



**SINO-ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY: FORM, FUNCTION
AND AESTHETIC VALUES - A CASE STUDY OF HAJI
NOOR DEEN MI GUANG JIANG**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Science (Built Environment)**

**Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design
International Islamic University Malaysia**

MARCH 2018

ABSTRACT

Islamic arts has played an important part in the development of the Chinese Muslim community. It has developed through time in response to cultural needs of minority Muslim groups, as Islamic calligraphy is widely used in decorative art design. This study aims to analyze Islamic arts in China, particularly on Sino-Arabic calligraphy's forms, functions and aesthetic values. The research method is based on the qualitative research approach. A broad range of information is collected from various sources, such as documents, samples of calligraphy, photographs, microfilm and interviews of famous Chinese Sino Arabic calligrapher. The data reveals the characteristics of Sino-Arabic calligraphy which is a combination of Arabic and Chinese script patterns. These led to the development of a unique Sino-Arabic writing style, which displays the aspects of the two cultures' aesthetic heritage. For the continuity, revival and preservation of this forgotten heritage, the data reveals the contribution of the famous Chinese calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang to this great work. He established the Chinese House for the Arts of Islamic Arabic Calligraphy in Zhengzhou in order to promote and preserve China's traditional Islamic calligraphy. Not only that, the institute offers classes in Sino-Arabic calligraphy and works with museums and universities from around the world to promote understanding of the history of the traditional Islamic arts in China. Based on this, the researcher recommends the revision of a few records within Islamic arts calligraphy in China, and assistance in examining the topic in depth. This will help develop guidelines for regional expansion and adaptation of Islamic arts, its forms, functions and aesthetic values, with the local environmental condition to contribute more to the future of the Muslim civilization.

خلاصة البحث

للفن الإسلامي دور مهم في تنمية المجتمع الإسلامي الصيني. وقد تطور مع الوقت استجابةً للاحتياجات الثقافية للأقليات الإسلامية في الصين، كما استخدم الخط الإسلامي على نطاق واسع في فن التصميم والديكور. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الفن الإسلامي في الصين، والخط الصيني - العربي في شكله، ووظيفته، وقيمه الجمالية. وتستند هذه الدراسة على منهج البحث النوعي، حيث تم جمع مجموعة واسعة من المعلومات من مصادر مختلفة، مثل الملاحظات الميدانية، وعينات من الخطوط، والصور، والميكروفيلم، والمقابلات مع خطاطي الصين المشهورين في الخط الصيني - العربي. كشفت البيانات التي تم جمعها عن خصائص الخط الصيني - العربي والذي هو مزيج نمط نصي من العربية والصينية. وتؤدي هذه الحقائق إلى تطوير أسلوب الكتابة الصينية - العربية بشكل فريد من نوعه، وتعرض جوانب من التراث الجمالي لكلا الثقافتين. كما تشير البيانات إلى إسهامات الخطاط الصيني الشهير حاجي نور الدين مي غوانغ جيانج وأثره في الحفاظ على هذا التراث المنسي، وإحياء واستمرار هذا الفن العظيم. فقد قام بإنشاء "البيت الصيني لفنون الخط الإسلامي العربي" في تشنغتشو، من أجل الحفاظ على الخط الإسلامي التقليدي الصيني وتعزيزه. ليس هذا وحده، بل ويقدم المعهد دروسًا في الخط الصيني، ويعمل مع المتاحف والجامعات في جميع أنحاء العالم لتعزيز فهم تاريخ الفنون الإسلامية التقليدية في الصين. وبناءً على ذلك، يوصي الباحث بضرورة مراجعة بعض عناصر فن الخط الإسلامي في الصين، والتعمق في دراسة هذا الموضوع الذي سوف يساعد في وضع مبادئ توجيهية تساعد على نشر الفن الإسلامي إقليمياً وتكييفه شكلاً، ووظيفةً وقيمةً جماليةً، مع ظروف البيئة المحلية وتضيف أبعاداً فنية إلى الحضارة الإسلامية في المستقبل

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, it is my utmost pleasure to dedicate this work to my dear parents and my family, who granted me the gift of their unwavering belief in my ability to accomplish this goal: thank you for your support and patience.

