

**ACCULTURATION THROUGH MEANS OF COMMUNICATION:  
A STUDY OF LINGUISTIC EXCHANGES  
BETWEEN CHINESE AND ARABIC**

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**Abstract.** Language plays a pivotal role in the integration of a minority within a host majority culture and thus the linguistic trends may serve as indicators of acculturation of a community aptly as proposed by Kim (1984). This research focuses upon investigating the change in communication patterns of Chinese Muslims to explore the extent of their integration in Chinese society during history and today. The cultural interactions between the communities belonging to different languages result in the lexical integration of languages and the emergence of exclusive lingua franca as well, as it happened in the case of Chinese Muslims. This language contact resulted in orthographic exchanges as well as ‘cultural borrowing’ through code-switching initially and borrowing loanwords with phonological and morphological adaptation afterwards. The data for this research has been collected from the locale of Xi’an Muslim community through participant observation, extensive interviews and personal communications. The archival data has been consulted for historical information and the qualitative methodology is applied to analyse the collected information. It concludes that bilingualism and acculturation are inversely correlated in the case of the Chinese Muslim minority.

**Keywords:** Islam in China, acculturation, communication, linguistic and social integration, code-switching, linguistic exchanges between Chinese and Arabic, Chinese Arabic

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## **1. Introduction**

Kim (1988) suggested that when a cultural minority needs to settle and adapt to the culture of the host majority the first step is to acquire the communicative skills. The more the members of a minority enhance their communicative competence, the more interactive their lives become leading to a vigorous integration in the host

cultural milieu. Therefore, the communication patterns and linguistic developments of an acculturating community can aptly serve as indicators of its acculturation. Analysing various models of acculturation Lakey (2003) concluded that communication is a significant tool and measure of acculturation of a community. A study, with intentions and paradigms similar to ours, has been made by Chang (1972) to analyse the acculturation of Koreans in America through the change in their communication patterns. Shuter (1985) studied the relationship of communication with acculturation in the context of Laos. Similarly Rhee et al. (2003) investigated the correlation between communication and acculturation among Asians and Caucasians in the American context. Hence we see that Kim's model of acculturation through communication (2001) has been empirically tested and applied in the American context so far, but has not tackled the acculturation patterns of ethnic minorities in China. So, this research focuses upon the linguistic pursuit of Muslim minority of China with reference to their acculturation in the Chinese society. The data for this research has been collected from the Muslim community of Xi'an during an extensive fieldwork of more than three years.

Muslims initially came to China as traders or ambassadors and later as soldiers<sup>1</sup> (to help the Chinese empire against her rebels) to Chang'an during Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. Their early communities were comprised of Arabs and Persians both of who were tied with the religious bonds and brotherhood of Islam in the first place. They were bound to live together, under the state orders, in the ghettos specified for the foreigners known as *Fan Fang* not intermixing with the Han majority society predominantly. This practice accelerated their mutual integration thus creating a common Arabic and Persian ancestry of today's Chinese Muslims and leaving behind a linguistic legacy of both the languages intermingled together. Since Islam did not come to China as a religion of conquerors or missionaries so there was never a large scale conversion to Islam, thus its sacred language belonged to only a minority who were sojourners and exotics at the beginning. Muslims were foreigners and merchants and both of these characteristics were enough to render them at an inferior and peripheral status in the Chinese cultural setup. At this level, the interaction of these Arabic-speaking foreigners with local Chinese-speaking community was limited to trade activities or some other inevitable dealings. This contact, however limited, must have caused these newcomers to learn some basic Chinese language for business enterprises and surely this learning remained in the profane circle totally, whereas the language of religious activities and debates/discussion was exclusively Arabic (Wenlong 2011).

We can infer from the status of Muslims in society that in the linguistic contact, Chinese was a more prestigious and dominant language as its speakers belonged to the majority class of power and influence so Arabic had to transform and adapt to the new linguistic requirements of Muslims. By the later Song, the bilingualism of Muslim traders was enhanced and improved as they started settling in Chang'an

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<sup>1</sup> After Anlu Shan Rebellion, Muslim soldiers who helped the Chinese emperor were settled in Chang'an. for details see (Leslie 1986).

with a few of them marrying local women and many of them owning properties in the city.<sup>2</sup> Although keeping their original languages and their scripts intact, they progressed in learning the Chinese languages and we see Song having its representatives among Muslims to communicate with their corresponding communities in various cities. These representatives were on the state's payroll and were expected to serve as the links between Arabic and Persian foreign Muslims and the Song Empire. These agents could not perform their job effectively unless they were proficient in both their communal language and Chinese. It is, however, impossible to establish whether they knew only colloquial Chinese or mastered its script as well and was it among their duty to submit written reports or not? But apart from that their existence and intercommunication in two languages was a considerable step itself towards linguistic integration. In Yuan we find two major currents in the linguistic pursuit of Chinese Muslims; first the array of Central Asian Muslims with Mongol conquerors that were predominantly Persian-speaking, and secondly the amplified involvement of Muslims in administrative activities related to trade and financial issues. Since Mongols were foreign invaders they did not trust the Han with financial and huge administrative responsibilities and classified Muslims as *Semu Ren* rendering them in charge of affairs related to finance. A Central Asian Muslim was employed as in-charge of North China including Beijing, and apart from this the Muslim caravans and merchants known as *Orty* were an indispensable part of Yuan fiscal setup (Morgan 1982, Endicott-West 1989). Thus the changing sociopolitical circumstances made the Muslims interact with Han people more frequently and extensively, enhancing their communication competence and thus paving their way of acculturation in Chinese society during the centuries to come. This official responsibility required proficiency in Chinese language and probably then for the first time, Muslims learnt local Chinese language exhaustively and by the end of the Mongol reign, they were bilingual in speaking if not in writing. They knew both the languages and were developing segregation between the languages used within their community and outside it although at a verbal level.

