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## The Huaisheng Mosque in Canton: A New Translation and Analysis of the Oldest Inscription from 1350 CE

Barbara STÖCKER-PARNIAN

**Abstract:** The Huaisheng Mosque in Canton is one of the oldest mosques in China. Its exact founding year is unknown, however the earliest still existing inscription dates to the year 1350, the final stage of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). The text carved on a stone stele documents the reconstruction of the mosque, after it had burnt down some years earlier. To make this text known to a wider public and correct misunderstandings, the inscription was completely translated and newly annotated.

**Keywords:** Islam in China, stele inscription, epigraphy, mosque, Yuan dynasty, Canton

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## 1. Introduction

Stone inscriptions in China, having a long tradition and wide distribution, are interesting and important sources. Like tesserae these inscriptions can complete the mosaic on historical persons, and their social, cultural and political background.<sup>1</sup> Foreigners, such as people from the Western Region, i.e. Central and Western Asia, who came to China and settled down, also used this form of information and representation in their communities. The earliest Islamic inscriptions are words and sentences on tombstones and in mosques, written in Arabic, Persian or Turkish, often bilingual.<sup>2</sup> The carvings in mosques are inscriptions on the pillars and on the crossbeams, on wooden boards hanging in the rooms, and on stone steles standing in the yards and pavilions of the mosque area. Well documented are the Islamic inscriptions, mostly in Arabic, from the mosques and Muslim tombs in Quanzhou, which were compiled and annotated by Chen Dasheng (CHEN 1984).

However Islamic inscriptions, either monolingual or bilingual, are to be found all over China where Muslim communities exist. Since the Mongol period, bilingual Islamic steles have been erected in mosques, especially after the repair or reconstruction of the building. The earliest stone steles with Chinese Islamic inscriptions are situated in south-eastern China in the mosques of Dingzhou, Quanzhou and Guangzhou (LI 1996: 114–118). These steles were erected at the end of Mongol Yuan dynasty, during the years 1348 (Dingzhou) and 1350 (Guangzhou and Quanzhou). Of these three inscriptions I selected the stone stele of the Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou: an inscription of the year 1350 which documents the reconstruction of the mosque after it has burnt down. Based on the inscription text, I will analyse the political, social, and religious situation pertaining to the Muslim community in Guangzhou, the circumstances surrounding the erection of the stele, and its long existence in the mosque for many centuries until it was finally destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The name Huaishengsi has been translated as: Mosque of Holy Remembrance (BROOMHALL [1910] 1987: 109), Temple of the Memory of the Saint, Temple of Holy Remembrance (FRANKE 1983: 114), Flourishing of the Sage Mosque (STEINHARDT 2015: 59); however, I prefer to use the Chinese name Huaisheng Mosque.

In the beginning of my research, I wanted to translate, annotate, and compare the three Mosque inscriptions of Guangzhou, Quanzhou and Dingzhou. However, I soon realised that this would be too comprehensive and complex for just an article and should be done in another project. So, I concentrated on

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<sup>1</sup> For the translation of the tomb inscription of the Muslim scholar Liu Zhi, see STÖCKER-PARNIAN (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Bilingual texts: Chinese–Arabic, Chinese–Persian, Chinese–Turkish.

the Huaishengsi inscription, an interesting document for the history of Islam in China and, in particular for the city of Guangzhou.

The article is divided into seven parts: After the introduction (no. 1), I give a full translation of the inscription (no. 2), and afterwards I analyse the composition and structure of the inscription text (no. 3). Then I inquire the five persons, recorded in the text and who handle the establishing of the stele (no. 4). The minaret or stupa, cited in the inscription, which is probably the oldest still existing part of the mosque, is examined in no. 5. For a better understanding, especially for the non-Sinologist reader, I give some information on the historical relations between East and West Asia, the coming of Muslims and their situation in China during the 14th century, all in all the background knowledge of the stele and its inscription (no. 6). At last, I list and specify the special (Islamic) terminology, which is used in the inscription (no. 7).

## 2. Text of the inscription<sup>3</sup>

**(line 1)** 重建懷聖寺記

*Zhongjian Huaishengsi ji*

Documenting the Reconstruction of the Huaisheng Mosque

**(line 2)**<sup>4</sup> 奉議大夫廣東道宣慰使司都元帥府經理郭嘉撰文

*fengyi dafu Guangdongdao Xuanwei shisi du yuanshuai fu jingli Guo Jia zhuan wen*

The Grandee of the Twenty-fourth Class<sup>5</sup> of Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands<sup>6</sup> of Guangdong region, the registrar official<sup>7</sup> **Guo Jia** has composed the text.

**(line 3)** 政議大夫同知廣東道宣慰使司都元帥府撒的迷失书丹

*zhengyi dafu tongzhi Guangdongdao Xuanwei shisi du yuanshuai fu Sademishi shu dan*

<sup>3</sup> The inscription was translated in the 19th century by DABRY DE THIERSANT (1878) into French and by Karl HIMLY (1887) into German. However, these translations are quite outdated, sometimes incomprehensible, and partly not correct.

<sup>4</sup> After the title (line 1), there are 3 lines (lines 2–4), introducing the important persons – Guo Jia, Sademishi, Seng Jiane – who were responsible for the composition of the inscription. The whole text consists of 24 vertical lines.

