haji Noor Deen, Interview, May, 2010.
University; University of California, Berkeley; and Boston University. He has also exhibited in a number of countries including the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Qatar, Mauritius and Kuwait. His works have been displayed in galleries and museums around the world, often as the first Chinese/Arabic calligrapher, including the British Museum, San Francisco Asian Art Museum, National Museum of Scotland and Harvard University Art Museum (Sackler).\footnote{Haji Noor Deen Webpage: http://www.hajinoordeen.com/, Nov. 2012.}

In *Arabic Calligraphy in the Chinese Tradition*, Haji Noor Deen displays around 162 pieces of his work. The collection in this book represents a good example of the modern status of Sini script. It shows the changes in style and form caused by China’s opening up to Middle Eastern and Central Asian Muslim cultures. In his work, Haji Noor Deen tends to pick and choose, compromise, and appropriate different forms of letters so as to make them more acceptable to the taste of Muslims both inside and outside China. He has kept some aspects of Sini, compromised other aspects, and inserted many new aspects to the body of the script, sometimes indicating “Chineseness” in the overall design of the work, rather than the script itself.

In around 84 of the works displayed in his book, Haji Noor Deen, has abandoned the stylistic tapered endings of the letters, a major characteristic of Sini script, while keeping the *feibai* (flying white) effect, an aspect integral to Chinese calligraphy in the running and cursive scripts, achieved by dry ink, and the quick movement of the reed pen rather than the brush.
When looking at some examples from his book, in which he maintained the flying white effect, but used a solid reed pen or wooden spatula, vertical letters look very similar to their Arabic counterparts in the Middle Eastern and Central Asian styles of Islamic calligraphy. Looking at figures 52 through 55, they share the same features of the very long vertical letters, with the pointed triangular tips (which is an indication of the use of the solid wood spatula/reed pen as opposed to the round tapered tips achieved by a brush). The diamond shape dots, the very pointed tips of the letter sin ($س/س$) in the Basmallah and the Shahadah in figures 52, 54, and 55, as well as the shape of grammatical marks are also an indication of the use of a reed pen or wooden spatula, as evidenced by the clear cut nature and the angularity of these dots.

The effects produced by using a reed pen in writing calligraphy appear most readily in the tips of the vertical letters, the joints and endings of the horizontal letter, and the dots. The difference is clear when we compare the above to figure 56, which is one of the few examples in the book in which the calligraphy was executed using a brush. The thick tapered verticals and the curves of the horizontal letters such as the mim ($م/م$) show that the writing tool used in this example is the brush rather than a reed pen.

Another form of appropriating, picking and choosing in the calligraphy of Haji Noor Deen is his manipulation of the use of the square form of Chinese characters. Haji Noor Deen followed a common tradition among Chinese calligraphers of writing characters and words in an imaginary square, but to make it more suitable to the eye of the Muslim viewer in the heartlands of Islam he turned the square forty-five degrees to form a diamond shape. In this case the form of words contains both meaning and
decorative elements, as diamond shape motifs are common in Islamic decorative arts. In figures 57 through 59, Haji Noor Deen uses this composition, also continuing to use the reed pen. Some of these pieces are highly decorative as in the one in figure 59, where Haji Noor Deen used the curves of the horizontal lines to give a rounder effect of the square sides thereby making it look more like a rosette.

In some cases, Haji Noor Deen uses other ways to express the Chinese flavor. In figure 50, he used material to indicate “Chineseness” rather than the script itself; he used flower-printed calligraphy paper which is very commonly used by Chinese calligraphers.

When writing Sini calligraphy in the classic style (late Yuan/Ming), Haji Noor Deen also followed the Arabic tradition, from the Middle East and Persia, of giving more elaborate tips to the vertical letters. The thick tapered endings of the letters in figures 60 through 64 are exaggerated and manipulated to suggest different Chinese and Islamic decorative motifs. This influence is more apparent when comparing these examples to the famous Kufic scripts in figure 65. Other examples of his work have different forms of endings that are very elaborate as, in figure 66.

In some cases Haji Noor Deen goes as far as including non-Chinese, typically Middle Eastern, motifs in his works’ composition. An example of this is in figure 65, where he used the North African/Middle Eastern hand motif (khamsah), to form the word Allah in white at the top, and then inserted the first part of the Shahadah in Sini script in a circle in black ink. He surrounded the whole composition with the second part of the Shahadah, written with a reed pen.
While keeping the traditional format of using the seal and sometimes signing his name in Chinese, Haji Noor Deen also signs his name in Arabic. In some cases, Haji Noor Deen uses scripts other than Sini to form a composition that is very Chinese, such as forming shapes of vegetation that would recall Chinese birds and flower paintings, or using words to form a Chinese temple or a pagoda. The tradition of using words to form shapes has been used for hundreds of years in the Middle East and Central Asia (such as the Tugraa zoomorphic forms during the Ottoman Empire) to compensate for the aniconic nature of Islamic art. There is an example in Chinese calligraphy that follows this tradition as well; it is the stele inscription of the Bamboo poem by Lord Guan (160-220), a famous general in the Three Kingdoms Period, which was inscribed during the Qing dynasty (fig. 68). In this stele bamboo leaves form the strokes of the Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{106} Figures 69 through 71 are good examples of this technique. In Figure 70 Haji Noor Deen uses a form of Thulth script to repeat the Shahadah and prayers several times to compose the form of a Chinese pagoda. In Figure 71, he uses text written in Sini script with a brush to form the dome of a mosque in the Central Asian onion-dome style.