It was due to the Sinicizing policies of Ming after the Mongols that the Arabic language declined and then finally diminished, but before dwindling it had left a long-lasting impact on Chinese Muslims' education and culture. Ming policies intended to acculturate Barbarians, i.e. foreigners including Muslims in China so the Ming emphasized the learning of the Chinese language by foreigners and cut off the relations of minorities with their native motherlands, thus virtually localizing them and making China their homeland. This geographical seclusion accelerated the indigenization resulting in the severing of cultural and linguistic sources from their original terrain. This loss of connection made people look for alternatives in the local environ and thus they integrated in every aspect of their

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<sup>2</sup> The laws dealing with *tushengfanke* during Song show that Muslims by then started localizing in China. They were the mixed progeny of foreign Muslim men and local Chinese women thus the founder generation of linguistic integration in Muslim ethnic communities. For further details, see (Chang 1999).

social lives including language and education (Murata 2000). We suggest that during this linguistic integration, the prime status was of Chinese language and it served as the main skeleton or recipient language, whereas Arabic played the role of donor and its words underwent a morphological, as well as a phonological modification. This position is justified with the evidence from orthographic and lexical exchanges between both languages. The orthographic exchanges influenced the script of both Arabic and Chinese giving rise to new orthographies known as Xiao Jing and Jingtang Jiaoyu script respectively. The lexical changes, however, resulted in the emergence of a vernacular peculiar to the Chinese Muslims; it operated by borrowing the loanwords from Arabic and adapting them to the syntax and phonological morphemes of the Chinese language. In the following pages, the orthographic part of ‘language contact’ has been analysed in the light of the relationship between the means of communication and acculturation, whereas the phenomenon of lexical exchange has been studied in the light of Scotton’s (2002) theory of ‘bilingual encounter’ and ‘code-switching’.

## 2. The orthographic exchanges between Chinese and Arabic

Xiao Jing can be literally translated as “little classic” or “the beginner’s classic” if its other name Xiao’er Jing is taken into account, whereas Jing in the local Muslim connotation is applied to the sacred/classical religious literature. Colloquially, Xiao Jing is a term applied to the Chinese language written in Arabic script. It is a sort of Arabized form of Chinese characters or writing them in Pinyin with Arabic alphabets. But one must not forget that this is not merely bigraphism, the text is loaded with many Arabic and Persian loanwords as well; at times in their original form and often in a syncretic form with a combination of Arabic word with a Chinese syllabic ending etc. It is certainly not a coincidence that we see such orthographies being developed amongst the Muslim minorities throughout the world including Europe, South Asia, South East Asia, East Africa and East Asia, i.e. China. During the expansion of Islam to African, Asian and European countries, many Arab Muslims migrated to the far-flung areas for trade or missionary purposes and finally settled there. Arabic remained their language for a long time and they simultaneously gradually integrated with local people and became bilingual to the extent of at least speaking. Finally with the demise of Muslim caliphate at Baghdad and then Spain, Arabic language declined as *lingua franca* but its religious status remained intact as it is the language of communication with Allah in Islam. This attribute kept it on the go in the religious sphere of Muslims’ lives in the mosques and religious learning centres. So, we see a whole clan of European languages being written in Arabic script in the 16th century and this phenomenon has been studied under the quintessential category of ‘Aljamiado literature.’ The term developed in Hispanic environment and Christian context and from *ajamiyyah* it became finally a purely technical term denoting “Spanish texts written in the Arabic alphabet”. Then it became an archetype for all such

phenomena in European literature and extensively applied to Portuguese, Bulgarian, Armenian and Italian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian written in the Arabic alphabet (Hegyí 1979).

Aljamiado literature is applied in cases where the script of a language has not been changed by the whole language community<sup>3</sup>, rather Arabic orthography has been employed by a minority for specifically religious purposes in a peculiar socio-cultural context (Hegyí 1979). Not only in Europe but also in Africa, we see the scholars using the term ‘ajamiyya literature’ (Robinson 1982), a word synonym to Aljamiado in meaning and a literature identical to the one aforementioned in content and purpose. The Fulfulde, Hausa and Yoruba language in West Africa have also been written in Arabic script for religious purposes (Hunwick 2006). In Swahili, we see the borrowing of Arabic religious loanwords and the use of Arabic script with few phonetic modifications (Omar and Frankl 1997). In Madagascar, the same trend is found among Muslim minorities to merge three local languages with Arabic loanwords and then employ Arabic orthography for writing this syncretic linguistic amalgam (Versteegh 2001). Among the South Asian clan of languages, Gujrati is being written in both Devanagari and Arabic script whereas the latter is used for religious purposes and communication within community, whereas the former is used for communication outside the community, so its religious literature in Arabic script is a classical parallel to Xiaojing.

There is evidence that other Muslims in the sub-continent also used Arabic script to write their languages, such as Arabic-Malayalam, Arabic-Telugo and Arabic-Bengali in Kerala, Andhra and Bengal respectively. Arabic-Tamil is perhaps the phenomenon with the closest semblance to the Chinese Muslims’ practice of employing Arabic alphabets for religious purposes (see Fig.1 and 2). Arabic-Tamil has been the practice of writing Tamil in Arabic script in the first place but by extension it is also applied to “Tamil written in its own script but containing a large number of loan-words from Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Turkish. The immediate mechanics of Arabic-Tamil consists in adapting the phonology of Tamil to the script and hence the phonology of Arabic” (Mahroof 1993). So Muslims of South India and Sri Lanka share both the mechanisms of Xiaojing and Jingtang Jiaoyu with Chinese Muslims. Xiaojing served the same purpose for its developers; they used it for within community correspondence and more extensively for religious purposes. Secrecy might not be required by the people who used it unlike their Morisco counterparts but definitely it was an exclusive Chinese Muslim enterprise which the Han were unable to understand. So it served as a distinct identity classifier for the Chinese Muslims, predominantly Hui and

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, among Indian languages, Kashmiri and Sindhi switched their script to Arabic and Punjabi, which was initially written in Gurumukhi, is also being written in Arabic by whole Muslim Punjabi community so their literature would not be classified under this category.