<sup>5</sup> *Fengyi dafu* 奉議大夫 (Grandee of the Twenty-fourth Class) – in the ranks of the titles of the officials; FARQUHAR (1990: 25, no. 28).

<sup>6</sup> *Xuanwei shisi du yuanshuai fu* 宣慰使司都元帥府 (Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands); FARQUHAR (1990: 412, no. 120).

<sup>7</sup> *Jingli* 經理 (registrar official); FARQUHAR (1990: 23).

The Grandee of the Eleventh Class<sup>8</sup> the Associate<sup>9</sup> of Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands of Guangdong region **Sademishi** has written in red.

(line 4) 中奉大夫江浙等處行中書省參知政事僧家訥篆額  
*zhongfeng dafu Jiangzhe dengzhu xingzhongshusheng canzhi zhengshi Seng Jiane zhuan e*

The Grandee of the Tenth Class<sup>10</sup> of the Branch Central Secretariat for Jiangzhe<sup>11</sup> and other places<sup>12</sup>, the Second Privy Councillor<sup>13</sup> **Seng Jiane** has written the headline in seal script.

**Beginning of the main text:**

(line 5) 白雲之麓坡山之隈有浮圖焉  
*Baiyun zhi lu po shan zhi wei you futu yan*

At the foot of **White-Cloud Hill**, at the bay of the slope of the hill, there is a **stupa**.

其制則西域巖然石立  
*qi zhi ze Xiyu jie ran shi li*

It was built according to the style of **Western Region** and was erected made of stone.

中州所未睹  
*Zhongzhou suo wei du*

This had never been seen before in Central Province (i.e. **China**).

世傳自李唐訖今  
*shi chuan zi Li Tang qi jin*

It is said that it passed from the **Tang Dynasty** to the present.

蝸旋 (line 6) 蟻陟左右九轉  
*woxuan yizhi zuo you jiu zhuan*

Spiralling up like a snail shell and an anthill, left and right in nine turnings (spirals).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Zhengyi dafu* 政議大夫 (Grand Master for Proper Consultation), a prestige title; see HUCKER (1985: 67). For translation of *zhengyi dafu* (Grandee of the Eleventh Class), see FARQUHAR (1990: 25, no. 15).

<sup>9</sup> *Tongzhi* 同知 Associate (Pacification Commissioner); FARQUHAR (1990: 412, no. 121).

<sup>10</sup> *Zhongfeng dafu* 中奉大夫 (Grandee of the Tenth Class); FARQUHAR (1990: 25, no. 14).

<sup>11</sup> *Xingzhongshusheng* 行中書省 (Branch Central Secretariat); FARQUHAR (1990: 367).

<sup>12</sup> The *Jiangzhe* province covered most of the present provinces Zhejiang and Fujian. FARQUHAR (1990: 371).

<sup>13</sup> *Canzhi zhengshi* 參知政事 (Second Privy Councillor); FARQUHAR (1990: 171).

<sup>14</sup> The spiral stairs ascend on the left and the right like a snail shell or an anthill.

南北其扃

*nan bei qi jiong*

There is a door to the south and one to the north.

其膚則混然若不可級而登也

*qi fu ze hun ran ruo buke ji er deng ye*

Its skin (i.e. exterior) is one of an undivided body, appearing to be vertically inaccessible.

其中為二道上出惟一户

*qi zhong wei er dao shang chu wei yi hu*

Inside there are two routes, at the top there is only one door.

古碑漶 (line 7) 漫而莫之或紀

*gu bei huan man er mo zhi huo ji*

The old stone stele inscription has become illegible, and nothing can be deciphered.

寺之毀于至正癸未也殿宇一空

*si zhi hui yu Zhizheng Guiwei ye dian yu yi kong*

The mosque burned down in the Yuan Zhizheng era (i.e. 1343), the great hall was an empty space.

今 (line 8) 參知浙省僧家訥元卿公實元帥

*jin can zhi Zhesheng Seng Jiane Yuanqing Gong shi Yuanshuai*

Now, the vice counsellor of Zhejiang Province, Lord **Seng Jiane**, with adult name **Yuanqing**, concurrently serves as the Marshal.

是乃力為輦礫樹宇金碧載鮮

*shi nai li wei nian li shu yu, jin bi zai xian*

Then with great effort they removed the rubble and reconstructed the building. It is decorated in green and gold.

徵文於予而未之遑也

*zheng wen yu yu, er wei zhi huang ye*

Then they asked me to write an essay, but there was no time to do it.

適 (line 9) 元帥馬合謨德卿公至曰

*shi yuanshuai Mahemo Deqing gong zhi yue*

Just then the Marshal Lord **Mahemo**, with adult name **Deqing** said:

此吾西天大聖擗奄八而馬合蘇也

*ci wu Xitian dasheng piyanbaer Mahema ye*

This is our great holy man and **peigambar**<sup>15</sup> **Muhammad** of the Western Land.

<sup>15</sup> *Piyanbaer*, i.e. peighambar, rasul, the prophet.

其石室尚存修事歲嚴

*qi shishi shang cun, xiu shi sui yan*

His **Stone House**<sup>16</sup> still exists, (one is) practising the rituals every year.

至者 (line 10) 乃弟子撒哈八以師命來東

*zhi zhe nai dizi Sahaba yi shi ming lai dong*

By order of the master, his disciples, the **Sahaba**<sup>17</sup> came to the east.