Haji Noor Deen also followed the tradition attributed by scholars such as Bashir to Liu Zhi of manipulating Arabic words to carry both Chinese and Arabic meanings by rotating the Arabic word ninety degrees. The resulting shape forms words that look Chinese when read vertically and Arabic when read horizontally. Some of these manipulated words are easy to decipher by both Chinese and Arabic readers, such as the words “Peace” in figure 72 and the word “Allah” in figure 73. When hanging the piece of

\textsuperscript{106} Harvard University Digital Sources and Libretti: http://vc.lib.harvard.edu/vc/deliver/~rubbings/olvwork279605, 12/4/2012.
work vertically, one who reads Chinese will be able to read the Chinese word, but after
rotating the work ninety degrees to the right, an Arabic reader will be able to read it.
Some forms of this style are very abstract and difficult to read in Arabic, such as figure
74, in which the form of the Arabic words are extremely manipulated and distorted, we
only get to know the meaning that says (*Alhamdulillah/praise to Allah*) from Noor Deen’s
title.

Haji Noor Deen also tends to frame his calligraphy in a frame of texts, which is
also new to the Chinese tradition of calligraphy. It is most likely inspired by the Middle
Eastern practice of calligraphy, where artists tend to frame the calligraphy with text. This
appears in Figures 75 and 76, where Haji Noor Deen framed the *Shahadah* in both figures
by repeating *Shahadahs* around the major script.

**Haji Abdul Hakim:**

Another major Chinese Muslim calligrapher is Haji Abdul Hakim, or Haji Liu
Jingyi (fig. 77). According to his website, he was so attracted to the art of calligraphy
since childhood that he started studying Chinese calligraphy under the famous Chinese
calligrapher Guo Zhenduo. Consistent with the education that most Chinese Muslims
receive, Haji Abdul Hakim first acquired a solid foundation in Chinese
calligraphy techniques and skills.107 But as a teenager Haji Abdul Hakim decided to study

---

Arabic calligraphy under one of the most famous Arabic calligraphers in the Eastern part of China, Imam Cao Jinzao.\textsuperscript{108}

Haji Abdul Hakim’s ability to learn the skills of calligraphic writing in Chinese and Arabic helped him to produce work that gained international appreciation. Haji Abdul Hakim used the traditional Chinese method (in this case the Chinese brush) to write Arabic calligraphy in the Sini style. But soon, like most Chinese Muslim calligraphers, he started using the common reed pen and wooden spatula in his works. In his works he uses Arabic calligraphy combined with the translation of the Arabic text into Chinese. He uses several well-established Chinese scripts in his writing, such as the rough and strong Da Kai style, the rounder in form, plump and graceful Zhong kai style, and the Xiao kai style, which is smooth.\textsuperscript{109} On the other hand, he also uses a variety of standard Arabic calligraphic scripts in his work, including the Thulth and Diwani. Many of Haji Abdul Hakim's artworks are accompanied by extensive Chinese translations of the Arabic calligraphy, which distinguishes and makes him different from most other Chinese Muslim calligraphers such as Haji Noor Deen.\textsuperscript{110}

When looking at the few examples of Haji Abdulhakim’s works displayed in his website, it seems that the practice of using the solid wooden spatula or the reed pen continues in his work. In figures 78 and 79, he writes Arabic calligraphy with a hint of “Chineseness” in the form of using the dry ink to maintain the flying white effect, while the sharp semi triangular, clear cut tips of his vertical letters are indications of the use of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid] \textsuperscript{108}
\item[Ibid.] \textsuperscript{109}
\item[Ibid.] \textsuperscript{110}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the reed pen. On the other hand, he used a brush to write the Chinese translation of the text, and his signature. Another hint of “Chineseness” is his use of the hanging scroll and couplet format in his works, which is an indication of his early education in the Chinese calligraphic tradition.

**Sini Calligraphy Outside of China:**

Sini calligraphy is not only practiced within China. There are calligraphers who practice forms of Sini calligraphy outside China, especially in Japan and South East Asia. These non-Chinese calligraphers are also influenced by the modern practices of Chinese calligraphers.

Kouchi Honda (fig. 80) is a Japanese Muslim calligrapher who started his career by learning the basics of Arabic and the rules of calligraphy. He became so well-established in the art of Arabic calligraphy that he is now one of the most famous Islamic calligraphers in the world.\(^{111}\) He has exhibited his works in places as far flung as Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Iraq, Japan, and Malaysia.

Honda’s examples of calligraphy in the Chinese mood tend to follow the modern school of highly decorative, extremely exaggerated forms. Bashir mentions that Honda tends to be more experimental with the script, departing from traditions by presenting calligraphy robbed of its nobility and status (in some of his works, he does not follow the very neat, well-organized composition of writing Arabic or Sini, preferring more

\(^{111}\) Mohamed Bashir et al., *Islamic Calligraphy*, p. i.
expressive presentations) (see fig. 82), and departing from the norms of traditions towards greater expressiveness.112

When looking at examples of his work, we see that Honda tends to follow the rules of highly decorative forms when he writes Sini script. He most likely used a brush in the example shown in figure 81, where he tends to exaggerate the width and the length of the tips of the letters to create decorative forms, which is a technique that is followed in the Kufic script, as mentioned earlier.

The departure towards expressiveness and innovation in his work is seen clearly when he tends to use more abstract and light ink in writing forms of Sini in the flying white style in as in figure 82. The pervasive trend among Chinese Muslim calligraphers in China of expressing “Chineseness” through overall composition rather than the style of the script, appears in Honda’s works when he departs from the Sini script into the Thulth, but indicates “Chineseness” through composing forms of Chinese architecture using text to form the three-tier pavilion in figure 83, which reminds one of Haji Noor Deen’s pagoda, which also uses the Thulth script.