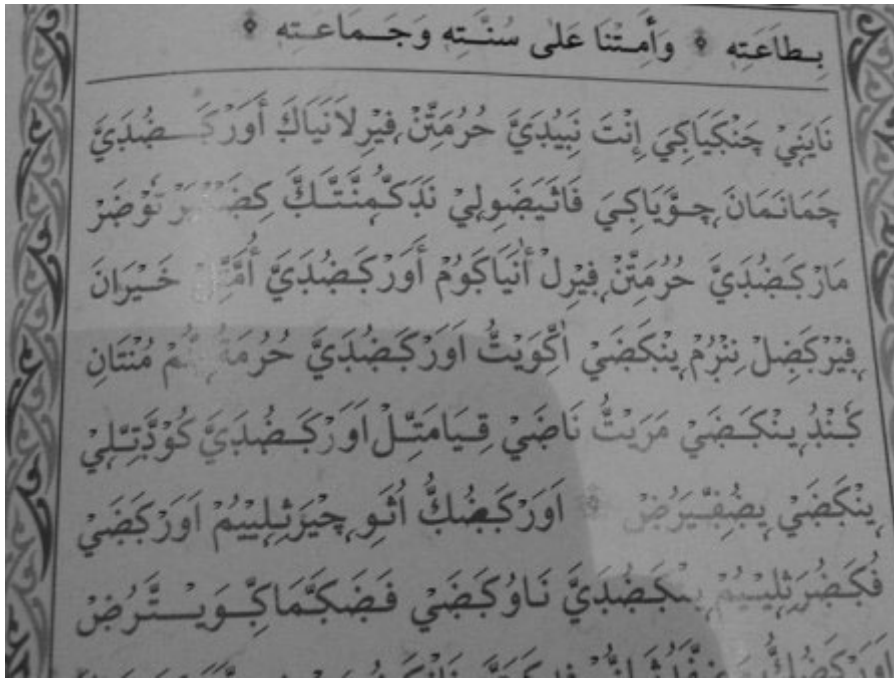


Figure 1. Tamil written in Arabic script

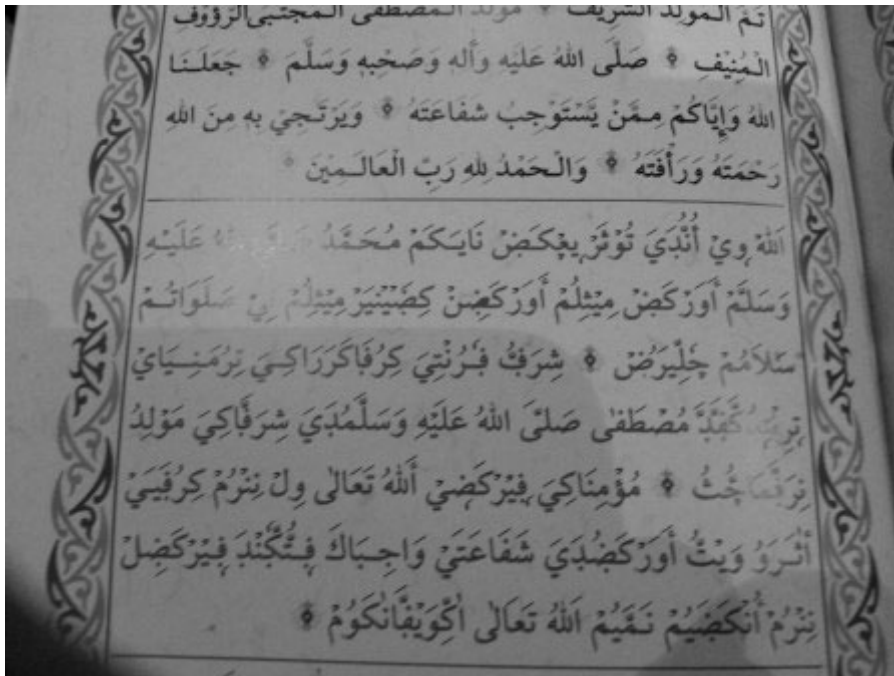


Figure 2. Arabic text followed by Tamil meaning written in Arabic script known as Tamil-Arabic

Dungan<sup>4</sup>, amidst a Han majority civilization. It became an ethnic cultural trait that marked Muslims from their non-Muslim neighbours and alleged them to their past through Arabic alphabets. This kind of text is a hallmark of nature of Muslims' integration in the Chinese lands, manifesting how they articulated their religious commitments by keeping their sacred language alive along with its orthography despite their social predicaments, i.e. of forgetting Arabic language owing to the integration in Chinese society.

The discourse of the early Muslim settlers with local people would have comprised a code switching, i.e. borrowing Chinese nouns and other inevitable vocabulary instilled in Arabic, with all the errors expected from a novice learner of an unfamiliar language. We may speculate that during these dealings, the preliminary forms of Xiaojing might have developed as the Arab traders penned down the names of Chinese places and persons in Arabic script in their personal memorandums. This kind of personalized and scattered transliteration amongst the first Arab community in Chang'an and other parts of China might be taken as the initial precursor of a script which later developed in an organized and precise manner. In Hua jue Xiang mosque Xi'an, the proclaimed oldest Chinese mosque, there stands a stone stele<sup>5</sup> with an ancient inscription bearing the Chinese names of the inscribers written in Arabic script which could be taken as the earliest relic preserving the record of Xiaojing. The inscribers possessed Chinese names and thus writing their names in a script legible for the Muslim readers required the usage of Arabic orthography. This instance leads us to the possibility of many other cases in which Xiao Jing would have been used by the early Muslims to keep record of the names of Chinese people and places.

The arrival of Muslims with Turk and Persian origins during the Mongol reign aided the already extant integrating Muslim community in China by providing them with some additional alphabets to denote the sounds extant in Chinese and extinct in Arabic so they now possessed a wider legacy of letters accommodating a broader range of phonetics. This might be counted as the apex of their journey of switching their script. Since Muslims were the right hands of the Mongols in their official activities, Arabic and Persian were significant languages in the official framework.<sup>6</sup> Mongols established an imperial college to teach Arabic, Persian and the 'yi-si-ti-fei', a set of special symbols based on these two languages that was specifically used in the management of financial affairs and this college is mentioned as China's first foreign language school by *Fu Ke* in his book *Zhongguo Waiyu Jiaoyu Shi* (Wenlong 2011). All these instances provide an

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<sup>4</sup> The Dungan people derive from China's Hui people, and now live mainly in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Their population is over 110,000. This people have now developed a separate ethnicity outside China, yet they have close relations with the Hui people in culture, ethnic characteristics and ethnic identity. For the linguistic relations between Hui and Dungans see (Rimsky-Korsakoff 1967).

<sup>5</sup> This stone stele is a very significant monument in the history of Chinese Islam and has been mentioned in all the historical literature of Chinese Islam (Pickens 1935).

<sup>6</sup> In the collection of the Yuan government's Secretary House alone, there were as many as 242 "Hui volumes" (books in Arabic) (Wenlong 2011).

insight into the frequency and versatility of the intercommunication between the Chinese, Mongols and Muslims. As we can see, language-switching was a gradual process, but the final choke causing the Muslims to adopt Chinese language while totally abandoning their mother languages was the Ming integrative pressure. Muslims have already been fluent in colloquial Chinese but their learning centres, i.e. mosques were using Arabic as the medium of instruction so the used script was Arabic. All Muslims acquired the basic religious education which necessitated the identification of Arabic alphabets which constitute The Holy Quran. In this way, in the orb of linguistic expertise, Muslims started constructing a dual identity by the early Ming coalescing between their originally inherited religious lingoes and the local language. This process was accelerated by the Ming orders of foreigners not marrying within their communities, but instead choosing Han wives. The new progeny with Han mothers naturally shifted to Chinese as their home language, gradually forgetting Arabic and Persian.