教興歲計殆八百

*jiao xing sui ji dai ba bai*

The teaching flourishes for almost 800 years.

制塔三此其一爾

*zhi ta san, ci qi yi er*

They constructed three towers (mosques, minarets)<sup>18</sup>, this is one of them.

因興程租入經廢弛

*yin xing cheng zu, ru jing fei chi*

Then they established the regulation and rent of the land. However, the managing of the income has been neglected.

選於 (line 11) 衆得哈只哈散使居之以掌其教

*xuan yu zhong de Hazhi Hasan shi ju zhi yi zhang qi jiao*

By the community **Hajji Hasan** was elected, resulting in his living there and managing the teaching.

噫茲教崛于西土

*yi! zi jiao jue yu Xitu*

Alas! This teaching emerged in the **Western land**,

乃能令其徒颯颯帆海

*nai neng ling qi tu zhuanzhuan fan hai*

So, he could order his followers to sail alone across the ocean.

歲一再週堇堇 (line 12) 達東粵海岸

*sui yi zai zhou jinjin da dong Yue hai an*

After almost two years, they arrived on the east coast of **Canton**,

逾中夏立教茲土

*yu Zhongxia li jiao ci tu*

they passed over to **China** and established the teaching (i.e. Islam) in this land.

<sup>16</sup> *Shishi*, i.e. Stone House, the Kaaba.

<sup>17</sup> *Sahaba*, i.e. an associate, one of the companions of Muhammad, one who had seen and accompanied the Prophet. MASON (1921: 267, fn.).

<sup>18</sup> The three towers refer to the Shizi Mosque (i.e. Huaisheng Mosque), the Qilin Mosque in Quanzhou and the Fenghuang Mosque in Hangzhou. BAI (1982: 335).

其用心之大用力之廣

*qi yong xin zhi da yong li zhi guang*

They used their great heart and broad strength,

雖際天極地而猶有未為已焉

*sui ji tian ji di, er you you wei yi yan*

although it brought them to the limit of the sky and to the end of the earth, there are still individuals who were not persuaded.

且 (line 13) 其不立像教惟以心傳

*qie qi bu li xiang jiao wei yi xin chuan*

And moreover, they do not erect statues, they pass on the teaching only with the heart (i.e. by word of mouth).

亦髣髴達磨

*yi fangfu damo*

And it also resembles the (Buddha-)dharma<sup>19</sup>.

今觀其寺宇空洞闕其無有像設

*jin guan qi si yu kong dong qu qi wu you xiang she*

Now, one sees the mosque hall and a void recess (i.e. mihrab), quiet and without displayed images.

與其徒日禮 (line 14) 天祝釐

*yu qi tu ri li tian zhu li*

And the followers are doing daily rites and are praying to **Tian** (i.e. Allah),

月齋戒惟謹不遺時刻晦朔

*yue zhaijie wei jin, bu yi shi ke hui shuo*

and are fasting very strictly, and do not omit the time and hour of the last, and the first day of the lunar month.

匾額懷聖

*bian e Huaisheng*

The horizontal board is titled “**Remembrance of the Holy Man**”.

其所以尊其法

*qi suoyi cun qi fa*

That which is respected is the law,

篤信其師教為何如哉

*du xin qi shi jiao weihe ruzai*

one sincerely believed in the teaching of the master, why it was like this!

<sup>19</sup> *Damo* 達磨 is the Dharma, the teaching of Buddha.

既一(寺)<sup>20</sup>/ (line 15) 燬蕩矣

*ji yi (si) hui dang yi*

Since it (the mosque) was completely destroyed by fire,

而殿宇宏敞廣廈周密

*er dianyu hong chang guang sha zhou mi*

therefore, the hall became wide and spacious, a big building carefully [built].

則元卿公之功焉

*ze Yuan Qing Gong zhi gong yan*

This was the achievement of Lord **Yuan Qing**.

常住無隱徒衆有歸

*chang zhu wu yin tu zhong you gui*

A permanent residence, without hiding, the mass of believers has some retreat (gathering place).

則德卿公之力焉

*ze De Qing Gong zhi li yan*

This is the effort of Lord **De Qing**.

嗚 (line 16) 呼不有廢也其孰以興

*wuhu bu you fei ye qi shu yi xing*

Alas! Without destruction, how could it rise again?

不有離也其孰與合

*bu you li ye qi shu yu he*

Without separation, there can be no convergence.

西東之異俗古今之異世

*xi dong zhi yi su gu jin zhi yi shi*

The different customs of West and East, the different generations of then and now,

以師之一言

*yi shi zhi yi yan*

according to the word of the teacher,

歷唐宋 (line 17) 五代四裂分崩

*li Tang Song Wu Dai, si lie fen beng*

the previous **Tang, Song** and the **Five** dynasties, all declined and fell in ruin.

<sup>20</sup> This character, the last in line 14, is not decipherable, it may be the character *yi* (one) or *si* (temple).

而卒行乎昭代四海一家之盛世於數十萬里之外

*erzu xing hu zhao dai si hai yi jia zhi sheng shi yu shu shiwan li zhi wai*

And finally, there came a resplendent dynasty, a family of flourishing generations,  
in 100,000 li over the four seas,

十百千年之後如指如 (line 18) 期明聖已夫!