**Conclusion:**

Sini Calligraphy has faced many changes since the eighteenth century. Calligraphers became more receptive and open to external influences as they tried to compromise, pick and choose, and manipulate forms of the script to be more acceptable in the eyes and for the taste of foreign viewers, especially those in the Middle East and

---

112 Ibid. p.ii.
Central Asia. These changes in style and practices resulted in what we may call Chinese Muslim calligraphy, but not Sini calligraphy. What we see today is more work in standard Arabic scripts with “Chineseness” expressed in effects such as the flying white, or indicated through the overall composition. Instead of trying to have the classic form of Sini standardized and become established among other famous standard Arabic scripts, Chinese Muslim calligraphers tended to compromise their style to meet the needs of the art market. These changes, along with the absence of any approved standardized form of Sini by the calligraphers, as well as the scarcity of research and systematic calligraphic education, threaten the preservation of an important part of the cultural heritage of China’s Muslims. The more decorative and innovative the style becomes, without any basis of reference, the more the genuine and original stylistic history of this script is going to be lost over time.
Chapter III: Challenges facing the preservation of Sini Calligraphy

Despite the fact that Sini script represents a unique form of Arabic/Chinese calligraphy, preserving it faces several challenges that vary between social, economic, political, and educational. These challenges and problems threaten preserving this style of Sini calligraphy as a distinctive form of material and cultural history of Chinese Muslims. Politically, periods of cutting and resuming connections with the Muslim countries in Central Asia and Arabia contributed to the development of this style of calligraphy. The style developed by blending aspects of Chinese and Islamic calligraphic arts, as seen in the previous chapters. When the Yuan dynasty enhanced Islamic artistic trends by bringing in artists from the Muslim lands under their control to China, Chinese Muslim artists in general were able to access several forms of art and calligraphy and the influence was bidirectional (the Muslim world was also influenced by Chinese art and artifacts, especially porcelain). Aspects of this influence appeared in the form of adopting famous Arabic calligraphic styles such as the use of standard scripts in Yuan period mosques (see the use of Kufic in a fourteenth century inscription from Quanzhou in figure 84), and then the use of Thulth that became the basis for Sini script.

On the other hand, during the time of the Ming dynasty (known theoretically as the golden age of Sini calligraphy), these relations were limited and multiple regulations on travel were enforced in later days of the Ming. Thus, Chinese Muslim calligraphers had to be more dependent on their own environment to develop the Sini style of calligraphy with its distinct Chinese taste, building it upon what they had already learned in the previous periods of good connections with the Muslim lands. Nowadays, with
unprecedented openness to the Arab and Muslim world, Chinese Muslim artists lean more towards their Muslim identity. China’s modern relations with the Islamic world have both a positive and a negative influence on Sini as a distinctive artistic style of calligraphy. Despite the fact that these relations allow Muslim students to study or to get to know more about Middle Eastern Islamic Art and culture, the situation also challenges Chinese Muslim calligraphers to maintain their distinct style while competing with other calligraphers from Muslim and Arab countries.

Not only external policies of the state, but aspects of Arabization and Sinicization within Chinese Muslim communities affect the artistic production of the Hui in one way or the other. Despite the fact that famous Sini calligraphers such as Haji Noor Deen and Haji Abdulhakim give a hint in their works of a tendency to revive their Muslim Chinese identity, many Chinese Muslims, affected by the Chinese government’s negative reaction to pan-Islamic sentiments, have become more assimilated to Chinese culture. The State’s reaction to Pan-Islamic movements appears to have accelerated the acculturation policies, making Muslims in China become more integrated and accustomed to the Chinese culture rather than the Muslim one. This has led to a growing ignorance of the language in which Sini is written. It is understandable that mainstream culture affects Chinese Muslims’ thoughts and lifestyle, but being more Chinese is also a result of governmental attempts and policies to harmonize and integrate the Muslims and other ethnic groups in the Chinese nation’s texture, to maintain the stability and unity of the state. This acculturation process affects the Arabic calligraphy market in China, which in turn directs
calligraphers’ attention towards the external market; hence, they are more likely to produce works accepted by their Arab customers.

Moreover, both Chinese public and Islamic education play a major role in the changes and the challenges facing Sini calligraphy. The scarcity of schools or courses that teach the principles of this artistic style does not only threaten the style, but might lead to losing it eventually.

In this chapter I will be discussing the challenges facing the preservation of Sini script and maintaining its distinct features, and also factors behind these challenges, and the influence of every factor on Sini calligraphy.

**Sinization and the use of Arabic language:**

Since the Tang dynasty, Muslims were able to learn, live, and intermarry with Chinese women, and although few acquired a Chinese classical education, some were able to obtain imperial examination degrees under the Tang. According to Lipman, by the twelfth century Chinese Muslims were able to take official positions and even to marry from the imperial palace. This freedom for them to intermarry with Chinese women continued through the Song. The Yuan tended to absorb the Chinese culture and live within its concepts and classics; so did the Muslims whom they brought from the West. Many Muslims tended to learn Chinese classics, and Muslim artisans tended to establish themselves and artistic production within proximity to Chinese.

---

113 Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p.29
114 Ibid. p.35
Contrary to the Tang and Song policies, Sinicization efforts by the Chinese empire became more intense during the Ming, when policies and laws forced foreigners to marry Chinese women in order to be civilized from the Chinese perspective. Since such foreigners were considered dangerous (potential rebels), they must be incorporated in conscious Sinicization. Mongols and Semu who lived in China were forced to marry Chinese women, and could not marry from among their own communities.\textsuperscript{115} During the Qing, and despite the occasional violence in Muslim communities based upon Sufi sectarian issues, or even anti-Qing maladministration, and because of the anti-Muslim sentiment, the Sinicization process continued. To encourage this process of considering the Hui as part of the empire, it was reported in statements issued by the Qing emperors such as the Qianlong emperor that Muslims are the children of the empire.\textsuperscript{116} Socially and politically, the Qing period witnessed the emergence of the Muslim warlords such as Ma Yonglin, who surrendered in 1895 after he had been an anti-Qing leader under Ma Zhanao. His son, Ma Fuxiang, gained a good reputation after battling against bandits in Ningxia after 1911, and became its ruler in the early Chinese Republican era.\textsuperscript{117}