Within a few generations, Arabic and Persian almost disappeared from the Muslim communities as the daily language and Chinese became the substitute. But this was the matter of speaking skills only and when it came to writing a text, Muslims were unable to write Chinese characters with a few exceptions. In those days, secular education was more often acquired to be a part of official bureaucracy and the sons of merchants were not allowed to enter the official exam, whereas the majority of Muslims belonged to merchandize until they localized completely by early Qing and got engaged with farming etc. Anyhow, during Ming, most of the Muslims obtained only mosque education which taught them Arabic script. This was the time when Xiaojing surfaced properly for the first time. Muslim students in the mosques did not understand Arabic or Persian, the language of sacred texts taught in the Mosque education, but they could read and write Arabic alphabets. On the other hand, they were well-versed in Chinese but were unfamiliar with its orthography so they devised Xiaojing. When the Ahong or teacher gave instruction and elaborated the religious Arabic/Persian literature in Chinese, the students took notes in Xiaojing. The purely Islamic categories and proper names were retained as such. They, along with many other loanwords, were incorporated into the Chinese syntax and written in Arabic orthography. Then in Ming and Qing, the system was further developed under Jingtang Jiaoyu and became a widespread and elaborate phenomenon throughout China and is still in practice today in some areas, particularly in the north-western region of China, for instance Qinghai and Gansu<sup>7</sup>. By the end of Qing and during the Great Rebellion, it was a connecting language between Muslims from Yunnan to Qinghai as all of them knew and practiced it at their local mosque and madrasa. It was taught with great emphasis in Jingtang Jiaoyu along with Arabic and Persian in the 16th century in Shaanxi (Jianbiao. 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> Author A had personal telephone communications with Chinese Muslim scholars from the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu. The scholars' names are Yizhe Ma, Ma Qiang, Ayyobuddin.



### **3. Xiaojing as orthographic syncretism: a symbol of integration of Muslims**

The development of Xiaojing<sup>8</sup> in its proper organized form owes itself to the Madrasa or Scripture hall education system as it is called in China (Zenglie 1982). Like Arabic-Tamil which developed in Tamil mosque schools and became an essential ingredient of religious education in Maktab schools known as Pallikkodam in South India and Sri Lanka, Xiaojing too became the part and parcel of Muslim religious education. Xiaojing was developed by the mosque teachers in order to cope with the linguistic quandary of their disciples who spoke Chinese but could not read or write it. Moreover, all the sacred literature to be taught was in Arabic and Persian so it was necessary to learn their orthography which enabled their students to read and write Arabic alphabets. So Sino-Muslim teachers invented a systematic alphabetic representation of Chinese which employed Arabic script thus resolving the issue. Arabic and Persian origins of Muslims provided the inventors of Xiaojing with a wider set of alphabets. In the vein of other script adoptions<sup>9</sup> here as well, we find the addition of alphabets through minor modifications of the already existing letters to pronounce the Chinese phonetics non-existent in Arabic. Xiaojing has 36 letters, 4 of which are used to represent vowel sounds. These 36 letters constitute 28 letters borrowed from Arabic, 4 letters borrowed from Persian including 2 modified letters, and 4 extra letters created by the users of Xiaojing to meet the requirements of Chinese sounds. These extra letters were created adding additional dots to the letters 'sa', 'seen', 'dad' and 'kaf'. Xiaojing prevailed and became popular to the extent that it is reflected to play a significant role in the development of the script of Dungan language, a Chinese Muslim minority (Hong 2005).

Xiaojing retains the words from classical Arabic and Persian as intact loanwords without changing their morpheme and without giving them a Chinese syllabic ending or mimicking them with identical Chinese phonemes. Moreover, the loanwords employed in Xiaojing are entirely comprised of a religious lexicon or classical jargon and no traces of colloquial language are found, which indicates that the phenomenon was developed under serious scholarly circumstances and only bookish and literary words were borrowed and inculcated by the developers. This method was not error-free as an alphabetic representation of Chinese is not possible with a high precision as Arabic and Persian orthographies do not represent distinguished syllabic endings or tonal differences (Lipman 1997). This error was partially countered as the writers and readers of the script were adept in

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<sup>8</sup> For details of linguistic adaptation and orthographic details of this script please see Feng Zenglie. *Beginning Dissertation on Xiao'erjing: Introducing a phonetic writing system of the Arabic script adopted for Chinese in The Arab World* (《阿拉伯世界》) Issue #1. 1982.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in Urdu language the script is Arabic and many words are borrowed from Sanskrit that produce the sounds not extant in Arabic; to counterfeit this problem, the Muslims of sub-continent added some alphabets in the Arabic script through a minor modification of the already existing alphabets (Brown, Sharma, and Kirsner 1984) and also see (Humayoun, Hammarström, and Ranta 2007).

Chinese language so they could read it conveniently. The dialectical differences among the speakers of different areas within China would also have caused discrepancies in transliteration but once standardized, the denotations would have become agreed upon with consensus among the Muslim scholars. Even today many Muslims could use the Xiaojing script in Xi'an. During ethnographic research, we met some Muslim Ahongs and Manla who could read and write Xiaojing.<sup>10</sup> Xiaojing has played the most significant role in the education of Chinese Muslim women as they did not obtain secular education till recent times but they recognized the Arabic script and spoke colloquial Chinese. This is why we see that much of the Xiaojing literature contains the issues related to women's religious education.<sup>11</sup> It must have helped them to obtain necessary religious education through the centuries as Muslim women are obliged to know the rituals related to purity and other feminine specific issues required in Islam. Perhaps this is what Chan and Jashock (2009) referred to, while concluding their research about the religious education of Chinese Muslim women.

Thus Xiaojing symbolizes how an endangered community kept its religious heritage alive using the linguistic integration as a tool of adaptation to their socio-cultural milieu. They integrated and learnt Chinese language under inevitable socio-cultural constraints and then used it as a means to acquire their religious knowledge and saved it from diminishing by creating an orthography which personified their linguistic integration. This resulted from centuries long 'language contact' and a consistent practice of 'bilingualism', Arabic being alive in the sphere of religion at least. Their integration in the Chinese host culture created an instance of 'orthographic syncretism' exclusive to the Chinese Muslim community as the text inscribed in Xiaojing is legible neither to Sinophone nor Arab people. Xiaojing could be conveniently taken as a forerunner of Jingtang Jiaoyu, which employed the Chinese script to write and pronounce Arabic words.

