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بِوَسِيْلَةِ سِيْلَةِ اِسْلَامٍ اَنْبَارٍ اِيْجِيْبَا مِلْدِيْنِيَا

SINO-ARABIC SCRIPT AND ARCHITECTURAL
INSCRIPTIONS IN CHINA

BY

DJAMEL DILMI

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International Islamic University
Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic art have played a significant role in the development of Muslim Chinese community in China, it was developed through time in response to cultural needs of the minority Muslim groups in China. The Islamic calligraphy was widely used in architecture, especially in interior and exterior decoration of mosques and other religious buildings. The aim of this study is to interpret the Islamic art and architecture in China through application of Sino-Arabic script on mosques and crafts produced by Muslim minority in China in relation to the Islamic civilization and Chinese civilization, in order to suggest some guidelines for the preservation of this heritage. To achieve the aim the Sino-Arabic script of calligraphy will be examined in order to determine their characteristics and the nature of the effects to which they have been subjected. A broad range of information will be collected from various sources and through a field survey that will be carried out in both places the Islamic Arts Museum in Malaysia and the Great Mosque of Xi'an in China. The collected information from field work will be analyzed with particular regard to the special character of Chinese Islamic art and architecture. This study is an attempt to address the important topic of Islamic calligraphy and its application on buildings and objects in China as part of issues of Islamic architecture and its integration with local tradition that have been occurred in the Muslim world and it is hoped that it is going to be a significant contribution to the subject of Islamic art and architecture in China as well as revival and preservation of this forgotten heritage. Detailed conclusions will be arrived at the end and specific suggestions are intended to assist in examining the topic in depth and helping in developing guidelines for regional expansion and adaptation of Islamic art and architecture with local environmental condition to contribute more for the future of Muslim civilization.

ملخص البحث

لقد كان للفن الإسلامي دورا مهما في ترقية وجود المسلمين في الصين، حيث تطور استجابة لمتطلبات ثقافية للأقلية المسلمة هناك إذ استعمل الخط العربي في الفن و العمارة خاصة في تزيين الفضاءات الداخلية و الخارجية للمساجد. و الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو قراءة في الفن و العمارة الإسلامية من خلال تطبيقات الخط العربي الصيني على المساجد و التحف الفنية التي أنجزتها أيدي الأقلية المسلمة في الصين حيث نجحت في مزج الثقافة الإسلامية و الصينية في قالب واحد. و لتحقيق هدف الدراسة سيدرس الخط العربي الصيني لتحديد خصائص و طبيعة التأثيرات التي تعرضت له. إذ جمعت كمية هائلة من المعلومات من مصادر متنوعة إضافة إلى الدراسة الميدانية التي أجريت في موقعين مختلفين: متحف الفن الإسلامي في ماليزيا و مسجد شيان الكبير في الصين. لقد عنيت هذه المعلومات بالدراسة و التحليل من أجل مساهمة هذه الدراسة في عرض و تقديم الخط العربي الصيني و تطبيقاته على المباني و التحف الفنية بالصين كجزء من طروحات العمارة الإسلامية و علاقة انسجامها مع المحيط الداخلي وخصوصيات التقاليد المتعارف عليها في كل منطقة من العالم الإسلامي. تأمل هذه الدراسة في تقديم الفن و العمارة الإسلامية في الصين بغية لفت الإنتباه لهذا التراث الإسلامي المنسي في الصين و إعادة إحيائه وبعثه من جديد. و جاءت خلاصة الدراسة لتقديم مقترحات من أجل طرح التراث الإسلامي بعمق و المساعدة في تقديم حلول لإعادة بعث و تكييف الفن الإسلامي مع مراعاة خصوصيات المحيط الداخلي لكل منطقة من العالم الإسلامي من أجل إضافات جديدة لمستقبل الحضارة الإسلامية.