Many Islamic cultural and social aspects have changed due to the Sinicization process. Even when writing about Islam, we have seen earlier that the Muslims of central and eastern China in the \textit{Han Kitab} writings tailored Islamic concepts to fit a Neo-Confucian framework. When looking at names of Muslim figures in Chinese history,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid. p.41
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid. p.98
\item \textsuperscript{117} Lipman gives more details about Ma Fuxiang and other Muslim leaders and their status in Chinese history in his \textit{Familiar Strangers}, p. 167-200.
\end{itemize}
such as Liu Zhi, Wu Sunqie, Ma Fuxiang etc., we can notice that the Sinicization process reached a level where Muslims started to take Chinese names. Raphael Israeli talks about Chinese Muslims adopting a double standard of behavior in life: that is, Chinese within the mainstream non-Muslim society, and Islamic within the Muslim community. When dealing with non-Muslim Chinese, the Hui used their Chinese names and spoke Chinese in public. They also pasted up red Chinese strips outside their homes like all other Chinese.\textsuperscript{118}

Modern life and Sinicization policies played a major role in the change of the mainstream Chinese Muslims’ thinking and culture. This change had its impact in the use of Islam’s mother tongue, the Arabic language itself, within the Chinese Muslim community. While Israeli talks about the usage of Chinese with some Arabic/Persian words among Chinese Muslims, there are many accounts by foreign researchers that show Chinese Muslims becoming more assimilated into Chinese culture and life style and the use of Chinese language.

The lack of emphasis on using Arabic or Persian as a common language among Muslims in China today is a result of the acculturation process, and a result of the population distribution of Muslims all over China, which is a kind of diaspora, where Chinese Muslims live scattered in mosque-centered communities within every Chinese province. According to Jean Berlie, the Chinese Muslims known as the Hui are spread everywhere, and they occupy the whole Chinese space. Muslims are numerous in north,
northeast, northwest, southwest China, and even in the central provinces such as Sichuan.\textsuperscript{119}

Like any other people around the world, Chinese Muslims became very busy with the demands of daily life, so that they have begun to leave some aspects of Muslim life behind, and be more integrated into mainstream Han Chinese life. The Hui Muslims are described by authors like Berlie as being flexible as bamboo in adapting to Chinese civilization. Despite the Qur’an’s inflexibility, Chinese Muslims are of a high adaptability to Chinese culture, such that Islam in China is tempered by Sinicization, and the acculturation and the penetration of Han culture into the Hui’s everyday life is noticeable.\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, the need to improve their socio-economic lives pushes Chinese Muslims to learn what can help them obtain good jobs to be able to live a good life. In his book, Machida Kazuhiko talks about the impact of the social and economic aspects of the life of Chinese Muslims on the use of Arabic among them. Kazuhiko indicates that while visiting China for research and survey purposes, he noticed that Chinese Muslims are very busy with their economic and social lives, such that they have begun to move away from learning Arabic. Thus, the use of Arabic is becoming more limited to prayers and service at the mosque, and the need to learn the language is fading over time. He also mentioned that a few people who are religious or work in the field of Islamic studies tend to study the language, but other than this, the use of Arabic is very limited.\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Ibid. pp. 8-10.
\item Machida Kazuhiko. \textit{Aspects of Arabic Script Cultures in China}, Japan: Kenkyu, Wa Kushoppu, 2003, pp 139-152.
\end{thebibliography}
Logically, only those who are willing to pursue Islamic education among the Hui will be willing to learn and excel in Arabic or Persian, but not the entire Hui population all over China. People become more influenced by the mainstream culture and language surrounding them, and the limited use of Arabic only in greetings or religious ceremonies like reading the Qur’an or praying. The limited use of Arabic, and the loss of interest in learning it, is a major factor that directly influences the Hui domestic art market and the need for Arabic calligraphy within China. Moreover, this limited need of the domestic market of Chinese Muslims for Arabic calligraphy, pushes Sini calligraphers towards the external Arab/Central Asian market where the language itself is understandable and more appreciated. Sini calligraphers in turn are most likely to produce works suiting the taste of the external market with more of a non-Chinese style expressed in these works, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Sini Calligraphy and Chinese Islamic Education:

Despite the fact that the Sinicization process has resulted in many Chinese Muslims being more assimilated into the Chinese lifestyle and education, those who chose to learn more about their religion tend to learn Arabic. Using Arabic in religion is an essential part of Islam. The Qur’an should only be recited in Arabic, and the prescribed individual or congregational prayers must be performed in Arabic as well.

There are two types of Islamic education in China. The first is called Jingtang jiaoyu (open schools at the mosques to provide Islamic education). The efforts to establish this kind of education began in the middle of the sixteenth century, when Hu
Dengzhou (1522-1579) initiated the reform of Mosque Education. The scattered distribution of the Muslim population in China provided conditions for the growth of Jingtang jiaoyu, which is mosque based education. But after Hu’s initiative, the Jingtang jiaoyu created a trans-regional network to achieve standardization of curricula. Wherever there is a Muslim community, there is a mosque, and it is most convenient for the Muslim community to attain knowledge of their religion through the mosque education.

The Jingtang jiaoyu education is a combination of the traditional education in Arabic countries of the Middle Ages and the old-style Chinese private school education. From the time of the Ming dynasty to the present, the Jingtang jiaoyu has produced several educational schools and teaching styles, such as the Shaanxi School, presented by Feng Yangwu and Zhang Shaoshan, focusing on Islamic philosophy and Quranic Commentary. Other schools such as the Shandong School focus on the 13 scriptures in Arabic and Persian, and the study of Sufism.

In modern days, Jingtang jiaoyu has developed extensively. Jingtang jiaoyu is open for all Muslim children and the mosques provide free accommodation and tuition for any student who comes to study. Imams also teach for free. The school is divided into two sections: the primary school section in which Muslim children get the basic Islamic education, like learning the Arabic alphabet, Islamic religious teachings, Qur’an recitation, and prayer knowledge. The other section is the Islamic University section, in which the students receive systematic religious education and Islamic ethical education.