#### **4. Writing Arabic in Chinese characters: second phase of Muslims' acculturation**

When we visited the Huajue Xiang mosque for the first time in February 2012, it was evening prayer time known as *Digere* by local Muslims. While standing near the Moon Platform, we listened to the Ahong reciting Quran when he was leading the prayer. It was hard for us to recognize that the words uttered by the Ahong were Arabic or Chinese as his pronunciation was entirely Chinese. In the following visits, during personal conversations with the Ahong, it was revealed

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<sup>10</sup> A personal interview of Ahong at Jian Guo Xiang si by author A on March 21, 2014 after Friday prayer.

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to the list of Xiaojing material compiled by the Machida Kazuhiko in Japan; almost half of the literature deals with the religious issues related to women and addressed to Chinese Muslim women in a simplified expression to make the things clear for the beginners. <http://www.aa.tufs.ac.jp/~kmach/xiaoerjin/xiaoerjin-e.htm>, accessed on April 15th, 2014.

that the traditional Chinese Muslim educational system depended upon teaching the Quran with the help of Chinese characters and phonics. The Arabic words are substituted with the Chinese characters bearing similar or approximate sounds and thus the child is taught to mimic the Chinese sounds to produce an Arabic word. For this purpose, the Arabic syllables are written in Chinese characters and this can be certainly counted as a developed extension of Xiao Jing. During late Ming, Chinese Muslims were totally conversant in Chinese language owing to their integration in Chinese society and their original languages were lost and so was their contact with mother resources of Islam. They spoke and wrote Chinese as it was the need of the hour. Xiao Jing was not valid anymore as the Arabic script was intelligible to the common Muslim populace – rather the Chinese script was becoming fashionable.<sup>12</sup> So they developed this technique of producing Arabic in Chinese script to keep the Islamic faith and knowledge alive and to assure the continuous usage of Arabic language in the religious sphere. The Jingtang Jiaoyu method of teaching Quran relies on written Chinese transliteration of Arabic to teach students how to pronounce and recite the Quran. The Chinese characters are employed not to translate the meaning, but instead the text itself is phonetically represented. The sound of Chinese characters pronounced collectively creates a rough approximation of the Arabic words with the least emphasis upon understanding the meaning of the text. It was not a way to learn and understand Quran, but rather just to pronounce it. For instance, Allah is pronounced as An-la-hu in Jingtang as each of the syllables is presented by a Chinese character and this approximation adds the nasal sound of Arabic alphabet ‘noon’ originally not present in standard Arabic pronunciation. Similarly, the common Muslim greetings called ‘salam’ become *sailiang mu* when written in Jingtang Jiaoyu script and the readers pronounce it Salaam Aleikun ending with nasal sound again, whereas the standard pronunciation in Arabic is Assalam o alaykum. In this way, the pronunciation is fallible as the exact phonetic representation of Arabic is not possible in Chinese characters. In the Muslim community of today’s Xi’an, most of the elder people recite the Quran using Jingtang Jiaoyu method and have their copies of Quran with the verses transliterated in Chinese and use these copies for recitation. The shop in front of the Huajue Xiang mosque selling Islamic literature and related stuff sells the pamphlets with Jingtang Jiaoyu text, i.e. the Arabic verses, transliterated Chinese verses and then Chinese translation of the meaning of the verses. Not only Quran, but also the texts of prayer and other ritual texts written in Jingtang Jiaoyu script are also available in the shop. This method enables people to read the Quran and other sacred Arabic texts who are unfamiliar with Arabic script and alphabets. They can read the Chinese characters and thus pronounce the sounds which look like the original word. Such a practice is found in other parts of the world as well, for instance Quranic Arabic is also transliterated in English in

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<sup>12</sup> It obviously does not mean that JingtangJiaoyu anyway replaced Xiao Jing, rather Xiao Jing remained in use for the people who could not read Chinese characters, particularly women and people unfamiliar with secular education. So, both of these scripts coexisted and there are still copies of sacred texts found in Xiao Jing.

order to help the readers who cannot recognize Arabic script or produce the sounds of Arabic alphabets.

Traditionally, the religious scholars trained in the mosque education were chosen to transliterate the Holy Quran and other Arabic texts as they were bilingual and knew both Arabic and Chinese scripts. The common Muslim populace, though, depended upon only Jingtang Jiaoyu text for recitation. The emergence of this syncretic script with the primary focus upon the Chinese characters is an evidence of the integration of Muslims in China and their acceptance and adoption of Chinese as their primary language. They compromised the script of their sacred language while endeavouring to adapt to their host majority society. This trend has changed considerably in contemporary times. With the establishment of the Communist government and the opening of China to the new world, Muslims are exposed to the outer Muslim world. The pressure of integration is no more as vigorous as it was in imperial China. The progress of the Gulf countries and the status of Arab Muslim countries in the contemporary world has raised the status of Arabic as a prestigious language and this phenomenon has influenced the linguistic preferences and patterns of Chinese Muslims a great deal. They tend towards deculturation, i.e. unlearning some of the past habits of one's cultural elements (Kim 1988). The voices of reform among Chinese Muslims call for refraining from the scripts emerged as a result of linguistic integration between Chinese and Arabic. They emphasize upon the primacy and supremacy of Arabic language with integrity of its standard pronunciation and script. They are advocates of *biaozhun Alaboyu* (standard Arabic pronunciation) and for them the Arabic pronounced by reading Jingtang Jiaoyu script is *Hanyu de awen* (Chinese Arabic). The difference is immediately perceptible when one hears an Ahong reciting Quran in the mosque of a Reform faction. While listening to the recitation of Ma Rui, the female Ahong of Jian Guo Xiang women's mosque, it was hard to believe that she was a Chinese Muslim and never been to any Arab country. She did not know Arabic language yet surprisingly not only was her pronunciation flawless in Quranic Arabic, but also her tone was an exact mimicry of any Arab imam reciting Quran.

The proponents of Jingtang Jiaoyu script believe that it is the legacy of Chinese Muslims and it is much more convenient for Chinese-speaking Muslims to learn Quran in this way as it works by ensuring the approximation of Quranic sounds by pronouncing similar Chinese sounds (see Fig. 3 and 4). All Chinese Muslims cannot spare much time to learn the Arabic script which needs a lot of time and strenuous practice. Thus the linguistic patterns and preferences of Chinese Muslims in the contemporary age are serving to evaluate their acculturative trends and orientations.

