

*Cultural Encounters
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*Familiar Strangers:
A History of Muslims in Northwest China*
Jonathan N. Lipman

Familiar Strangers

A History of Muslims
in Northwest China

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CONNECTIONS

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The *Mirsad*, a thirteenth-century text by Abū-Bakr 'Abd-Allāh, traces the soul's journey from its original home, through the present life to the world to come.³⁹ Clearly of Sufi origins, in Wu's hands it became a manual for proper Islamic belief and behavior, including sections on creation, worldly obligations, good and evil, and methods of self-cultivation for various classes of society. In northwest China Sufis arrived in person, bearing the *tariqa* as a vehicle of religious and social organization and their own charismatic leadership for mobilization. In east China Sufism arrived as philosophical texts, not especially distinguished from other Islamic books and quite separate from any social or political forms.

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40. Bai, *Huizu renwu zhi* (Qingdai), 42–43.

41. *Ibid.*, 37–41.

42. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, 23.

Original Authors:

Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi

The connections to a broader scholarly community that characterized translators is even more marked in the case of the authors of original *Han Kitab* texts. The earliest author to emerge from the Chinese Muslim educational network is best understood by the sobriquet he chose for himself. This is Wang Daiyu 王岱輿, also known as Zhenhui laoren 真回老人 (Elder of Islam).³⁸ A disciple of Ma Junshi, a teacher of the fourth generation of scholars active in the network, Wang was born in Nanjing around 1570 to a family of Muslim astronomers. Wang says, with some apparent pride, that his ancestors had come to China from Arabia (天房)³⁹ during the early Ming period to serve at the court of the Hongwu emperor.⁴⁰ The family settled in Nanjing and apparently held positions in the Bureau of Astronomy for several generations. This is, at least, what Wang tells us about his family. Wang's ancestors, he wrote, "corrected the subtleties of astronomy [and] altered the mistakes in the calendar" 訂天文之精微改曆法之謬誤.⁴¹ According to Wang, the grateful emperor granted the family the right to live in China and exempted them from corvée. Wang explains that his family's privilege came about because of the lack of good astronomers in China.⁴²

Wang, by his account, had no classical education prior to the age of twenty, when he began reading the Confucian classics, history

38. I translate *zhenhui* as "Islam." I suspect that it is a combining form of Qingzhen (Islam) and Huihui (Muslim), which were common at the time. In the same manner, Wang's sobriquet could be also translated as "Elder of the Muslims."

39. As mentioned in the Introduction, the character *fang* 房 is sometimes used instead of the more common 方. In this context, the meaning of 天房 is similar to that of 天方.

40. Several short biographies of Wang Daiyu were published in China, starting in the nineteenth century. All are based on Wang's account in the "Zixu" 自敘, which he attached to his first book, the *Zhengjiao zhenquan* (for the text of the "Zixu," see ZQX, pp. 16-17). For the most recent, see HRZ (Qingdai), pp. 33-35.

41. Wang Daiyu, "Zixu," in ZQX, p. 16.

42. In his words: 帝心欣悅... 遂授職欽天賜居此地准免徭役與國始終 (ibid.).

books, and the various authors of the hundred schools (始閱性理史鑒之書旁及百家諸子). He defines all these topics as the learning of the *Ru* (or Confucian scholars—儒者之學).⁴³ Evidently, Wang did not receive a formal education in the classics, nor do we have any indication from him that he was ever an examination candidate. He probably learned to read and write Chinese in the Islamic school at Nanjing. In Zhao's *Genealogy*, Wang appears in the school of Ma Junshi from Nanjing, as the "teacher Daiyu Wang" 岱輿王師. Next to his name, Zhao noted: "Author of the *Zhengjiao zhenquan* and other [books], good at instructing the books and classics, writing and translating, [his] wonders are many" 著有正教真詮等書字譯經長於訓勸奇跡頗多 (JXCP, p. 52). His teacher, Ma Junshi—himself author of the *Tianfang weizhen yaolue* 天方微真要略 (Comprehensive sketch of the subtleties [hidden things] of Islam)⁴⁴—also wrote of Wang's scholarly prowess. The teacher contributed a foreword to one of Wang's texts—the *Xizhen zhengda* 希真正答 (Correct answer of the Very True), published in Nanjing in 1658—in which Ma described his disciple Wang as someone who was able to explain every question he was asked in a friendly and a kind manner, even when he had to repeat himself (往日岱輿王子於是或有問者必正言答之不憚反覆明曉之同人爲筆記, 得若干則).⁴⁵

Wang's first and most important book is in two volumes, each divided into twenty sections concerned with different topics related to Islam. The first volume is dedicated to the foundations of Islamic faith, beginning with a discussion of the meaning and nature of God. It is entitled *Zhenyi* 真一 (The True and One), a term he apparently coined.⁴⁶ The second addresses questions of practice and opens with a section explicating the five pillars of Islam.⁴⁷ Wang followed the composition of this book with a number of others, among them the undated *Qingzhen daxue* 清真大學 (The Great

43. Ibid.

44. HRZ (Qingdai), p. 37. See also the entry on Ma Junshi in Leslie, *Islamic Literature in Chinese*, p. 78.

45. Ma Junshi (Ma Zhongxin), "Bianyan" 弁言 (Foreword), in HRZ (Qingdai), pp. 313-14.

46. Wang Daiyu, "Zhenyi" in ZQX, pp. 19-23.

47. For a detailed discussion of all terms used by Wang and a translation of his text, see Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*, pp. 43-112.

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