*shi bai qian nian zhi hou ru zhi ru qi ming sheng yi fu*

after tens of thousands of years, as indicated by time, this was the bright holy  
man!

且天之所興必付之人

*qie tian zhi suo xing bi fu zhi ren*

And what **heaven** (i.e. Allah) is promoting, must be handed over to human.

雖灰燼之餘

*sui huijin zhi yu*

Although ashes in excess,

而卒昭昭乎成於二公之手

*erzu zhaozhao hu cheng yu er Gong zhi shou*

but finally, resplendence was manifested by the hand of the two Lords,

使如創初又豈 (line 19) 偶然哉?

*shi ru chuang chu you qi ouran zai*

they initiated the beginning. Oh, it did not happen by chance!

遂為之辭曰

*sui wei zhi ci yue*

Thereupon the poem says:

**(line 20)**

天竺之西

*Tianzhu zhi xi*

West of **India**,

曰維大食

*yue wei Dashi*

there is **Arabia**,

有教興焉

*you jiao xing yan*

where the teaching emerged,

顯諸石室

*xian zhu shishi*

it is manifested in the **Stone House**.

遂逾中土

*sui yu Zhongtu*

Then they crossed over to **China**

闡於粵東

*chan yu yue dong*

and expounded [the teaching] in **Canton**.

中海外內

*Zhong hai wai nei*

in **China** and abroad.

**(line 21)**

窳堵表雄

*su-du biao xiong*

The stupa expresses magnificence,

迺立金鷄

*nai li jin ji*

there is standing a **golden cock** on top,

翹翼半空

*qiao yi ban kong*

tilting his wings in midair.

商舶是脉	<i>shangbo shi mai</i>	The trading ships are like veins,
南北其風	<i>nan bei qi feng</i>	coming with the wind from north and south.
火烈不渝	<i>huo lie bu yu</i>	The violent fire is not changing,
神幻靡窮	<i>shen huan mi qiong</i>	the divine spirit is endless.

**(line 22)**

珠水溶溶	<i>zhu shui rongrong</i>	The <b>Pearl River</b> is flowing gently.
徒集景從	<i>tu ji jing cong</i>	The believers come together following the sunlight.
甫田莽蒼	<i>fu tian mang cang</i>	Now the fields are boundless,
复厦穹窿	<i>fu sha qionglong</i>	again, the great hall is domed.
寺曰懷聖	<i>si yue <b>Huasheng</b></i>	The mosque is called <b>Huasheng</b> ,
西教之宗	<i>xi jiao zhi zong</i>	it is a religion of western teaching.

**(line 23)**

至正十年八月初一日  
*zhizheng shi nian ba yue chu yi ri*  
 Zhizheng, 10th year, 8th month, 1st day (1350)<sup>21</sup>

当代主持哈只哈只哈散  
*dangdai zhuchi **Hazhi Hasan***  
 The present (religious) leader is **Hajji Hasan**

**(line 24)**

中顺大夫同知廣東道宣慰使司都元帅府副都元帅馬合謨  
*zhongshun dafu tongzhi Guangdong dao xuanweishisi du yuanshuai fu fudu yuanshuai **Mahemo***  
 Grandee of the Nineteenth Class<sup>22</sup> of Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands of Guangdong region, Assistant General Regional Military Commander<sup>23</sup> **Muhammad**.

**3. Composition and structure of the stele text**

The composition of the stele inscription shows the classical form; the top part of the tablet, the so-called *forehead* of the stele, *bei'e* 碑額 bears two horizontal rows of eight Chinese characters in seal script, which form the main headline of the stone stele. These eight seal characters are *Zhong jian Huai sheng ta si*

<sup>21</sup> Zhizheng, 10th year, 8th month, 1st day; i.e. 1350 CE / 751 Hijra.

<sup>22</sup> *Zhongshun dafu* 中顺大夫 (Grandee of the Nineteenth Class); FARQUHAR (1990: 25, no. 23).

<sup>23</sup> *Fudu yuanshuai* 副都元帅 (Assistant General Regional Military Commander; FARQUHAR (1990: 412, no. 120).

*zhi ji* 重建懷聖塔寺之記 (Inscription of the reconstruction of the Huaishengta Mosque).<sup>24</sup> The eight characters are arranged in 2-word steps, read from top to bottom and from the right to the left. The headline is centered in the middle of the board and elaborately surrounded by two dragons, one on each side, which are integrated into a cloud carving design.

Below the heading there are three and a half lines of horizontal Arabic text, squeezed in between the headline and the following Chinese text; possibly the Arabic words were engraved after the Chinese text was finished.<sup>25</sup>

The main Chinese text is structured in 24 vertical rows of characters running from the right to the left. The first line is the title, which is: *Zhong jian Huaishengsi ji* 重建懷聖寺記 (Documenting the Reconstruction of the Huaisheng Mosque). Thus, the name of the mosque here is Huaisheng Mosque, “Mosque of remembrance of the holy man” – omitting the *Ta*, which was used in the headline.

*Ta* means pagoda – in this context a minaret – and is a tower-like building. The stone stele bears two different names for the mosque, one with the *ta* in the main title and one without the *ta* at the beginning of the Chinese text. The reason for this small difference in the mosque name is not quite clear, but the *ta* – the tower – is a special mark of the Huaisheng Mosque, which will be discussed at a later stage.