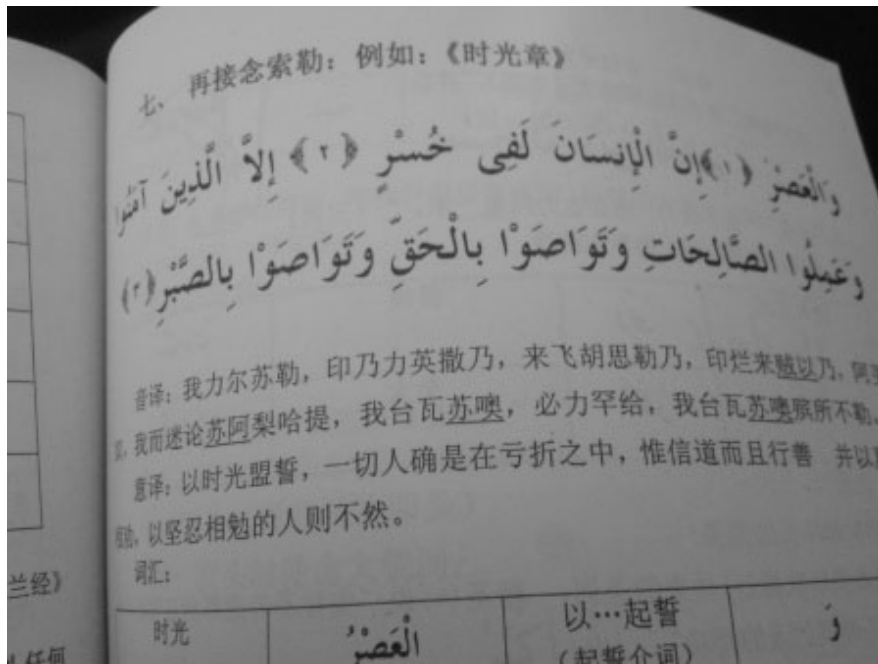


Figure 3. The Quranic Arabic is followed by Chinese Transliteration and Chinese meaning afterwards.

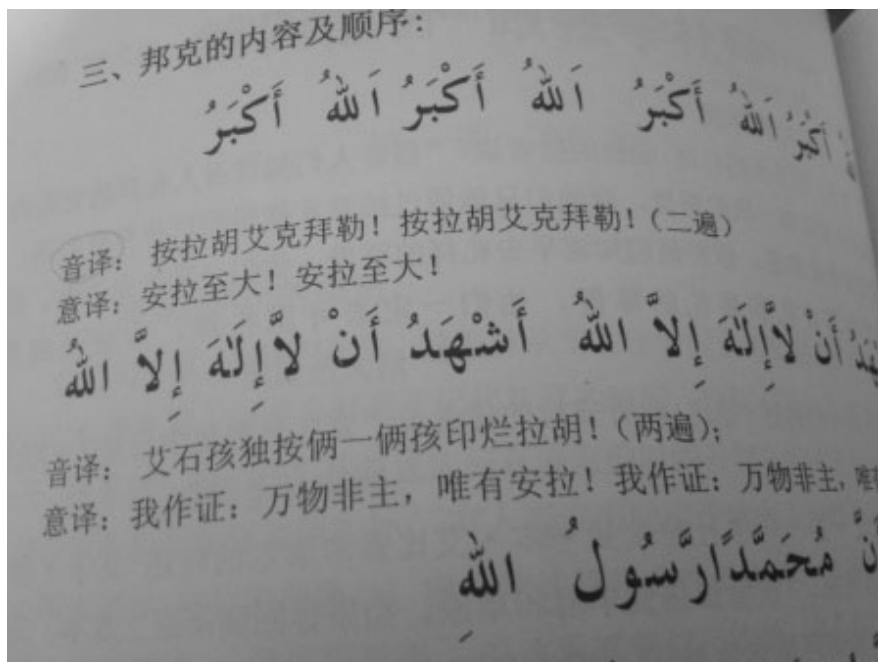


Figure 4. The testimony of Islam is transliterated in Jingtang Jiaoyu script which is followed by Chinese translation.

### 5. The lexical exchanges between Chinese and Arabic

The lexical exchanges occurred principally under the mosque education system which employed the Chinese language for teaching the religious curriculum, but retained the Arabic/Persian terms for religious quintessential categories. Ma Tong (1983) mentions it as an identity classifier or a hallmark of Chinese Muslim identity and this is what the historians of Islam in China refer to when they talk about the specific dialect of Sinophone Muslims. Otherwise they would never have developed a thoroughly independent language in their history and would have adopted the languages of their neighbouring communities comfortably<sup>13</sup>. Due to the linguistic integration, an eclectic/syncretic vernacular<sup>14</sup> developed through the course of history in the specific Chinese Muslim socio-cultural milieu owing to a persistent 'language contact' between Chinese and Arabic. It is essentially symbiotic in character, combining the word stock from Persian, Arabic, Mandarin and local dialect set on the Chinese syntactic skeleton. The borrowing of words is purely lexical and the modifications are morphological as well as phonological. Since Arabic is the donor whereas Chinese is the recipient, and the recipient language tends to be of more prestige and value in such kind of linguistic contact and integration (Myers-Scotton 2002), there is no significant change in Chinese syntax. The words/phrases of foreign languages are moulded and transliterated or patterned according to the Mandarin grammatical rules and inculcated in the religious vernacular, which is used for religious sermons and exegesis of Quran and exhortations, etc.<sup>15</sup> The combination of Chinese with Arabic and Persian makes it unintelligible for outsiders, including both the Han Chinese and foreign Muslims, as only local Muslims can understand and recognize the sinicised forms of Arabic and Persian loanwords and grasp their colloquial meanings.

In Chinese society, there was initially a contact between Chinese and Arabic/Persian where the Chinese was the language of power and dominance, being the lingo of dominant host majority, and Arabic/Persian belonged to the foreign minority community. In Tang and Song, intercommunication was limited and thus was the communication and adaptation of the minority. In this period, we may

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<sup>13</sup> In the regions of Han majority, Hui speak the local Chinese dialects, in the Northwestern provinces of Salar minority, Hui adopt Salar's language and in Mongolia, they speak Mongolian dialects so it is only the religious lexicon which distinguishes them from their non-Muslim neighbours. For details of their cultural integration in their neighbouring societies, see *China's Muslims* (Dillon 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Brown studied the emergence of a similar phenomenon of lexical acculturation and creation of new lingua franca, such as 'Chinook Jargon' and 'Peruvian Quechua'. He proposed a direct correlation between bilingualism and lexical borrowing. See (Brown 1996).