I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to those who provided their time, effort and support for this project. To the members of my dissertation committee, thank you for sticking with me.

Finally, a special thanks to Professor Amir H. Zekrgoo for his continuous support, encouragement and leadership, and also thanks to my internal examiner Asst. Prof. Dr. Harlina Md Sharif and external examiner Prof. Dato' Dr. Baharudin Ahmad for their valuable advices and their willingness to share useful information and knowledge about my study. And for that, I will be forever grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Islamic art has played a significant role in the development of a distinguished Muslim artistic culture in China. It articulates the integration between the Islamic and Chinese civilization (Hee Soo Li, 2002). Alongside the spread of Islam in China, the Islamic philosophies and Chinese long-acclaimed civilization gave rise to the formation of a distinguished Sino-Arabic calligraphy. This serves as an expression of the dual cultural identity of Chinese Muslims.

Based on what is mentioned above, this thesis will review the factors responsible for the formation of a distinguished style in Chinese-Islamic calligraphy. A product of two great calligraphic tradition, the Chinese Muslim developed their hybrid calligraphy, which expresses the dual culture nurtured by both Chinese and Islamic civilizations. There is a great deal of information about the Islamic calligraphy art and Chinese calligraphy independently. However, the scholars have rarely studied the aesthetic aspects of Arabic and Chinese calligraphy, in their merged identity: Sino-Arabic calligraphy.

Islamic calligraphy is Arabic script written in a beautiful form, often referred to as Arabic calligraphy. It is an art of expressing Muslims arts around the globe to show their attachment to Allah. Also known in Arabic as *khatt Al-Islamī*: which is literally translated as Islamic line or design (Islamic calligraphy, 2012).

Sino-Arabic script is defined as a rounded and, flowing script, with thick and tapered effects (Ghonaime, 2012). While, in Haji Noor Deen¹ definition of Sino-Arabic script, he describes it as: “...(a) combination of Arabic script and Chinese script written by using Chinese writing tools, like brush and rice paper, and decorations in Arabic but in a Chinese style.” In his opinion, the main difference between Sino scripts and other Arabic styles, is the proportions of letters in one word. In the standard Arabic script, the letters are measured by the dot unit (the length and thickness of each other letter is determined by how many dots are made by the reed pen). While in Sino, achieving beauty of the overall composition is more important (personal communication, 2016). This thesis therefore, is an attempt to study the contemporary art of Sino-Arabic calligraphy, from cultural, traditional, aspects of the forms, as well as its functions, and aesthetics values.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems that prompted this research work on Sino-Arabic calligraphy is the evident lack of enough study tracing the original development of Sino-Arabic calligraphic style. Most of the literature on Sino-Arabic calligraphy is written in Chinese. As the researcher was a student of Haji Noor Deen for about a decade, this gives her added advantage to retrieve and document the hidden wisdoms in the development of Sino-Arabic calligraphy. Therefore, the following questions are investigated:

1. What are the historic origins of Sino- Arabic calligraphy?
2. What are the distinct forms of Sino- Arabic calligraphy?

¹ Haji Noor Deen is renowned Chinese calligrapher who has had is training from 1989-2008. The detail account of his work can be found in Chapter 4 – Case Study.

3. How does Sino-Arabic script reflect Chinese aesthetic values?
4. What functional role does Sino-Arabic calligraphy play in maintaining Islamic identity of Chinese Muslims?
5. How does contemporary Sino-Arabic calligraphy contribute to the development of the art form?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to uncover the roots of Islamic art in China by studying the development and principles of Sino-Arabic script produced by Muslims in China. In order to let more people know about the Islamic and the Chinese civilization, this work appraise the Sino-Arabic script of calligraphy, study their characteristics, and forms, and consequently, understand its impacts on the Chinese Muslims arts. Through critical analysis of the characteristics of Sino-Arabic calligraphy, this study aspires to inform the public on the uniqueness of this Islamic art and accordingly understand its impacts on the identity of Chinese Muslims.

