Theories and Methodologies

The Aristocracy of Qing Xinjiang as Patrons of Islamic Letters

DAVID BROPHY

In a work published in 1948, the Kashgar author Ahmad Żiyaʾi presented a dramaturgical reworking of the story of Rabiʿa and Saʿdin, two ill-fated lovers whose families stood in the way of their marriage. Żiyaʾi's version itself took inspiration from an earlier act of literary reworking in the Kashgar oasis. As he writes in his introduction to his "opera," Żiyaʾi came across the story in a mid-nineteenth-century collection of verse sagas authored by one ʿAbd al-Raḥim Niẓari, a literatus in the service of a Qing-appointed governor of Kashgar, Ẓuhur al-Din Taiji Beg (Nizari 491–562). In this work, Niẓari's Rabiʿa and Saʿdin sits alongside a series of other popular love stories; what made the tale stand out for Żiyaʾi above the rest, and moved him to adapt it, was the simple fact that it was set in Kashgar. کوپ وقتلرده ("On many occasions"), Żiyaʾi writes,

> شونی اویلار ایدیمکی عربلرنینگ لیلی مجنونی بغدادلیقلرنینگ غریب صنمی و باشقه‌لرنینگ فرهاد شرینی بار ایکن، بیز اویغورلرنینگ مو مونداغ کیشی‌لریمیز یوقمو؟ بیزنینگ تورموشیمیزده بونداغ واقعه‌لر بولماغانمو؟ (61)

> I have reflected: the Arabs have their Layli and Majnun, the Baghdadis their Gharib and Sanam, and others their Farhad and Shirin. Don't we Uighurs have people like this? Have there not been events like this among us too?[1]

Rabi'a and Sa'din were just what Żiyaʾi was looking for. Here was something

> عربستان چوللریدن، بغداد وادی‌لریدن، یاکه ارمنستان تاغلقلریدین ایمس، بلکه اویغورلرنینگ قاینیمی بولغان کاشغر. (62)

> not from the deserts of Arabia, the wadis of Baghdad, or the mountain ranges of Armenia, but from the Uighur center of Kashgar.

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In his view, the tragic story of Rabiʿa and Saʿdin was nothing less than a vindication of his people's moral fiber:

> اولرنینگ محبت یولیده کورستکن دل کویدورارلیك بو فداکارلیقلری،
> لیلی مجنون فرهاد شیرین و غریب صنملرنینگ خیالیلاشقان قهرمان
> لیقلریدن کممو؟ (64)

> Are the harrowing sacrifices that they made for the sake of love any less than the imaginary heroism of Layli and Majnun, Farhad and Shirin, or Gharib and Sanam?

I begin with this example to sketch out certain stages in the history of what is now known as modern Uighur literature and to consider this tradition's relationship to a wider "Persianate" sphere. Eastern Turkistan, today's Xinjiang, lay at the eastern edge of a bilingual Turco-Persian literary world whose imagined center was Timurid Transoxiana. The love stories of *khamsa* literature were known there from the works of Persian authors such as Niẓami and Jami, as well as early Turkic renditions by Navaʾi. These classics themselves, and the models they provided, continued to enjoy unrivaled prestige across the Tarim Basin, even as literary preference shifted decisively toward Turkic. From around 1700 onward, oasis rulers took renewed interest in literary patronage, sponsoring a wave of translations from Persian into Turkic but also new, more vernacular renditions of classical Chaghatay works. In his anthology, Niẓari blended works inspired by Navaʾi (for example, the romance of Farhad and Shirin) with stories like that of Rabiʿa and Saʿdin, which must have been circulating orally. A century on, Żiyaʾi was dissatisfied with the transregional imaginary embodied in such compilative works. Yet Żiyaʾi was obviously still working in the tradition of the *khamsa* romance, even as he sought to disaggregate it along national lines.