<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the Friday Sermon, the Ahong used the word 'Salat', the standard Arabic word for prayer and after a while used 'namzu', the Persian term for the same act each time followed by the Chinese equivalent of the word 'li bai'. It was not the only Arabic or Persian word mentioned; rather, the whole sermon was full of repetition of Arabic and Persian words incorporated into the Chinese conversation sometimes in their original form and sometimes in a modified sinicised form.

better characterize the process of contact as ‘code switching’ and ‘code mixing’ (Poplack, Sankoff, and Miller 1988, Poplack 2001) because it was necessary at the time as the contact between minority and majority was confined to business and trade activities, which required the usage of Chinese names of places, products and people etc. This code switching was mutual initially, i.e. Chinese words instilled in Arabic language when no alternatives were available and vice versa. Muslims were not very fluent in Chinese as they were not allowed to intermix in Han Chinese society by the state so their integration was yet to begin. In Yuan, when Muslims started interacting with the surrounding majority, there was foreign rule and thus Chinese did not enjoy a dominant status, yet its influence was inevitable owing to the considerable majority of its speakers. With this interaction in Mongol reign, the languages interacted extensively for the first time in the life histories of Chinese Muslims. In Ming, this linguistic contact was more widespread and state regulated, making Muslims the group with lesser socio-political status and their language subject to adaptation and transformation. Scotton (2002) posited that in such contacts, the language of the group at the inferior end has to change in sound and form according to the pre-requisites of the dominant language.

Under Ming, the Muslims quitted their native languages altogether retaining the religious vocabulary only in the form of modified loanwords and inculcating it into the Chinese speech, thus creating an instance of ‘cultural borrowing’ (Myers-Scotton 2002). Cultural borrowing serves to import the words from a donor language to fill gaps in the recipient language’s word stock because the loan words stand for the objects or concepts new to the recipient language’s culture. Since the route of Islam to the Chinese Muslim community has been through Persian-speaking communities, Persian served as an important language not only for direct borrowing but also as an intermediary language for borrowing the religious Arabic terminologies. When these loanwords were produced by the local speakers, they reflected the learners’ errors in pronunciation and thus resulted in an accent different from the native speakers. When the connection between native speakers and Chinese Muslim borrowers were interrupted, the local dialect of the borrowed words gradually became popular and standard. In case of Sinophone Muslim speakers, the most significant change in the pronunciation of Arabic and Persian words was giving them a syllabic ending or replacing some phonemes with Chinese sounds, thus introducing a phonological and morphological integration of Arabic borrowed words in Chinese syntax.

Here are a few instances of modified loanwords from the Chinese Muslim vernacular. The names of the five obligatory prayers are adaptations of classical Persian names except for the first dawn prayer. The noon prayer called *Zuhr* in Arabic is known as *Pie sheng*; a modified form of Persian term *Peshiin*. Similarly prayers of *Asar*, *Maghrib* and *Isha* are known as *Di ge re*, *Shamu* and *Hu fudan* correspondingly, whereas their respective Persian names are *Diigar*, *Shaam* and

*Xuftan*<sup>16</sup>. *Sewabu* is the word used by Xi'an Muslims in the mosques to encourage the people who give charity; its original Arabic word is *Sawab* in Arabic which means reward given by Allah in the here after upon any good deed. *Yimamu* is the synonym for Ahong and both are used alternatively for the person leading the prayer. The former is a modified form of Arabic word *Imam* and the latter is a loanword from Persian, the original being *Akhund*. *Khaituibu* is another loanword from Arabic with Chinese phonemes and is used for the person who delivers the sermons and religious exhortations; the original is *Khatib*. *Yizabu* is the word applied to the ceremony of acceptance during a Muslim wedding; the word in Arabic is *Ijab* which literally means to agree and is in use for the same purpose. *Halamu* comes from the Arabic word *Haram* which means prohibited in Islamic law. Then the word *Gedimu* itself is modified from the Arabic word *Qadim* which means old, hence the term is applied to the faction of Sinophone Muslims who are the oldest in China. Similarly, the head of a faction is called *Reyisi*, the Arabic word being *Rais*. The religious exhortation called *Wa'z* in Arabic is modified as *Woersi*.

All these aforementioned words are modified by giving them a Chinese syllabic ending, i.e. adding -u/-i finals to the Arabic loanwords. Perhaps this phenomenon owes itself to the dialect of Chinese speakers who tended to pronounce these words in this way exactly according to Scotton's (2002) postulate that borrowed words have to integrate in the borrowing language morphologically and phonologically. This hypothesis of attributing the modification of loanwords to the pronunciation of local inhabitants is strengthened by the presence of similar phenomena among the Indonesian/Malay-speaking Muslims. The Arabic and Persian loanwords in these languages are also given -u/-i endings and the researchers have traced the reason neither in the original source nor the intermediary languages, but instead in the recipient languages themselves (tot de Taal and Volkenkunde 2010)<sup>17</sup>. Why this argument supports our contention is that Malay and Indonesian are syllabic languages and Chinese, too, belongs to the same clan. Apart from giving a syllabic ending to the loanwords, another common way of pronouncing Arabic and Persian phonemes in Chinese is to replace the sounds. For example, 'm' is replaced with 'n' as in *salamualeikun* (the correct word being *assalamalaykum*), 'r' with 'l' as in *musilin* (the original being Muslim)<sup>18</sup>, 'q' with 'g' as in *Gu'erban* (the original Persian word being *Qurban* meaning ritual sacrifice), sound of 'sh' is reduced to 's' as in *muleside* (the

<sup>16</sup> It would be interesting to know that these Persian names are widely in use in the rural areas of India and Pakistan by the illiterate Muslims who received Islamic education through oral inheritance. A large number of people including my own grandparents used the Peshii for Zuhr, Diigar for Asar and sham for Maghrib. On the other hand, the religious clergy used the proper Arabic names everywhere in Indo-Pak and Chinese regions.

<sup>17</sup> The endings of words like *salju/salji* and *waktu* can then simply be seen as forms that have been adapted so as to fit into the Malay/Indonesian phonology and syllable structure.