After the title there are three lines bearing the names and titles of the persons – Guo Jia, Sademishi and Seng Jiane – who are responsible for the reconstruction of the mosque. Then the main text starts, from line/row 5 to line/row 19, which is completed by a poem on the mosque (line 20 to 22). The last two lines (line 23 to 24) give the time of the setup of the tablet and the names of the persons working and managing the mosque.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Also translated: Inscription of the reconstruction of the Mosque and Pagoda of the Holy Man (i.e. Muhammad).

<sup>25</sup> For the translations of the Arabic text, see: DIETERICI (1859: 475–477), HIMLY (1887: 141–142), DABRY DE THIERSANT (1878: 88–89) and *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* 16, p. 110. I am thankful to Nourane Ben Azzouna (personal communication) for her new translation: “Allah, who is exalted, said: ‘The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day’ [beginning of Qur’an 9:18], and the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: ‘Whoever builds a mosque for Allah, who is exalted, Allah, who is exalted, builds for him 70,000 palaces in paradise’. This construction of the great congregational mosque of the Companions [of the Prophet], may Allah be pleased with it for a happy beginning and a praiseworthy end, was completed thanks to the energetic efforts of the Emir who rose to the pinnacle of great qualities, Emir Maḥmūd Wayshād, may Allah extend his exalted protection [or patronage], on the date of the year 751, in the month of Radjab, carefully drafted in [some Turkish words?].”

<sup>26</sup> On the five persons mentioned in the inscription, see section 4 below.

Sadly, the original stone stele had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and only the horizontal board heading with the eight big seal characters survived the disaster (ZHONG et al. 1989: 3 fn. 1). The present stele in the mosque in Guangzhou is a new copy of the original inscription. It is 165 cm high and 92 cm wide. Fortunately, a stone rubbing of the original stele text exists and was reprinted in 1887 in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Fig. 1). The rubbing was handed out to Himly while he was in China in 1876. However, he did not see the stone stele *in situ*. Due to weak health, he could not visit Canton during his stay in China, as documented at the beginning of his article (HIMLY 1887: 141).

The copy is quite clear and legible, some characters are difficult to decipher or partly wiped out. Unfortunately, most Chinese publications of the inscription text are reprinted in *jiantizi* (simplified characters), which makes no sense for a document of the 14th century, and moreover, it complicates the reading and understanding of the text.

#### 4. Five persons recorded in the inscription

The inscription mentions five persons involved in the construction and installation of the stone stele, these are:<sup>27</sup>

**Guo Jia** 郭嘉 – who composed the inscription text.

**Sademishi** 撒的迷失 – who wrote the stele text.

**Seng Jiane** 僧家訥<sup>28</sup> – the initiator of the reconstruction project and writer of the top title.

**Mahemo** 馬合謨 – the promoter of the restoring of the educational administration of the mosque.

**Hajji Hasan** 哈只哈散 – the managing Ahong of the Huaisheng Mosque, after its reconstruction.

The first one is **Guo Jia**,<sup>29</sup> the author of the inscription, whose name is written in the first line of the text. Guo Jia 郭嘉, with the style name Yuan Li 元禮, came from Linzhou 林州 in Henan and is the offspring of a family of famous

<sup>27</sup> In the following I refer to the article of MA (2011:76–83) and BAI (1982: 325–339).

<sup>28</sup> The character of *Jia* in the name of *Seng Jiane* is different to the text collection of YU (2001: 12); here it is 僧嘉訥, on the stone inscription it is *Seng Jiane* 僧家訥. BAI (1982: 325) uses the correct form of the inscription.

<sup>29</sup> Guo Jia is recorded in *Yuan Shi* (History of Yuan), *Lie Zhuan* (Biographies of Loyal and Righteous), *quan* 194, *di* 81. His official position and title written on the stone is exactly found in the *Yuan Shi: Guangdongao Xuanweishisi du yuan-shuai fu jingli* (Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands of Guangdong region, the registrar official); *Yuan Shi*, *quan* 194, *di* 81, pp. 4396–4397. See also MA (2011: 78).

officials. His paternal grandfather Guo Ang<sup>30</sup> 郭昂, his uncle Guo Zhen 郭震 and his father Guo Hui 郭惠 are documented in the *Yuan Shi* 元史 (History of Yuan). His grandfather Guo Ang was an important military and civil official and, moreover, wrote over 600 poems during his lifetime. In the tradition of his grandfather Guo Jia also composed essays and literary works, of which some were published by Li Xiusheng 李修生 in the *Quan yuan wen* 全元文 (Complete Yuan Texts). Because of his intellectual ability and his official position, Guo Jia was asked by Seng Jiān and by Mahemo to compose the inscription for the Huaisheng Mosque. His approval was a great favour and significant support for the official acceptance of the Islamic community and the reconstruction of their mosque in Guangzhou. Some years later, Guo Jia was appointed as commander in Liaoyang to suppress the insurgents of the Red Turban Uprising. When the rebel army attacked Liaoyang in 1358, Guo Jia died whilst defending the city.

It is not quite clear if Guo Jia was a Muslim, as he used some unusual or non-Islamic terms in the text, (for example, *dharmā*, *tian*, *stupa*), which will be discussed later. He was a Chinese and Confucian and in favour of Buddhism, and he was not very familiar with Islam. Probably it was also the time of the beginning of the influence and Sinicisation of Islamic terminology by other religions existing in China (MA 2011: 78).