The genres and themes of Persian literature, and the "literary sensibility" scholars identify as Persianate, have had an enduring influence on Uighur culture even as the use of Persian has declined and modernity has erected a divide between "classical" and "modern" literature. Outside Uighur scholarship, though, much of this story remains unknown. While recent discussions of the Persianate have widened to incorporate reference to China, the specific institutions that served to maintain and replenish a Persian-influenced literary idiom among China's Turkic-speaking Muslims are yet to receive serious scholarly attention.[2] My focus here is on the continuation of practices of literary patronage into the Qing period (1636–1912), practices that I see as crucial to this history of cultural transmission. While infringing on prerogatives such as the dispensing of justice and the appointment of officials, the system of governance implemented by the Qing permitted native officials (known as *begs*) to maintain select elements of a good ruler's repertoire. Indeed, the perceived value of literary patronage may even have been heightened in such a state of circumscribed authority. A full examination of this phenomenon is naturally beyond the scope of this short contribution; I take here as a case study a family from the oasis of Khotan, whose story highlights both continuities and transformations in the circulation of texts and the structure of patronage networks during the Qing.

Vernacularization in the Tarim Basin

In the late seventeenth century, the last remaining branch of the Chinggisid dynasty to rule in the sedentary oasis society of Central Asia—the Chaghatayids of Yarkand—lost their grip on the Tarim Basin, and the region succumbed to a period of political turmoil. Unlike in Kokand and Bukhara to the west, no new dynasties emerged here to consolidate their rule in the khanate's former domains. Rather, a series of local contenders carved out a more limited authority for themselves amid ongoing efforts by the non-Muslim Junghar Mongols to exercise hegemony across the region. Some of those who rose to prominence were local *begs*—members of a once nomadic elite who had by then established themselves in the oasis centers; others were members of the Makhdumzada lineage of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, better known as the *khojas*.

The late Chaghatayids were not, as far as scholars can tell, avid patrons of letters; in fact, very little

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survives in the way of seventeenth-century literary production from their court. One can say, though, that the dynasty considered itself a part of a wider network of Chinggisid and Timurid elites connected through intermarriage, diplomacy, and trade. Such a self-identity was not as strong a feature of the families who sought to fill the vacuum they left behind. Even the Makhdumzadas *khojas*, who were tied by blood to similarly prominent Sufi shaykhs in neighboring Kokand and Bukhara, came to construct a sense of themselves as heirs to a more territorially delimited patrimony. While the hagiographic narratives of founding figures such as Khoja Isḥaq Vali (d. 1599) span eastern and western Turkistan, for example, those involving their successors do not. Likewise, it is rare to find mention of these *khojas* in hagiographic compilations from western Turkistan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The narrowing of political horizons and the waning of traditional standards of legitimacy are often seen as conducive to shifts in courtly culture. Thus, at the turn of the eighteenth century a distinct trend to patronize translations from Persian into Turkic emerged. The situation resembles that of the Khivan khanate (Toutant; Sartori), where a similar translation movement was developing in a context where Turkic was already established as an administrative, and occasionally literary, language. The high degree of political fragmentation in the Tarim Basin also invites comparisons with the rise of literary Turkish in post-Mongol Anatolia (Peacock 150). In a very different social environment, comparable developments were also taking place among the Sinophone Hui Muslims of China. There, efforts of the Confucian-educated Muslim literati, writing for a Chinese as much as a Muslim audience, produced the corpus of Chinese Islamic texts known as the Han Kitab. Alongside this, educational institutions sustained a curriculum of Arabic and Persian doctrinal works (Stöcker-Parnian; Weil).

