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Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Manuscripts from the Hıjāz to Northwest China:
Ma Laichi Abū al-Futūh al-Şmī and his Huasi Menhuan Sufi Order

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Introduction

Among the photographs of Arabic and a few Persian manuscripts, mainly of the Chinese origin, that I have taken during my travels in Northwest China between 2008 and 2017, there is an image of a license (*ijāza*) that Arab Sufi and ḥadīth scholar Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sa'īd Ibn 'Aqīla al-Makkī al-Ḥanafī (d. 1150/1737)¹ issued to Chinese Sufi Ma Laichi 马来迟 Abū al-Futūh 'Abd al-Ḥalīm (1681–1766). The *ijāza* authorized Ma Laichi to propagate Islam in China through the interpretation of a branch of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order. The Arabic manuscript text confirms the claim of the transmission of spiritual knowledge from 'Aqīla to Laichi as is implied by the inclusion of their names among the authorities mentioned in various liturgical texts of the *Tarīqa al-Huasi* or Huasi² 华寺 Sufi order (Menhuan).

This article will include a short discussion of the *ijāza* according to the manuscript in the possession of the central convent in Hezhou (modern Linxia, Gansu province).³ As this

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1 [Brockelmann 1937–49: II, 506 s II, 522; Kaḥḥāla 1957–61: VIII, 264–265; Sobieroj 2018: no. 9, 2, 196–97; Reichmuth 2009: 22]. A statement of 'Aqīla's year of death and place of burial (Mecca) has been entered in the margins of a manuscript of 'Aqīla's *Fawā'id* (Cod.arab. 1832, fo. 53r), together with a reference to the scribe's source, the Syrian jurist and member of the Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya, Muḥammad Amīn 'Abidīn (d. 1252/1836).

2 Translated as “flowery,” “colored,” “multicolored,” and “variegated” [mosque] by Michael Dillon [1999: 119]. The name, Dillon [1999: 119] explains, has been taken “from the carvings, paintings, and multicolored decoration” of a mosque, already built in the 15th century. In its design and decoration, it was modeled on “Chinese Buddhist temples and imperial palaces.”

3 I saw the manuscript in 2010 in the Huasi convent in the Bafang 八坊 quarter of Linxia, where I was given the permission to take photographs (for an eventual publication). The manuscripts were owned by the eighth-generation successor of the order's founder, called Ma Hongzhang 馬鴻章, who then was 78 years old. The scholar's ownership stamp 馬鴻章印 embellished some of the manuscripts of his collection. His son, at that time, operated a bookshop specialized in books on Islam and Sufism, including facsimile Arabic