The second person in the inscription is **Sademishi** 撒的迷失, also written Sadimishi 撒迪弥实, with the style name *Zhengde* 正德. He was the writer of the stele text, and a military official, as is documented in line 3 of the inscription:

(line 3) 政議大夫 同知廣東道 宣慰使司 都元帥府 撒的迷失 书丹。  
*zhengyi dafu tongzhi Guangdongdao Xuanwei shisi duyuan shuai fu*  
**Sademishi shu dan**

The Grandee of the Eleventh Class, the Associate of Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands of Guangdong region **Sademishi** has written in red.

Sademishi and Mahemo are names which can often be found in the Yuan Dynasty; therefore, it is not easy to identify these persons. However, according to MA (2011: 81), they are Muslims, even if their origin is not quite clear. *Mahemo* is the Chinese transcription of Mohammad, and *Sa* is the family name or part of name of many Hui Muslims and Mongols in China. Sademishi is mentioned in the works of the Yuan-official Liu E 刘鄂 of Jiangxi, who praised him for his political talent and benevolent government and for caring for the people and rendering many political services. Moreover, he supported the establishment of this stone stele. He was asked by Guo Jia to write the text in red, i.e. he wrote the text with a red pen on the stone, and later these characters

<sup>30</sup> Guo Ang is documented in *Yuan Shi, Lie Zhuan* (Biographies of Loyal and Righteous), *quan* 165, *di* 52.

were engraved according to his script. Concerning the personal background there is no certainty of the ethnicity and religious affiliation of Sademishi, but as far as Ma is concerned, he could be a Muslim (MA 2011: 82). Although his family was of Western origin, he was quite well educated in Chinese studies, calligraphy, and culture.

The third person listed in the inscription is **Seng Jiane** 僧家訥, who is the manager and organizer of the rebuilding project of the mosque (MA 2011: 78–80).

Seng Jiane 僧家訥 – also written Seng Jianu 僧家奴 – with the style name Yuanqing 元卿, was a Mongol and high official at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. While there exists no biography of him in the *History of Yuan*, there is an entry in the *Complete Yuan Texts* (MA 2011: 79). Here it is recorded that Seng had different official posts in Shandong, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong and in Jiangzhe. This position, being employed in the Branch Central Secretariat of Jiangzhe, is inscribed in line 4 of the stone text:

**(line 4)** 中奉大夫江浙等處行中書省參知政事僧家訥篆額  
*zhongfeng dafu Jiangzhe dengzhu xingzhongshusheng canzhi zhengshi*  
*Seng Jiane zhuan e*

The Grandee of the Tenth Class of the Branch Central Secretariat for Jiangzhe and other places, the Second Privy Councillor **Seng Jiane** has written the headline in seal script.

Besides this, there exist different short entries in literary and historical works, which allude to somebody with the name Seng Jiane, or Seng Jianu. Ma examines and analyses all these entries and concludes that these names always refer to one and the same person. Seng was a Mongol statesman, who supported the reconstruction of the mosque for political and economic reasons. MA (2011: 80) doubts that he was a Muslim, although Bai writes that Seng was a believer of Islam (BAI 1982: 335).

Guangzhou was during the Yuan Dynasty an important and thriving harbour, and the number of foreign Muslim merchants coming from the West was increasing. Many of them stayed longer and settled down, so the reconstruction of the mosque and its buildings was necessary for a harmonious and peaceful life for the Muslim community in Chinese society. Therefore, due to his political power Seng Jiane supported the rebuilding of the mosque and moreover wrote the heading of the inscription, the eight characters in seal script “*Zhong jian Huai sheng ta si zhi ji*” (Inscription of the reconstruction of the Huaishengta Mosque). Ironically, only this eight-character-tablet survived the catastrophe of the destruction during the Cultural Revolution.

The last two persons are **Mahemo** 馬合謨 and **Hajji Hasan** 哈只哈散, about whom little information exists. Mahemo (Muhammad or Mahmud) is a very common Muslim name, and there are many persons with this name found in historical records of the Yuan Dynasty.

**Mahemo** 馬合謨, with the style name Deqing 德卿, was an Assistant Regional Military Commander of Guangzhou, which is recorded in the last line of the inscription,

(line 24) 中順大夫同知廣東道宣慰使司都元帥府副都元帥馬合謨  
*zhongshun dafu tongzhi Guangdongao xuanweishisi du yuanshuai fu*  
*fudu yuanshuai Mahemo*

Grandee of the Nineteenth Class Pacification Commissions and General Regional Military Commands of Guangdong region, Assistant General Regional Military Commander **Muhammad**.

According to Ma (2011: 81) he had in general three main duties, namely:

1. to provide Guo Jia with information for composing the text on Islam and its arrival in China;
2. to engage Hajji Hasan as the religious leader of the mosque;
3. to promote the normalisation of religious activities in the Huaisheng Mosque, which is expressed in the inscription in line 15 with the words:

常住無隱徒衆有歸則德卿公之力焉  
*Chang zhu wu yin tu zhong you gui ze De Qing Gong zhi li yan*

A permanent residence, without hiding, the mass of believers has some retreat (gathering place). This is the effort of Lord **De Qing**.