The east Turkistani case has been less well studied than these other examples, so a sketch of developments is in order. Scholars rely, naturally, on extant texts only, and not all manuscripts listed in catalogs are currently accessible. Other than the texts themselves (and their prefaces), there is little other source material to draw on to describe the context and motivations for the production of these works. Keeping these provisos in mind, the earliest date for a commissioned translation is 1118 AH (1706–07 CE), a rendering of the Ilkhanid author Fakhruddin Banakati's world history, a work best known as تاریخ بناکتی (*Tarikh-i Banakati*; *Banakati's History*), translated for a *beg* of Yarkand, Amir Qurban b. Khazanachi (Muginov 35–6). In the following decade, one Muḥammad Temür produced translations of two works by Ḥusayn Kashifi, اخلاق محسنی (*Akhlaq-i Muḥsini*; *Muḥsin's Ethics*) and انوار سهیلی (*Anwar-i Suhayli*; *Lights of Canopus*) (itself a translation of کلیله و دمنه [*Kalila u Dimna*; *Kalila and Dimna*]), both of them dedicated to his patron, Muḥammad Imam Beg b. ʿIvaż Beg (Götz 500; Muginov 17–20; Çimen). Finally, in the 1730s Qurban Beg b. Niyaz Beg patronized a translation of Mirkhwand's work of early Islamic history, روضة الصفا (*Rawżat al-Ṣafa*; *Garden of Purity*) (Muginov 36).

Alongside these texts associated with *beg* patronage are texts that link themselves to *khoja* rule. In the 1720s Muḥammad ʿAbdullah b. Muḥammad Nurullah produced a translation of Amir Ḥusayni Haravi's mystical treatise نزهة الارواح (*Nuzhat al-Arvaḥ*; *Delight of the Souls*). No patron is mentioned in the preface, but Muḥammad ʿAbdullah provides some insight into the context in which he was writing. He says that he was motivated to undertake the translation by the fact that

> دنیانی کفر کافر توتوب ایردی حضرت خوجام پادشاه سجّادۂ نبوتته ایردی‌لار امّا بسیار مسلمان‌لار بو کافرلارنینگ ایلیگیدا اسیر ایردی لار. (3)
>
> the infidels seized control of the world, and despite the fact that His Grace Khojam Padshah was occupying the seat of prophecy, nonetheless many Muslims fell captive to the hands of these unbelievers.

The reference is to the Junghar Mongols and their practice of enslaving Muslims from the Tarim Basin. Here "Khojam Padshah" may well indicate Khoja ʿAbdullah b. Khoja Danyal, who governed for a time in Kashgar and had a direct hand in the

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translation of two other religious works, both of them by the fifteenth-century Herat author Muʿin al-Din Farahi. The first was of Farahi's extensive biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, معارج النبوة (*Maʿarij al-Nubuvvat*; *The Ladders of Prophethood*), the second a study of forty hadiths, روضة الواعظين (*Rawżat al-Vaʿiẓin*; *Garden of the Preachers*) (Hartmann 5; Muginov 93). Given the Naqshbandi *khojas*' reputation as champions of Islamic orthodoxy, it is tempting to hypothesize a certain distinction in cultural style: the *begs* evincing a preference for chronicles and ethics, and *khoja* patrons supporting prophetic biography and hadith literature. But the evidence is limited, and not entirely supportive of this interpretation. Khoja ʿAbdullah's brother, Khoja Yaqʿub (or Khoja Jahan, also known by his pen name, ʿArshi), for example, is credited with supporting one Shah Ḥijran to translate an unidentified prose version of Firdawsī's شاهنامه (*Shahnama*; *Book of Kings*) (Shah Ḥijran 2b).

Qing Rule and the Refashioning of Literary Networks: A Case Study

The linguistic and literary shift described here was thus well underway by the time the Qianlong emperor conquered this region in the late 1750s and was not a product of the transition to Qing rule. Indeed, this political transition saw a major disruption to existing networks of literary production, scattering patrons, authors, and even texts themselves. In the preface to a second translation of *Shahnama*, commissioned by a *beg* of Khotan in 1194 (1780–81), Mulla Khamush mourned the dispersal of a manuscript of Shah Hijran's translation during the violence:

> امّا اول وقتلارده بو کتاب شاهنامه اول لابهگویلار ایلیگیدا توشوب ثبدل بد بولوب ورق جزدین جز کلدین اجراب قصهٔ خوبی و هکایه مرغوبی لار اجزا و متفرق بولوب. (2b)
>
> At that time this *Shahnama* fell into the hands of those sycophants and was corrupted: pages were torn from chapters, and chapters from the whole, and its delightful stories were separated and scattered.

