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Literacy, in Arabic and Persian, in late imperial China

Literacy in Arabic and Persian became more common in late imperial China, specifically during the Ming and Qing periods (roughly, from the fourteenth to the twentieth century). Three reasons for this development can be identified. First, the Chinese court used Arabic and Persian for diplomacy and desired access to scientific knowledge originating from the Islamicate world. Second, religious communities, most notably Muslims and Jews, persisted in their use of Arabic and Persian (and their related scripts and variants). Third, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, local Chinese savants, many of whom were either practising Muslims or of Muslim descent, were interested in a deeper understanding of Arabic and Persian philosophical and religious texts.

Those Chinese people who either professed the Islamic religion or who had Muslim ancestry were often referred to as "huihui," a term also used for the entire Muslim population of western and central

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01 Temmuz 2021