The objective of this research is:

1. To analyse the Sino-Arabic script of calligraphy, study their characteristics, forms, and the origins of influences.
2. To document and classify the various styles of Sino-Arabic calligraphy for the purpose of exhibiting the richness of its vocabulary.
3. To examine the reflection of Sino-Arabic script on Chinese aesthetic values.
4. To give an account of the functions of Sino-Arabic calligraphy in maintaining Islamic identity of the Muslim Chinese.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This research employs the qualitative research approach in analyzing the salient characteristics of Sino-Arabic calligraphy. The principle method of conducting this research is through case study on the works of prominent calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang, who was born in 1963, in Yu Cheng, Shan Dong province (Haji Noor Deen, 2016). In his early years, he studied the Qur'an at *madrassa (or jing tang)*: whereby he also learnt the Arabic language and studied the foundation of calligraphy from the *Imām* of the *Masjid*. After that, Haji Noor Deen developed a kin likeness to Arabic calligraphy and went to Egypt to pursue his study where Haji Mohammad Sa'd became his first formal lecturer. He studied under this local calligrapher in *Al-Minufiya* province, at Nile delta, for about eight years, where he learnt the basic styles of Arabic calligraphy. He received Arabic calligraphy certificate in 1997 and was recognised as the first Chinese artist or calligraphy to have ever been awarded for such achievement (Personal communication, 2016).

In 2008, Haji Noor Deen furthered his study on traditional Arabic calligraphy at Istanbul, under the famous calligrapher and Shaykh, Hassan Celebi, and Davut Beletas, as the first Chinese student of that time (Haji Noor Deen, 2016). After going back to China on 2000, he initiated a course which produces Sino-Arabic calligraphy. After that, he establishes the first inerratic and exactly Arabic Calligraphy class at the Zhengzhou in China in the year 2000. Thus, an in-depth study on his work will illustrate the development and achievement of Chinese Islam art in contemporary China through Sino-Arabic calligraphy.

The method used to retrieve data from Haji Noor Deen is through:

1. Documenting his thoughts and philosophies through the researcher's interactions with him as his student (apprenticeship) for the period of 10 years from 2006 to 2017.
2. Document and catalogue his works that are mainly found through field visits to Guang Ji De studio and gallery.
3. Utilized his writings in various literature, principally:
 - a. 伊斯兰艺术问答 (Islamic Art, 2008) – (translated)
 - b. 阿文书法在中国 (Arabic calligraphy in China, 2006)
 - c. Fusion of Fonts principles of Chinese-Arabic calligraphy, 2013