---

124 Ibid. p. 36.
and the study lasts for 6-7 years. In terms of academics, both Islamic and common cultures are taught, and there are two kinds of courses offered: the basic courses which include Arabic, Persian, rhetoric and logic; and the professional courses including Quranic commentary, Hadith, Sharia', and Sufi philosophy. Graduates of the university level go to mosques in different places to be Imams (Religious Leaders).125

The other type of Islamic education in China is called the Systematic School education, which started in the 1920s and the 1930s, under the influence of the May 4th Movement of 1919. Muslim intellectuals and activists set up Islamic schools in different parts of China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, and other places to modernize and enhance Muslim education. The school education in this form is independent from the mosque, and the curriculum includes both religion and social sciences. Starting in the 1930s, students from these schools were sent abroad to Islamic countries for more education and research. After the founding of the PRC, the Chinese government supported a national high-level Islamic school, known as the Islamic Institute in Beijing, in 1955. The goals of this school are to foster educationally qualified Islamic personnel. The Islamic Institute of China practices all modern teaching methods to make sure that their students have enough knowledge in mosque affairs, theory and culture, and also foreign affairs as well as Communist doctrine.126

The role of mosque and school education in preserving Islamic heritage in China is very vital. These learning networks not only helped to teach Chinese Muslims their religion, but have also acted for a long time as the main source to learn Arabic in China.

125 Ibid. p. 37.
126 Ibid. p. 38
Moreover, most of the major Islamic literary works are products of these educational systems. The production of the most famous *Han Kitab*, a collection of texts, written by Chinese Muslims, which synthesized Islam and Confucianism, took place in the early eighteenth century, within the context of an educational network that was influenced by both the Muslim and even more so the Chinese means of education and literary production.\(^{127}\)

Unfortunately, when it comes to Sini calligraphy, although originally the mosque education in particular has had a major role in the development of this script, the current Islamic educational system tends to ignore art education. Islamic religious education in China not only preserved the Islamic legacy of Chinese Muslims, but also was the main factor behind the existence and evolution of Sini calligraphy, through preserving the language in which the script is written. Thanks to the mosque education in China, the art of Arabic calligraphy has been able to exist and survive among Chinese Muslims for more than a thousand years, because mosque education preserved the language, although not the style of the script. Contrary to the situation in northwestern China, making quills was one of the first skills that Chinese Muslim students at *madrasas* in the eastern part of China were required to master. Up till fifty years ago, *madrasa* students in Hezhou, parts of Gansu, and other places would not begin their formal lessons until they had written out proper copies of their text books. Thus, students were not only learning the Arabic alphabet, but also receiving a sort of writing training in the form of copying.

Unfortunately, this type of training does not exist today, due to the availability of cheaply printed books.\textsuperscript{128}

The history of Chinese Islamic calligraphy witnessed the emergence of many leading calligraphers in different places at different stages of Chinese Islamic history. Many of these leading calligraphers were products of Chinese Muslim \textit{madrasa}, but also received training in Chinese calligraphy, prompted by their personal desire to take it as a career. Unfortunately, despite how great and influential the Islamic educational network in China is, the system focuses more on the Islamic teachings rather than artistic learning. Only a few people practice the art of Arabic calligraphy, most likely prompted by the Chinese values of practicing calligraphy as a form of self-cultivation (It was also expected that Confucian literati master the brush, and for the Civil examination they had to rewrite the Classics from memory). Most of these institutions care more about getting students to learn the language rather than the art. The teaching of this wonderful art was limited to either mosques or other non-governmental Islamic educational entities. It did not find an opportunity to be part of public school curriculum. This affected Sini calligraphy in a negative way, as the art has not been taken as a subject of academic research, nor have its features and origins been formally set down in writing by any Chinese calligrapher or art expert.\textsuperscript{129}

Sini calligraphy suffers from ignorance in terms of researching its origins and development. It seems that only calligraphers who practice this script try to pass it on to

\textsuperscript{128} Oktasari, p.15.

their students in order to keep it going, while the study of this form of art as a part of Chinese Muslim cultural heritage hardly exists within the Islamic educational system in China.\textsuperscript{130} When it comes to teaching Sini script as a style of calligraphy in some private workshops, the style faces other problems. Although Sini calligraphy has its own characteristics, there are no specific rules or conventional theories to guide students through their educational process. Even calligraphers who practice the art in the present day focus more on the technique of producing the art than the style when defining the script itself. The differences of teaching techniques of several madrasas has left the art of Arabic calligraphy in China at a low level without any clear direction for development.\textsuperscript{131} Although famous Sini calligraphers try to elevate the status of this art, these efforts need to be accompanied by organized artistic and historic education. The absence of any such artistic educational system in turn threatens the preservation of this unique script from extinction. And being open to the Middle Eastern and other Muslims culture, the style is increasingly influenced by the artistic trends from these regions, and without a solid basis of stylistic identification, the script might lose its distinctive features.

**Sini Script and Islamic Identity:**

The case of Chinese Muslims (the Hui) is different from any other Muslim group that lives in a non-Muslim country, in that they are not seen as foreigners with a different religion (a paradigm in the Communist PRC does not take religion as a valid criterion in

\textsuperscript{130} Haji Youssif Chenjin Hui, Chinese Muslim Calligraphy- Arabic: http://www.sawwan1600.jeeran.com/archive/2007/11/380551.html, Nov. 2011

ethnic categorization), or a different language; they are both Chinese and Muslims. In contrast, the word non-Chinese can be applied to any other Muslim ethnic group in China, such as the Uyghur.

Although it seems contradictory to be both Muslim and Chinese, the Hui have been able to maintain their Muslim identity while being integrated in the Chinese society. Although affected by the Sinicization process, when possible, many Hui have showed a tendency towards being more receptive to issues related to their Muslim identity and the lands of their ancestors in many instances. The elites and religious personnel among the Hui look to the Islamic countries in the West as a source for developing their Islamic education, and reviving their Islamic spirit. This tendency appeared in the coming of Sufism to China, which inclined Muslims in the northwest frontier towards the heartlands of their religion. From as early as even before the mid-eighteenth century the western lands were recognized as the land of the Hui’s ancestors and their source of inspiration. Even during the times when relations with the lands of their ancestors were cut, we notice that literati Muslims in the eastern cities of China, such as Wang Daiyu, recognized Arabia as the Muslims’ ancestral home and the original source of their teachings.