Mulla Khamush thus saw his task as reconstituting, and carrying on, a cultural enterprise that had commenced before the Qing conquest.

Those who emerged in positions of authority in Qing Xinjiang had successfully navigated a complex landscape of shifting loyalties and retained sufficient trust in the eyes of the empire to act as local intermediaries. Men whose contributions were deemed most valuable were rewarded with aristocratic titles and stipends and were preferred for appointment to governing positions in the oasis cities. With this new structure in place, networks of literary patronage gradually reestablished themselves. It was not until the 1770s that the first original historical work engaging with the turbulent decades leading up to the Qing invasion was commissioned (Kashghari). Translation work resumed earlier than this, though, and remained the focus of *beg*-sponsored textual production well into the nineteenth century.

The first work with an identifiable patron and translator from the Qing period is a rendition of ʿAbd al-Raḥman Jami's collection of saintly biographies, نفحات الانس (*Nafaḥat al-Uns*; *Breaths of Fellowship*), dating to 1182 (1768–69) (Papas 414). This was commissioned by one of the leading *begs* to survive the transition to Qing rule, Khosh Kifäk Beg (和什克伯克 [Ch. Heshike boke]). Originally a native of Khotan, Khosh Kifäk had served as governor of Kashgar during the rule of the Junghars and the *khojas* (Fletcher). A decade later, he also commissioned a version of a work of the same genre, Farid al-Din ʿAṭṭar's تذکرة الاولیا (*Taẕkirat al-Avliya*; *Memoirs of the Saints*), by an accomplished local translator, Muḥammad Ṣiddiq Rushdi.[3]

While both these works are known to scholarship, an important element of the circumstances surrounding their production has so far been missed. Khosh Kifäk and Rushdi were devotees of the Isḥaqiyya branch of the Naqshbandiyya, whose downfall in 1755 sent both men into exile in the neighboring Kokand khanate. In a "complaint poem" (*ḥasb-i ḥāl*) included in some manuscripts of his *Taẕkirat al-Avliya*, Rushdi describes his travails upon the demise of his beloved Khoja Jahan:

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تگدی سموم افتی یولداشیمه
توشتی فراق اوتی منینگ باشیمه
قیلدی بو اوت ایچره سمندر منی
ایلدی عالمده قلندر منی
(*Taẕkirat* [Jarring Prov. 345] 12b)

My companion was struck by a pestilent wind
And the flames of parting consumed me
This fire made me into a salamander
And left me a vagrant in this world

After the dust settled in the Tarim Basin, Rushdi was able to return home to Khotan. A different fate, however, was awaiting Khosh Kifäk. While rewarded with the title of "duke" (公 [Ch. Gong]) for advising Qing commanders during their invasion of the Tarim Basin, his considerable preconquest political experience aroused the suspicions of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–95). After Khosh Kifäk's first audience in 1760, the emperor ordered that Khosh Kifäk remain in the capital, where he was given a courtyard residence neighboring the imperial palace, among the city's population of Manchu bannermen. No evidence exists that Khosh Kifäk was ever able to return home before his death in Beijing in 1781.

