## The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China

*Zvi Ben-Dor Benite*
*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. 280 pages.*

Zvi Ben-Dor Benite has contributed an important piece to the history of Muslims in imperial China, centered on a seventeenth-century Muslim genealogy known as the *Jing Xue Xi Chuan Pu* (hereinafter *Genealogy*), which has been recently discovered, punctuated, and printed as the *Jing Xue Xi Chuan Pu* (Xining: Qinghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1989). His book follows Sachiko Murata's study of Confucian Muslim texts and teachers (namely, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-Yu's Great Learning of Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* [Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000]) and illuminates many aspects of the Muslims' cultural life in imperial China.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion with tables and illustrations. The first chapter decodes the *Genealogy* and outlines the trajectory of the Chinese Muslims' educational network in central and coastal China. The second chapter explores the "social logic" behind the practices of the Muslim literati (p. 74) – that is, how they envisioned and understood the educational system, their roles, and Islam in reference to imperial China's existing sociocultural categories. This chapter reveals how Muslim educational institutions enabled and empowered Muslim intellectuals to convert "Islam" and "Muslim" into valid social categories of school (*xuepai*) and to envision themselves as "literati" (*shi*) that were as much Chinese as Muslim.

The third chapter analyzes the transformation of Islamic knowledge from "orality" to "texuality" (p. 158) and the formation of the Chinese Islamic school, which was patterned on contemporary Chinese schools of scholarship. The fourth chapter explains how Confucian Muslims interpreted Islam, Prophet Muhammad, and Islamic canons as equivalents and counterparts of Confucianism (enumerated in the *Han Kitab* as "Dao," "Sage," and "Classic"), and how the Muslim literati embraced Confucianism. In the conclud-

ing section, through the so-called "Muslim literature inquisition" (the Hai Furun case), the author demonstrates how the Islamic Dao, Sage, and Classic were "encompassed" by the dominant Chinese thought and philosophy of (neo-)Confucianism.

The book is clearly written and analyzes the Muslim educational networking presented in the *Genealogy* from multiple angles, from historical development to geographical distribution. More importantly, this book provides an insider's view of the close ties in this elite circle and its members' consciousness, which was brought and bound by the learning network. At the same time, the author interprets the *Genealogy* contextually in reference to imperial China, where learning and the learned are socially appreciated. This insider and outsider understanding of the Muslims' perception of their religion (as "Dao"), activities (as "learning"), and status (as "literati") leads the author to refute the dichotomist understanding of Chinese Muslims as either Muslim or Chinese and to conclude that these learned Muslims were as much Chinese as they were Muslim. In addition to the unique way of textually and contextually interpreting the Muslim literati, another strength of the book is the author's linguistic ability to read these complicated philosophical and religious texts in Chinese, Arabic, and Persian.

This book, however, in many ways recalls and reflects legacies of sinological and Islamic studies that continue discourses that, on the one hand, distinguish between *civilized* and *barbarian* (*hua* and *yi*) in Confucian societies and, on the other hand, the difference between Islamic and un-Islamic domains (*dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*) in Muslim societies that existed in Qing China. The result of the millennium-long inquiry into the two cultural identities unavoidably results in studying Chinese Muslim "identity," enticed by such recent studies on Manchu "ethnicity" as Pamela Crossley's *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and Mark Elliott's *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Unfortunately, studying "Chinese Muslim" identity causes one to fall into a subtle trap. The Manchu identity, either prescribed by imperial edicts in Crossley's study or subscribed to under the banner institution in Elliott's research, is actually identification. The internal Muslim educational system, however, did not generate enough force to impose such an identity, nor did the external forces of "valid" social categories (be it "Dao," "Learning," "School," and "Literati"). It is hardly convincing that "Chinese Muslim" cultural identity was, like other Chinese identities, institutionally shaped during the Qing era (p. 62), and it is even difficult for this reviewer to find a proper

translation for "Chinese Muslim" in the Qing context. The urge to make a resemblance between the Muslim educational system and the dominant Chinese learning system even leads the author, following Evelyn S. Rawski's definition in her *Education and Popular Literary in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979, 38-40), to translate religious professionals (*zhangjiao*) and their certificate (*zhangjiaodie*) as "school master" of "low-ranking local schools" and "school master's certificate with belt and caps" (p. 101, fn. 57; p. 102).

This reviewer asks why Muslims had to act in the "Chinese" way under the Manchu rule, given that the Manchus built close relations with Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang and that Han Muslims of the interior regions were included in the large category of the *min* (commoner) population. The ultimate reason, as this reviewer argues, lies in the cultural scholars' misinterpretation of the legal concept and category of *min* during the Qing period, which the author mistakenly translates as "people" (p. 198). It is this reviewer's opinion that Chinese Muslims well understood the legitimacy of this legal (not cultural) category, and that it is by and to this legal reference that Chinese Muslims engaged in a discussion on Islam and Confucianism.

In addition to second-hand citations of many Qing memorials and edicts of the 1780s, often twisted if not distorted, included in the *Han Kitab* (esp. *Zhi Sheng Shi Lu*, p. 215), other minor mistakes include misinterpretations (e.g., "Turbaned-man," p. 42, fn. 60), faulty translations (e.g., p. 225, "*huo su qie qie*" as "burn urgently"), chronological confusion (p. 185, "*zhenquan,* 785-805" should be "*zhenguan,* 627-650"), geographic misidentifications (e.g., p. 154, "Yangzhou" should be "Liuzhou"), Chinese character mistakes (e.g., pp. 27, 85, and 127) and the misidentification of official titles (e.g., Zhu Chun was not "governor-general" of Guangdong and Guangxi, but "governor" of Guangxi; Jueluo Bayansan was "governor-general" of Guangdong and Guangxi at the time of the Hai Furun case, p. 215). These mistakes are joined by editorial errors as well as misspellings in the text and the bibliography (e.g., p. 2. "Lin Yansheng"; p. 57, "*Jingxue Xi Chaun Pu*"; and p. 205, "*Saahde*").

Despite all of these questions and minor mistakes, however, the book is a great piece and this reviewer recommends it for students of historical, religious, and identity studies on Islam and China. It is of particular interest and importance to studies of Islamic thought and theology, both of which are often centered on major Islamicates of the Middle East, for it enables readers to look at another way of being "Muslim" and practicing "Islam." The same is true of scholars of Confucianism (especially neo-Confucianism) who

seek to understand the Muslim perception of and contribution to "Confucianism" that has long been abscribed to the "Chinese."

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