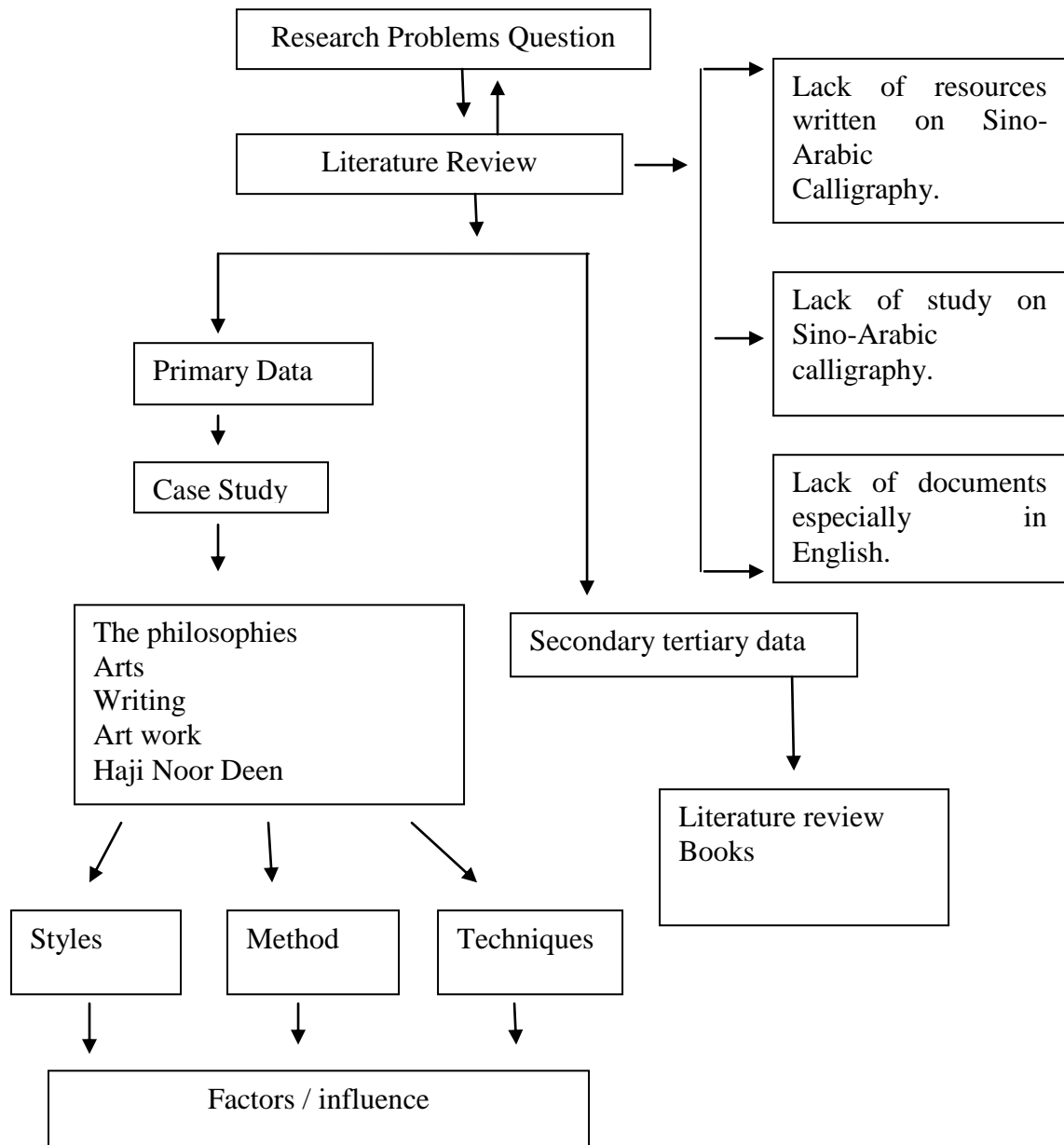


Figure 1:1 Research Methodology

The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with the most famous calligrapher Haji Noor Deen, as the primary data for this research, to support the idea of the development of a hybrid style of Sino script in modern days. This method is employed in order to get the result on Sino-Arabic calligraphy. Moreover, the required field notes, samples of calligraphy, photographs, microfilm, are all collected from the Haji Noor Deen, to support this research.

This work also, involves an extensive and in-depth analysis of relevant literature produced by Haji Noor Deen. These analysis are done in his works on original Arabic calligraphy, traditional Chinese calligraphy, and Sino-Arabic calligraphy script. Besides his biography, calligraphy works, some of his major books are selected as core references. In addition, some major sources that have commented and elaborated on his calligraphic thoughts are also consulted.

While the secondary data includes references and literature discussing Islamic calligraphy in general as found in books, journals, academic researches, articles, online sources pictures, artworks, calligraphy, and others. These collected information on historical development of Islamic art in China, the types of Chinese, Islamic and Sino-Arabic calligraphy and the used materials and tools are used as supportive information. The information sought will highlight the importance of Sino-Arabic calligraphy. Inherited from the Arabic and Chinese culture to produce the modern Sino-Arabic calligraphy. At the same time, the Arabic calligraphy influenced Chinese Muslims to mix with the Chinese traditional cultural aesthetic values. This produces the prevalent hybrid calligraphy called Sino-Arabic calligraphy.

1.5 THE FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

This study explores the characteristics of the three (3) kinds of calligraphy, namely, the Arabic calligraphy, Chinese calligraphy and Sino Arabic calligraphy respectively. It will mainly focus on the development of the Sino-Arabic calligraphy style. “Calligraphy, derived from the Greek words *kallos* (beauty) and *graphos* (writing), in general refers to the harmonious proportion of both letters within a word and words on a page” (McNamee, 2007). While, Arabic calligraphy, also called Islamic calligraphy,