When we look at the modern times, we notice that even religiously-oriented political movements in the Middle East, Central Asia and Arabia have influenced the thinking of the Hui within China. For example the fundamentalist movements in the Middle East growing from the Wahhabi ideology, such as the Muslim Brotherhood,

---


133 Ibid. p.76.
influenced the rise of the *Ikhwan* movement among Chinese Muslims that opposed Sufism in early and mid twentieth century China.\(^\text{134}\)

In terms of calligraphy, Haji Noor Deen mentions that the techniques and the style of Sini calligraphy in modern days, due to increased communication with the Middle East and Muslim countries, have been influenced by the calligraphic practices and styles coming from these Muslim countries. Young Chinese Muslim calligraphers look at the Middle Eastern and Central Asian calligraphic styles as the standard styles of Arabic calligraphy from which they should learn how to practice Arabic calligraphy. Thus these styles are major sources of their learning. He mentions also that the internet has offered many Middle Eastern calligraphic works to young Chinese calligraphers to imitate, to the level that their artistic production has become very similar to these Middle Eastern works and similar to each others’ works. Thus, the individuality that distinguishes each calligrapher’s work is fading away.\(^\text{135}\)

---

**Sini Calligraphy and the PRC’s International Relations, and the needs of the Art Market:**

From the early days of Islam in China, artistic influence has been moving both ways. The tendency of Chinese Muslims to produce art for export to the Muslim world played a major role in the development of the Sini calligraphy as an artistic form. Vessels and items that were meant for export or use by local Chinese Muslims were decorated

\(^{134}\) Ibid. pp. 204-211.  
\(^{135}\) Haji Noor Deen.
with verses from the Qur’an. For example, during the region of the Zhengde emperor (1506-21), many blue and white wares in Arabic shapes and with Arabic inscriptions were produced for export. Chinese Muslim artisans tended to produce pieces of art that would suit the taste of their customers in Central Asia and the Muslim lands, as we have seen in figure 47; they often tended to abandon some aspects of “Chineseness” to make their works acceptable to the eye of non-Chinese customers.

After China’s Opening-up Policy of the 1980s, Chinese Muslims started to look extensively at other Muslim nations in the Middle East and Central Asia for inspiration. For education, in recent years, in line with the cultural exchange agreement between China and some Muslim countries, the China Islamic Institute has sent nearly 200 students to study in Islamic universities in Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, etc. Even before this, the PRC government also encouraged this kind of exchange for political and economic purposes, such as its interests in the oil industry in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. The PRC was in need of recognition by some Muslim countries, and therefore Muslim notables were included in China’s delegations to the Middle East. These delegations were instrumental in the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Egypt, Syria, and Yemen in 1956.

In terms of art, in what seems like part of its international political agenda and its opening up policy, the government of the PRC has been allowing Sini calligraphers to practice their artistic talent openly and with official sanction since the 1980s. The

136 Islamic Art Museum of Malaysia, Six Centuries of Islamic Art in China, p. 16.
137 Zhang, Islam in China, p. 39.
government also allows Muslim calligraphers to market their works, and exhibit them both locally and internationally.\textsuperscript{139} Many famous state figures attend Sini calligraphy galleries inside and outside China. One of the most famous events that involves Sini calligraphy exhibitions is the Annual Arab/Islamic Arts festival in China. Besides accepting participants from the different Muslim groups in China, this festival allows participation of artists from Muslim and Arab countries.\textsuperscript{140}

With the absence of a solid Islamic art education system in China, relations with Muslim countries influenced the practice of art and architecture in China. The Islamic Association, interested in good economic relations with rich countries such as Saudi Arabia, often welcomes new mosque designs, replacing ancient mosques with structures resembling those in Muslim countries.\textsuperscript{141}

Not only in the areas of mosques and religious architecture, these relations have also shaped a new artistic taste that in turn shapes Hui identity. Most of the famous Sini calligraphers have received their artistic education in Muslim countries, with no solid bases for learning the basics of Sini calligraphy, and in order to meet the needs of their customers from these countries, they compromise their artistic style, or they leave some aspects of Sini in favor of those from other styles.

Haji Noor Deen spent nine years of his life studying different kinds of standard Arabic scripts other than Sini in Egypt. In his 2010 book, he compiles some of his works. Looking at them, it is clear that the education he received in Egypt has influenced his

\textsuperscript{139} Haji Noor Deen, p.1
\textsuperscript{141} Brieli, p.15.
style. For example he writes a form of Thulth script in a very expressive way to integrate the Chinese calligraphic aspect of flying white; or he writes any other standard script in a Chinese square format, or within a composition that is very Chinese. The brush movement quality found in Chinese calligraphy still exists in some of his works, and he is one of a few Sini calligraphers who maintained Sini aspects in his works, even when working with other scripts, but he tries to make his works suit the taste of Muslims in China and in the rest of the Muslim world. When looking at figure 85, we see that Haji Noor Deen tends to make the style very decorative and exaggerated when using Sini, and he uses both the reed pen and the brush in such works in order to form overall decorative compositions. In figure 84 he uses the Middle Eastern standard script of Kufi to write *Sura al-Fatiha*.

It seems that the tendency to make the style closer to those in the Middle East and Central Asia is a result of the enhanced relations between China and these countries, as well as the needs of the market. It is also an indication of the Hui artists’ tendency to compete with other Arabic calligraphers in the field. Thus without a solid training in Sini and without emphasizing the basics of this calligraphic practice, the style is destined to lose its distinctiveness.