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Djamel Dilmi has been approved by the following:

Amir Hossein Zekrgoo
Supervisor

Ghasan Taha Yaseen
Internal Examiner

Othman Yatim
External Examiner

Nasr Eldin Ibrahim Ahmed Hussein
Chairman

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Djamel Dilmi

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**SINO-ARABIC SCRIPT AND THE ARCHITECTURAL INSCRIPTIONS IN
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“By the pen, and what they write”, from the *Surah Al-Qalam*, which means ‘The Pen’.
"Seek knowledge even it is in China", from *Hadīth*
I dedicate this work
to my dearest father and mother Mohamed and Khadija
to my beloved wife Asma and my little sons Is’haq and Raouf
,,,For your enduring sacrifices, support, hopes and joy that you have given me...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UNESCO	United Nation Economic Social Culture Organization.
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IAMM	Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia
IUM	International Islamic University Malaysia

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT
AND THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the background of the study of Sino-Arabic calligraphy and its application in Islamic art and architecture as a part of heritage that was produced by Muslims in China. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part sets out the background of the study and its finding. In section 1.2 a brief description of the Islamic calligraphy and its application in the Islamic art and architecture in China and its significance in the daily life of Muslim in relation to the Islamic civilization is given. Section 1.3 presents the problem statement of this study. The aim and objectives of the study are identified in section 1.4. Section 1.5 raises the questions that this study is going to answer. In section 1.6 and 1.7 limitations of the study and its scope are highlighted. The expected results and outcomes of this study is given in section 1.8. Section 1.9 shows the significance of this study and its contribution to the field of built environment. The second part of this chapter explains the methods and tools that have been used in this study. In section 1.10 the methodology used to assemble detailed information about the subject is identified. Section 1.11 presents the organisation of the thesis and its chapter's division. Finally, conclusions of this chapter are made.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Islamic art and architecture in China is a field surrounded by controversy for both its name and are those who question the existence of an Islamic Chinese culture altogether, and consequently object to the term Islamic Chinese art and architecture. What they are really questioning thus is the identity of Muslim Chinese. As such, it is perceived as an enigma.

In general, however, it is a neglected field, both in Islamic world and in the West. There is virtually nothing known in the West about Islamic Chinese art. Islamic art works or calligraphic works by Muslim Chinese artists or calligraphers have barely made an appearance in Western galleries and museums or even occasioned an editorial in magazines.¹ Although the study of things Islamic covering every facet of Muslim life and culture has increased tremendously during the second half of twentieth and twenty one century. The majority of scholars of history of arts tend to ignore the existence of Islamic art in China; they keep mentioning the Islamic art from Arabian land to Andalusia up to Persia, South East Asia and India. The obvious question here is, why? What is the reason behind the absence of Islamic art in China from the international scene, particularly at this age of global communication? There might be some reasons, some of which are beyond the scope of this study.

However, the dissemination of Islam in China articulates the integration between the Islamic and Chinese civilization. From generation to generation, Muslims in China were immensely seen with eminent figures in the history of China including military strategists, writers, poets, historians, astronomers, navigators and philosophers. The Muslim contribution in the field of medicine, politics, trade and art

¹ With exception to the British Museum in London that started since 2006 inviting Haji Noor Deen to demonstrate his calligraphic works in form of exhibitions and workshops and one of his works is displayed in one of the museum galleries.

has been highly acknowledged as the inseparable part of the diversified and heterogeneous civilization of China. The Islamic art has played a significant role in the development of Muslim Chinese community in China. Over time it evolved in response to the cultural needs of Muslim minority groups in China.

The Islamic calligraphy is one of the major characteristics of Islamic art and architecture and has always been an element of identification and unification in the civilization of Islam, it was applied on various types of media, it was used on objects and monuments or incorporated into the walls of buildings, ceramics plates, textiles, and practically all other objects using different material and techniques. However, the Arabic script was widely used in architecture, especially in interior and exterior decoration of mosques and other religious buildings, it played a decorative role as well as an epigraphic motif transmitting the religious message which is spiritual and educational in nature calling people to the worship of Allah and promoting local culture simultaneously.

The study of epigraphy has been commented upon and evaluated by Ettinghausen, Grabbar, Blair and others. In these evaluations, it is put forth that the importance of architectural inscriptions for the study of architectural history as well as cultural and social history. By the time the Mamluks raised the power in 1260 A.D, the use of Arabic inscriptions on architectural buildings had become a traditional form of visual communication. Though the use of inscriptions on buildings is dated back to the first monument in Islam, the Dome of the Rock (691 A.H). (figure 1.1), the roots of Mamluk practice lie in the Fatimid tradition in Cairo and its interpretation by Ayyubids after them. (Bierman. I, 1998: 34).

Most of the mosques in the world include Arabic calligraphic inscriptions were participating in the ornamental program of the construction as part and partial of their