Therefore, from this perspective, he was one of the most important persons for the reconstruction of the mosque and the later revival of the religious life of the community. The name Mahemo does not appear in the first lines of the inscription, but at the end, it is the last word in the last line – it is even the last word of the whole text. This final position of the name in the inscription may refer to the importance of Mohammad, a Muslim working in an official post for the Mongol government in China. Furthermore, he was managing and operating the mosque together with Hajji Hasan, who was the Ahong of the Huaisheng Mosque and responsible for religious activities. Hajji Hasan, about whom no further information exists, is mentioned in line 23, one line before Mahemo.

当代主持哈只哈散  
*dangdai zhuchi Hazhi Hasan*

The present (religious) leader is **Hajji Hasan**

Hajji Hasan was elected by the community, as it is documented in line 11:

選於 (line 11) 衆得哈只哈散使居之以掌其教

*Xuan yu zhong de Hazhi Hasan shi ju zhi yi zhang qi jiao*

By the community **Hajji Hasan** was elected, resulting in his living there and managing the teaching.

Hajji Hasan and Mahemo were the two persons responsible for religious activities in the mosque and for a harmonious social life in the Muslim community.

### 5. *Ta* – stupa – pagoda – minaret – *bangkelou* – a unique feature of the Mosque

A special characteristic of the mosque is the *ta* 塔, the pagoda or minaret, also *bangkelou*<sup>31</sup>. Its round cylindrical form is typical for most minarets in the Islamic world, but it is unusual for historical mosques of the Hui in China. The enforced political integration process in the 14th century at the beginning of the Ming dynasty caused the Muslims to build their mosques after the style of the Chinese temple architecture. This was part of the process of Sinicisation, which was imposed on all foreigners living in China, and the Muslims living their way of life in their own quarters had to adapt to the Chinese surroundings and culture. It is not known exactly what the old prayer hall of the mosque looked like, but in 1343 it burnt down, and the new hall was influenced by the Chinese architectural style; however, the accompanying minaret, the round stupa-pagoda survived the fire. At least the inscription gives no hint that the pagoda was destroyed, but the completely burnt hall had to be repaired again, it says:

寺之毀于至正癸未也殿宇一空

*si zhi hui yu Zhizheng Guiwei ye dian yu yi kong.*

The mosque burned down in Yuan Zhizheng era (i.e. 1343); the great hall was an empty space.

The stupa-minaret remained a historical element, and this unusual foreign-looking structure became a special characteristic of the Huaishengsi in Guangzhou.

Guo Jia, the author of the inscription, commences his text referring to the minaret, which he calls *futu* 浮圖 (stupa) a Buddhist term for an Islamic minaret. Firstly, he depicts the site of the mosque – near the White-Cloud Hill – and then he gives a detailed description of the tower or *futu*, which is built in a Western style and made of stone. He says:

<sup>31</sup> Bangkelou 邦克樓: *bang* “call to prayer” (Persian), *lou* “building” (Chinese).

白雲之麓坡山之隈有浮圖焉其制則西域巖然石立

*Baiyun zhi lu po shan zhi wei you futu yan qi zhi ze Xiyu jieran shili*

At the foot of White-Cloud Hill, at the bay of the slope of the hill, there is a **stupa**. It was built according to the style of Western Region and was erected made of stone.

This peculiar tower, which is very untypical for China apparently existed since the Tang dynasty, according to Guo Jia:

中州所未睹世傳自李唐訖今

*Zhongzhou suo wei du Shi chuan zi Li Tang qi jin*

This had never been seen before in Central Province (i.e. China). It is said that it passed from the **Tang Dynasty** to the present.

However, he does not say that the *futu* was always a minaret, it may originally have been constructed as a lighthouse for the ships, guiding them to the harbour of Guangzhou, a commercial town where foreigners were living and trading. Then Guo Jia goes on with the description of the inside of the tower with its spiral stairs, and he says:

蝸旋 (line 6) 蟻陟 左右九轉 南北其肩

*Woxuan yizhi zuo you jiu zhuan nan bei qi jiong*

Spiraling up like a snail shell and an anthill, left and right in nine turnings, there is a door to the south and one to the north.

It is not clear whether he means that there are two doors on the top platform or two doors on the ground level.<sup>32</sup> Guo Jia goes on with the outside description and says:

其膚則混然若不可級而登也

*Qi fu ze hun ran ruo buke ji er deng ye*

Its skin (i.e. exterior) is one of an undivided body, appearing to be vertically inaccessible.

The outside of the tower is like a skin forming a single entity, and it is not visible that there are stairs inside. But there are two stairways and one door on the top platform:

其中為二道上出惟一户

*Qi zhong wei er dao, shang chu wei yi hu*

Inside there are two routes, at the top there is only one door.

<sup>32</sup> STEINHARDT (2015: 65) mentions two entrances from ground level. HAGRAS (2023: 210) too writes that there are two entrances, “one on the north side and the other on the south, each with a spiral staircase”.