The reception of Sini calligraphy varies also between admiration and rejection. For collectors of traditional Chinese art, these works are considered not Chinese enough; for Islamic-art collectors, they seem too alien to be truly Islamic. This might have caused Sini Calligraphers to learn other Arabic styles and incorporate them into Sini to be

---

142 Lucien de Guise, From Middle East to Middle Kingdom, Saudi Aramco World website, http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200904/from.middle.east.to.middle.kingdom.htm, 10/10/11
able to satisfy the taste of their customers from these countries. This in turn forces some of them to pick and choose aspects of calligraphic practices and forms that do not resemble Sini calligraphy in its classical forms. For example, the Gansu calligrapher Haji Yossif Qinkuan, born in 1966, studied at the Islamic University of Pakistan, and also attended the Lanqiu Institute of Islamic Teachings. He produces works that are highly influenced by the Middle Eastern and Central Asian standard scripts (see Figure 87).\footnote{China Today: http://www.Chinatoday.com.cn/Arabic/2009n/09/p10.htm. May, 2011.}

Another example for Chinese Muslim calligraphers, who show a tendency in their works to suit the Middle Eastern/Muslim taste, is the Liaoning-born, Haji Yossif Xinjing Hui, who was born in 1938. He graduated from the Chinese Institute of Islamic Teachings in 1960. In his works we can see the tendency to produce calligraphic pieces in Middle Eastern/Central Asian designs, scripts and flavor. His works tends to be more Islamic in appearance and very decorative through the use of colors and Arabesque decorations (see figures 88 & 89).\footnote{China Today: http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/Arabic/...003n2/2aa6.htm. April, 2011.}
Conclusion:

Sini calligraphy is an outcome of hundreds of years of the existence of Arab and Persian merchants and soldiers who lived in China and intermarried with Han women, producing the largest Muslim ethnic group in modern China, known as the Hui. Sini is an integral part of the Sinophone Muslims’ cultural heritage; it reflects their hybrid nature and their distinctive cultural practices.

Although very important in terms of tracing the material culture of Chinese Muslims, Sini has suffered from educational ignorance. Its origins have hardly been traced, and its standards have never been studied by experts. The script was left to the hands and the practices of each calligrapher without being standardized, and with the receptive nature of Chinese Muslims and their tendency towards appreciating their Islamic identity, in addition to their desire to sell their works in the Arab/Muslim markets, they tend to compromise the style’s “Chineseness” to produce works that look more Islamic rather than Chinese.

It is to be hoped that Chinese Muslim artists and calligraphers will start thinking about how to maintain Sini as a distinctive style and help to establish the script as one of the famous Arabic and Muslim styles. The history and the development of several variations of Sini should be extensively studied. Chinese Muslim Islamic institutes should pay more attention to calligraphic and artistic education as part of maintaining Chinese Muslim cultural heritage. Their curriculum must contain courses on Sini, and the status of this calligraphic practice should be elevated as a literati practice on the same level as Chinese calligraphy in the Confucian system.
Chinese Muslim master calligraphers should start thinking about agreeing on a distinctive form and style of Sini and its major variants. They should put down rules for this calligraphic practice, and not leave the practice up to the taste and the practice of each calligrapher. Educational initiatives to systematically teach Sini, such as Haji Noor Deen’s House of Muslim Calligraphy, should be encouraged, utilizing the freedom that is given to Muslim calligraphers by the PRC in the present day.

Perhaps in this way, Chinese Muslim calligraphers can use the freedom of practicing and exhibiting their works inside and outside China to introduce and enhance the existence of their traditional calligraphic practice, rather than compromising the style itself. Sini is an important flower in the garden of Chinese Muslim cultural heritage that should be maintained historically and artistically for future generations of Muslims in China. One way to counter anti-Islamic sentiment is to present the Muslim communities in China to the majority non-Muslim society as people of belief, culture, and distinctive art, and the practice of Sini calligraphy can be part of this process.
Bibliography:


Imam al-Bukhari, *Sahih Albukhari*.


Islamic Art Museum of Malaysia, *Six Centuries of Islamic Art in China*.


Mi Guangjiang, Haji Noor Deen. *Arabic Calligraphy in the Chinese Tradition*.
Zhengzhou, China: the Chinese House for the Arts of Islamic Arabic Calligraphy,
2009.


Okatsari Wiwin, *Sino-Arabic Calligraphy*. International Islamic University, Malaysia,
2009.

*Qur’an*.


Siddiqui, Atiq R. *The Story of Islamic Calligraphy*, Delhi: Sarita Book House,
1990.


Zvi Ben-Dor Benite. *The Dao of Muhammad*. New Haven: Harvard University Press,
2005.

Interviews:

Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang:
  - Skype Interview, May, 2010
  - Phone conversation, Nov. 28th, 2010.
  - Skype Interview, 11/06/11
  - Skype Interview, 12/11/ 2011.
  - Skype Interview, February, 2012.
  - Skype Interview, 2/12/2012
  - Skype Interview, 02/17/2012.

86
Internet Resources:

Arabic Calligraphy Encyclopedia : http://sawwan1600.jeeran.com/archive/
2008/3/515902.html, Dec. 5th. 2010

China Heritage Newsletter Website: http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?
searchterm=005_calligraphy.inc&issue=005. Nov.16th.2010.

Chinese Muslim Khat: http://www.chinesemuslimkhat.com/p/calligraphist.html,
10/11/11

China Today:

Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang official website: http://www.Hajinoordeen.com/
ach.html, October 14th, 2011.

Haji Youssif Chenjin Hui, Chinese Muslim Calligraphy- Arabic: http://

Harvard University Digital Sources and Libretti: http://vc.lib.harvard.edu/vc/deliver/
~rubbings/olvwork279605, 12/4/2012.


Lucien de Guise, From Middle East to Middle Kingdom, Saudi Aramco World website,
http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200904/
from.middle.east.to.middle.kingdom.htm, 10/10/11
Figures & Illustrations:

Fig. 1: the gradual evolution of the Arabic writing system out of Nabatean/Syrian scripts

Fig. 2: Um Aljimal script is fully Nabatean script, but has what looks like proto-Arabic alphabets, like Hamzah (Alph)
Fig. 3: An Namera funerary inscription refers to the famous pre-Islamic poet Imra-ulQais, the script has some signs of early Arabic inclination.

Fig.4: the Himayerits in Yemen
Fig. 5: Nabataean inscription from Umm Aljimal, dated from the sixth century.