Khosh Kifäk was thus engaged in a remarkable form of long-range literary patronage: removed from any active role in the administration of the Tarim Basin, he sent his commissions for these two translations all the way from Beijing to Khotan, a distance of more than four thousand kilometers, which took a traveler during the Qing months to traverse. As Rushdi writes,

بولدی اشارت منگا چین ملکیدین
کلگوسی دیب بو ایش انینگ الگیدین
میر فریدون‌وش فرخ‌سفت
خلق ارا جمشید کبی معرفت
اسم شریفی دور انینگ خواجه کفک
سالدی انی چین ارا دور فلک
(*Taẕkirat* [Jarring Prov. 345] 13a)

A sign reached me from the kingdom of China
That he would undertake this task
An amir like Faridun and Farrukh
A Jamshid among the people in his wisdom
His name is Khoja Kifäk
A turn of heavenly fate sent him to China

It is difficult to say exactly how men like Khosh Kifäk perceived their new condition and how it was perceived by others. Was the loss of his land and influence in the Tarim Basin compensated for by the imperial gifts and stipend he received in the capital? Officially an act of imperial grace, was this relocation to Beijing a step up in the world or a state of exile? Although no known sources reflect on the fate of *begs* like Khosh Kifäk, the Muslim aristocracy in Beijing included Naqshbandi *khojas* who claimed sayyid descent, and their status was evidently a cause of concern for some Central Asian Muslims. An apocryphal account of a Kokandi embassy to Beijing in 1834 and 1835 describes the Kokand khan Muḥammad ʿAli as demanding the release of *khojas* who had been "captured and taken to Beijing" (Newby 196). Unwilling to do this, the emperor nevertheless consented to lift all restrictions on their movement and religious activities, issuing a decree guaranteeing their well-being (Kho'jandiy 29). Although written well after events, the source hints that the Beijing aristocrats were indeed felt to be living in something of a gilded cage and that their lives of leisure were dependent on the intervention of a Muslim sovereign. If this vignette reflects a more generalized anxiety concerning the role of Muslim elites at the court of a non-Muslim emperor, it may offer some clue as to why Khosh Kifäk turned to literary patronage to maintain what semblance he could of adherence to Islamic traditions of rulership.

Alongside a desire to honor the saints and receive the well-wishing of the living, Rushdi's preface to his *Taẕkirat al-Avliya* elaborates on Khosh Kifäk's motivations. Having erected during his period of active rule two madrasas in Khotan and a mosque in Yarkand, Khosh Kifäk is depicted here reflecting on the relative worth of literary patronage:

معلوم دور کم مدرسه و مسجد بناسی قرق ویا ایلک بیلدین زیاده باقی
بولمس، امدی بر عمارتی بنا قیلغایمن کم مدامی که دین اسلام باقی
دور اول عمارت باقی بولغای و درویش‌لار کونگلیگه اندین
حضور و حلوات یتکای، اغنیالار اندین موعطیت گوهرین تریب
الیب آخرت سوداسی مشغوللیغین کسب اتکای، و سلاطین‌لار
انینگ حکمت‌آموز نصیحت‌لارینی انگلاب جهاندارلیقدین کونگول

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ساوتوب عدالت ایشین توزاتکای‌لار، و امرای صاحباقتدار ایشتیب انینگ وحشت‌انگیز سوزلاریدین عبرت الیب ظلم ستم خیالی کونگلیدین کتکای.
(Rushdi, *Tazkirat* [IVANRUz no. 3161] 10a–b)

As is known, madrasas and mosques last no more than forty to fifty years. I now wish to erect a monument that will last for as long as Islam exists; one that the dervishes will find pleasure in; that the wealthy will hark to, and thus reflect on the trials of Judgment Day; whose advice sultans will heed, and thus turn from world conquering to the promotion of justice; and that amirs will derive lessons from, and thus expel thoughts of tyranny from their hearts.

Given the poor quality of construction materials in the Tarim Basin, the longevity of buildings there was indeed limited. But from far-off Beijing, Khosh Kifäk was in no position to order new construction anyway. Books thus became a way to preserve his name and his family's prestige, in their absence from Tarim Basin society.