<sup>18</sup> We know this through repeated personal observation that native Chinese speakers tend to replace the sound of 'r' with 'l' while pronouncing foreign language words.



original being *Murshid*; spiritual teacher), ‘z’ with ‘zh’ as in Zhuma (the original being Juma, name of the day when Muslim offer collective prayer at the midday) (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Lexical integration of Arabic into Chinese**

Types of linguistic integration	Original form of Arabic words	Integrated form of words in Chinese
Morphological integration	<i>Halal, Haram, Sawab, Imam, Khatib, Ijab, Qadim, Wa'z, Reyis.</i>	<i>Halalu, Halamu, Sawbu, Yimamu, Khaituibu, Yizabu, Qadimu, Woersi, Reyisi</i>
Phonological integration	<i>assalamualaykum</i> Muslim <i>Qurban</i> <i>Murshid</i> Juma	<i>salamualeikun</i> <i>musilin</i> <i>Gu'erban</i> <i>Muleside</i> <i>Zhuma</i>

## 6. Contemporary trends in Hui vernacular as indicators of deculturation

With the introduction of new movements in education and new trends of learning Arabic endorsed by the opportunities to hear original Arabic words through imported language teaching equipment and travelling to the Arab countries, these modified loanwords are under sway of change and criticism. The original words are re-borrowed by the speakers and inculcated in their colloquial speech replacing the sinicised words. The ahongs who know Arabic and the traders and students who have travelled to and interacted with native Arab speakers prefer to speak the non-integrated form of Arabic words. There is an inverse correlation between the degree of integration and the degree of bilingualism (Versteegh 2001) or the more a community integrates, the smaller is the tendency to be bilingual and when it resists to integrate, retains bilingualism. This is what happened to the Chinese Muslims, the more they learnt the Chinese language, the more they integrated in the Chinese society and thus the trend of maintaining bilingualism, i.e. Arabic/Persian with Chinese diminished. The inevitable religious jargon and terminologies from Arabic and Persian thus integrated into Chinese language as did the speakers themselves. This resulted in a specific synthesized vernacular. With the calls of Islamic reform in modern age particularly after Deng's reforms, the integration into the Chinese society and culture within religious realm has been criticized. The opportunities to learn Arabic and become bilingual again are increasing considerably in contemporary China, so this re-emerging trend of bilingualism is leading to the reversal of integration or unlearning the integrated forms of Arabic words. The recent antagonism towards integration and its associated symbols resulted in quitting the adapted Arabic words and re-adopting the non-sinicised form of the same loanwords. Although this trend of re-borrowing is becoming fashionable, it has not replaced the previous practices altogether as

the adapted and integrated loanwords have become the part and parcel of the language of Chinese Muslims and cannot be replaced so conveniently.

Besides replacing the modified words with 'correct' and 'standard' words in the religious sphere, another significant phenomenon in contemporary colloquial speech of Chinese Muslims is the integration of colloquial Arabic words. Since the traditionally inculcated words in the Chinese Muslims' vernacular owe their origin predominantly to the textual sources, they belonged to the category of religious archetypes, names of festivals and rituals or religious observances or part of the prayers, etc. However, the Arabic words and code-switching induced recently also depends significantly on the Arab regional dialects and colloquial speech. To illustrate the point, we heard many local Muslims of Xi'an thanking each other in the mosque saying '*shukran*', the Arabic word used to express gratitude; this is most probably borrowed from modern Arabian speech as the Islamic Arabic phrase for the purpose is '*Jazak Allahu*'. Similarly, while shopping at the shopkeepers who sell Islamic accessories imported from Arab countries, the owners used the Arabs' pet word '*wallahi*' frequently while continuing the rest of their speech in Chinese (it is a standard refrain meaning the vow taken in the name of Allah, but in Arab society it is not used for this purpose, but only as a supportive and repetitive word unconscious of meaning and so is its usage among Chinese borrowers). They must have borrowed this from their business fellows out there in the Gulf countries. These are a few instances of code-switching among today's Muslims of China demonstrating the beginning of a new trend of mixing languages most often in an un-adapted form. In this way, the dialect of today's Chinese Muslim community represents a juncture of two modes of integration of foreign language words into their local vernacular with elders and traditional people emphasizing the inherited sinicised Arabic words and the new reformers adopting the 'standard' form of loanwords both from religious lexicon and colloquial Arabic language. Scotton (1995) views that during the language contact and code-switching, the speakers tend to approximate the natives' pronunciation if the status of that particular language is prestigious in their society. In the changing global paradigms and enhanced economic influence of the Gulf countries in China, the status of Arabic language has been elevated. Moreover, Muslims particularly envy the linguistic and cultural symbols associated to the heartland of Islam, i.e. Arabia, so psychologically they appreciate the exact imitation of the Arab accent and vernacular. This psyche of contemporary Chinese Muslims has expanded the sphere of borrowing from 'cultural' to 'core' and from academic/religious vocabulary to colloquial loanwords. The local Muslims, in order to show more affiliation to the Arab world and culture than to Chinese social symbols, tend to replace the Chinese words with Arabic as mentioned in the instances given above. Hence, the lexical borrowings in contemporary Chinese Muslim society are not to fill the lexical gap in the Chinese word store (as was the case in the past), but instead because this borrowing helps them associate with the class and culture of the donor language. We can therefore see that linguistic preferences and patterns ostensibly reflect the social and psychological trends of a particular community.

## 7. Conclusion

When a minority intends to settle in a new majority cultural milieu, it is bound to adapt to the new cultural paradigms including language and social norms etc. The acculturating minority, considered in the current research, are Muslims who came to China more than a millennium ago and having passed through various stages of integration, they were made to quit their original languages and replace them with the language of the host majority, i.e. Chinese. But Arabic never disappeared from their lives completely as it was the language of their sacred scripture and religious literature; so an inevitable ‘language contact’ happened between the two languages in the lives of Chinese Muslims. The pursuit of switching language from Chinese and Arabic, creating the orthographies for writing Chinese in Arabic at the beginning and later for writing Arabic in Chinese characters, narrates the journey of acculturation of Muslims in the Chinese society implicitly. When they were beginning to integrate they developed Xiaojing as Arabic script was still alive in their practice and when they integrated fully they developed Jingtang Jiaoyu script, which fulfilled their religious needs employing Chinese orthography without learning Arabic script. As far as the lexical exchanges between Chinese and Arabic are concerned, there occurred ‘cultural borrowing’ mainly from Arabic to Chinese. Since Chinese was the language of power and prestige, as well as the recipient, its syntax and morpheme remained the standard for modification of the loanwords from Arabic. As the integration of Muslims increased, bilingualism decreased and the usage of adapted sinicised Arabic loanwords became the part of Muslim local vernacular. But in modern times owing to globalization and the increased influence of the Gulf countries, Arabic has regained its power and some of Chinese Muslims tend towards ‘deculturation’. This trend gave rise to re-borrowing of the non-integrated form of Arabic loanwords by the local speakers. This contemporary shift in the communication patterns again indicates a reversal of integration among today’s Chinese Muslims.

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