Fig. 6: the Message of the prophet to the King of Ethiopia.
Fig. 7: the Message of the prophet to the empire of Byzantium.

Fig. 8: the Message of the prophet to the King of Egypt.
Fig. 9: The Quran of Uthman.

Fig. 10: The Development of Kufic script.
Fig. 11: Different round Arabic scripts.

Fig. 12: Different Arabic scripts.
Fig 13: the Mamluk Qurn script.

Fig 14: the Andalusia script.
Fig 15: the Maghrib script.

Fig. 16: Oracle Bone inscriptions
Fig 17: A drawing of a pottery shard that carry abstract forms of characters, which date back to 4800-4300 BCE, found in Banpo village near Xi’an.

Fig 18: primitive pictographs of for Chinese characters were excavated from the site of the Dawenkou culture, located along the Lingyang River in Shandong Province.

19. Western Zhou wine bronze vessel gu, with pictorial inscriptions, 1000 BCE.
Fig 20: The development of Chinese scripts.

Fig 21: Chinese Muslim Calligraphy: Peacock fan motif on cloth, by Chen Jinhui.
Fig. 22: The Arabic Alphabet.

Fig 23: Decorative style of Sini Calligraphy.
Fig 24: Masha’Allah, Haji Noordin, Showing the movement of the brush.

Fig 25: Diamond Shape Shehada by Haji Noordin
Fig. 26: 8th or 9th Earthenware water pot that was unearthed in 1980 from a Tang dynasty tomb in Yangzhou.

Fig. 27: under glaze pottery shard from late Tang or Five Dynasties,

Fig 28: the earliest Arabic tombstone of Muhammad Alkhalt dated from 1171 CE.
Fig. 29: A tomb Stone from Zaitun, Quanzhou, dated from 1212 CE.

Fig. 30: the ornate Thulth script on the 14th century Sadr Ajil Kabir’s tombstone.
Fig. 31: Quranic Verses on 1301 CE, Yuan Period Tombstone from Zaitun, written in Thulth Script.

Fig. 32: A Zaitun Tombstone dated from 1310 CE, Showing early form of Sini script in relief.
Fig. 33: A Zaitun Tombstone dated from 1321 CE, Showing early form of Sini script in intaglio.

Fig. 34: The Great Mosque of Xinjiang.
Fig. 35: The Grand Huajuexiang Mosque in Xi’an.

Fig. 36: The Use of Thulth and Naskh in the mihrab decoration of a Mosque in Xinjiang.
Fig. 37: the 1387 tombstone from Quanzhou.

Fig. 38: A Ming dynasty tombstone from Quanzhou.
Fig. 39: Blue and white porcelain censer produced in the Ming Dynasty.

Fig. 40: Tri-Legged Incense Burner with Arabic Calligraphic Inscriptions, Gansu, 1426-35 CE.
Fig. 41: Incense Burner with a Fu dog ornament, Gansu, 1426-35 CE.

Fig 42: Arabic Plaque, the Great Mosque of Xi’an.
Fig. 43: "Ya Mustafa" (O Chosen One!). A Calligraphic rendering of Arabic words in the form of a Chinese "grass script" or cao shu character, by Ma Donghua. Original at the West Mosque, Cangzhou, Hebei.

Fig. 44: Central decoration of cloisonné enamel plate from, maybe a replica the twelfth or thirteenth century. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum.
Fig.45: a. Left: A page from a Qur’an written in Arabic and Chinese, 1892, Guangzhou, Canton, China.
   b. Right: Leaf from a Qing Dynasty Qur’an, China, c. 18th century.

Fig. 46: Enamel on bronze decoration on a vase given by the Chinese Emperor Qianlong (1736-1796) to the Ottoman Sultan Selim III (1761-1808)
Fig. 47: Overglaze enameled porcelain dish, China, 19th-20th century.

Fig. 48: Imam instructing students to learn Islamic Scriptures at mosque, 1950s.
Fig. 49: Tools for writing Sini Script.

Fig. 50: Effect created by the change of calligraphic tools.

Fig. 51: Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang practicing calligraphy in his house.
Fig. 52: The Shahada (Testimony of Faith) by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 53: Oh Merciful, Oh Compassionate, by Haji Noor Deen
Fig. 54: The Basmallah by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 55: The Shahadah, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 56: Peace Upon You, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 57: The Shahadah in the Diamond Format, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 58: The 99 Names of God by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 59: Knowledge is Light, by Haji Noor deen.
Fig. 60: The Basmalah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 61: The Testimony of Faith, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 62: The Basmallah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 63: The Basmallah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 64: The Basmallah by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 65: Kufic Styles.

Fig. 66: Elaborate Forms of Sini Calligraphy by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 67: Shahadah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 68: A rubbing of stele Bamboo poem by Lord Guan, Warner Langdon, 1881-1955.
Fig. 69: Prayers, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig 70: The Basmalah and the Shahadah, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 71: The Shahadah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 72: Peace, By Haji Noor Deen.
Fig 73: Allah, Zhu, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 74: Thanks To Allah, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 75: The Shahadah, by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig 76: The Shahadah by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 77: Haji Abdul Hakim.

Fig. 78: al-Fatihah, by Haji Abdul Hakim.
Fig. 79: al-Fatihah, by Haji Abdul Hakim.

Fig. 80: Kouchi Honda
Fig 81: Sini Calligraphy by Honda.
Fig. 82: Basmallah in the abstract style by Honda.

Fig. 83: Calligraphy in the form of three-tiered pavilion by Honda.
Fig. 84: A stone inscription in *Kufi* script, 14th century, Quanzhou.

Fig. 85: Hanging scroll with Qur’an, by Haji Noor Deen.
Fig. 86: al-Fatihah in the Kufic script by Haji Noor Deen.

Fig. 87: The opening of Surat al-Baqarah, by Haji Yossif Qinkuan.
Fig. 88: Star plate with Thulth script by Haji Yossif Xinjing Hui.

Fig. 89: al-Fatihah in the Thulth script by Haji Yossif Xinjing Hui.