Khosh Kifäk most likely never saw a copy of his *Tazkirat al-Avliya*; he died in 1781, the year of its completion. From Beijing his son Muḥammad Ibrahim nevertheless continued his family's long-distance relationship with Rushdi. Having inherited his father's title, Muḥammad Ibrahim instructed the long-serving Rushdi (now seventy-five years old) to produce what would be his final work, a Turkic version of the classic mirror for princes, قابوس‌نامه (*Qabusnama*; *Book of Qabus*), which he completed in 1201 (1786–87).[4] Again Rushdi describes the nature of the transaction in his preface, writing that his patron بو مهم امرنینگ اهملیگی‌نی چین ولایتی‌دین ماچین دیاریغه ایباریب ("sent this most important of commissions from the province of China to the region of Machin"; *Tarjama-i Qabusnama* 4a), invoking a traditional designation for the Khotan oasis.

The fourth and final work of translation associated with this family is a rare case of female patronage. In 1218 (1803–04) Muḥammad Ibrahim's sister ʿAyisha Khanim commissioned the translation of the Samarqandi scholar Mawlana Kalan's work of hadith interpretation, رياض المذكرين (*Riyaż al-Muzakkirin*; *Gardens of the Praisers*) (ʿIsa 3b). Less is known of the circumstances surrounding this work, and it is unclear whether ʿAyisha Khanim was living in Beijing. By this time, her family's fortunes were changing. After the end of the Qianlong reign in 1795, the Turkistani Muslim community of Beijing entered a period of decline, and some of its members returned to the Tarim Basin. Pleading illness, Muḥammad Ibrahim himself went back to Khotan in 1802, and when he died there in 1805, his wife and family were not required to return to the capital. Muḥammad Ibrahim's son ʿAbd al-Muʾmin inherited the family title but only obtained a low-ranking position in the local *beg* hierarchy in Khotan. He eventually perished in a *khoja*-led rebellion that swept the region in the late 1820s (Chen 42; Kono 20–21).

Although he occasionally claimed to know their language, the Qianlong emperor likely had little to no knowledge of literary affairs among the Muslims of his empire. Yet it was no coincidence that his reign, a period of imperial expansion in which the Qing court became a gathering point of peoples from across Eurasia, saw networks of Central Asian Islamic literary production extend as far as Beijing. While expanding along new lines of movement generated by imperial rule, those networks continued to exceed the boundaries of empire too. Judging from surviving manuscripts, Rushdi's Turkic-language *Tazkirat al-Avliya* was one of the most successful works of translation from Qing Xinjiang, and many of its extant copies can now be found in manuscript collections to the west, in Tashkent and the Ferghana Valley. In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, scholars such as Ikromiddin Ostonaqulov have brought the work renewed attention through their scholarship and by republishing sections in modern Cyrillic editions (see Ostonaqulov; Rushdiy). For a brief time, therefore, Beijing, Khotan, and the Kokand khanate were linked in a new circuit of literary production, one sustained materially by Qing largesse as well as by the desires of the empire's new Muslim aristocrats to remain cultural, and therefore political, actors in the oasis society they were estranged from.

Khosh Kifäk's family were the only Muslim aristocrats in Beijing to engage in this form of

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literary patronage, but they were but one of a series of new aristocratic lineages endowed by the incoming Qing. In the relative stability provided by Qing rule, each of these took part in what might be described as a minor reflorescence of Persianate letters in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Xinjiang. Scholarship at this point has tended to study the literary record of this period in isolation from the perspectives provided by Qing sources in Chinese and Manchu. When the two are combined, scholars gain a much better picture of the new political context in which Muslim patrons and authors were operating, as well as the challenges and opportunities it presented. On that basis scholars can begin to form hypotheses about how this context influenced the choices these patrons and authors made in refashioning the literary tradition of the Tarim Basin and to properly situate this region, and the Qing, as part of a cultural history of the wider Islamic world.

Notes

1. All translations are mine.

2. Recent studies exploring Persian-language literary representations of China include Green; Calzolaio; Hemmat.

3. For a description of one manuscript of the work (IVANRUz no. 12128), see Paul 124–25.

4. The work is described in Muginov 95. For a modern Uighur edition, see Räshidi.

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