The tower or stupa is also called **Guangta** 光塔 i.e. Tower of Light, and this corresponds to the Arabic word *manara*, meaning place of light or fire, which may indicate that this tower was a beacon or a lighthouse for ships coming to Guangzhou (STEINHARDT 2015: 65–66). Another theory is that the tower was a place where one could observe the weather, especially the direction of the wind. Supporting this theory is the existence of a golden cock, a weather vane, on top of the Guangta, which moved its wings according to the wind. The author Guo Jia mentions the golden cock in his poem at the end of the inscription in line 21. But he does not use the word Guangta for the pagoda, but another Buddhist term for stupa, the phonetic translation *su-du*.<sup>33</sup>

翠堵表雄	<b>su-du</b> biao xiong	The <b>stupa</b> expresses magnificence,
迺立金鷄	nai li <b>jin ji</b>	there is standing a <b>golden cock</b> on
		top,
翹翼半空	qiao yi ban kong	tilting its wings in midair.

A cock on top of a Buddhist pagoda is quite common, however a golden cock on top of an Islamic minaret is very unusual, and this may be a hint that it was originally not an Islamic building.

However, many stories exist about this rooster. Already the Song dynasty author **Yue Ke** 岳珂 (1183–1240) wrote about the one-legged cockerel on the tower, which had one of its legs stolen by a robber.<sup>34</sup> Yue Ke, whose father was governor of Guangzhou had contact with foreigners, the sea-barbarians (*hailiao* 海獠), especially with the Muslim merchant **Pu Shougeng** 蒲壽庚 and he describes the strange and unusual customs and culture of these foreigners. Yue Ke saw the “gigantic stupa which was entirely different in shape from an ordinary Buddhist one” (KUWABARA 1935: 5) and that the foreigners climbed up and prayed for a good arrival of the ships.

Yue Ke depicts the stupa standing behind the house of the Pu family, and although he does not mention the name of the tower, it is obvious that the minaret of the Huaisheng Mosque is meant:

At the back (of the house of the P’u family), there is a stupa (翠堵) towering toward the heavens. Its form is different from an ordinary one, the circular base is made of bricks piled up tier on tier to a great height, and the outside is coated over with mortar. When seen from a distance, it looks like a silver pen (i.e. white, tapering form). At the base, there is a door, through which one ascends on spiral steps (旋螺), never visible from the outside. As one ascends each flight of many steps, there is a hole for letting in light. Every year, in May or June, when trade-ships are

<sup>33</sup> In the beginning of the inscription he uses for the tower/minaret the Buddhist term *futu* (stupa).

<sup>34</sup> For the story of the golden rooster that was missing a leg, see STEINHARDT (2015: 62).

expected to arrive, a great many people would enter the stupa (塔), and, getting out of the window, make loud noises and cries, with which they pray for the south wind, and the prayer has always been effective. On the top of the stupa, there is a gold cock (金雞), very large in dimensions, that stands for the nine-wheels 相輪 at the top of a Buddhist stupa. One of the legs of the cock is now lost.

(KUWABARA 1935: 29)<sup>35</sup>

And then Yue Ke tells the story of how the leg was stolen by a thief and how he was finally captured.<sup>36</sup> Because of a heavy storm the golden cockerel fell down during the Ming dynasty. It was set up again, but in 1669 during the Qing Kangxi era, the cock was again blown down by a heavy storm. Following this, the cock was left aside and the minaret got its calabash-like form and pinnacle.<sup>37</sup>

However, what is more interesting in our context, is the use of special terminology by Yue Ke, which we also find in the inscription, like *sudu* 翠堵 (stupa), *xuanluo* 旋螺 (spiral steps), *ta* 塔 (stupa/pagoda), *jinji* 金雞 (gold cock), and this may indicate that the author Guo Jia knew the text of Yue Ke.

The Guangta minaret is 35.75 m. in height,<sup>38</sup> cylinder like and made of bricks, and so survived the repeated burnings and destructions of the mosque. During the renovation in 1935, most parts of the mosque were changed into a steel and cement structure, particularly the great hall was modernised by this new technique. This is more durable than wood, noted LIU Zhiping (2011: 14–19), because so many termites (*bai mayi* 白螞蟻) exist in Guangzhou; a danger for historical wooden buildings. Therefore, the pavilions now have stone pillars. Near the middle door are stone walls, and the Guangta is completely constructed using bricks to prevent the destructions caused by termites (LIU 2011: 16). And today this minaret or *bangkelou* 邦克樓 is one of the biggest among the mosques in China (LIU 2011: 18).

The cylindrical shape of the Guangta minaret was obviously so striking and eye-catching that also visitors of Canton in later periods described this unusual tower. For instance, Dennys, who visited China in the middle of the 19th century, writes in his guide:

<sup>35</sup> See also CHAFFEE (2018: 105–106). Kuwabara inserts the Chinese original text of Yue Ke after his translation. For a better understanding I inserted some Chinese characters in parenthesis.

<sup>36</sup> *Ting Shi* p. 126. See also STEINHARDT (2015: 62).

<sup>37</sup> LIU (2011: 18). The different forms of the Guangta described in historical works is sketched in ZHONG et al. (1989: 357).

<sup>38</sup> LIU (2011: 18). STEINHARDT (2015: 62). However CHAFFEE (2018: 105) and HAGRAS (2023: 221) define the length of the minaret with 36.3 metres (119 feet).

...in the Tartar Quarter, lies the Mohammedan Mosque and Minaret, called the Kwang T'ap, (光塔), or Bare Pagoda. This place of worship was founded circa A.D. 850, by the Arabian voyagers who then frequently visited Canton.

(DENNY [1867] 2012: 165)

Another visitor, Marshall Broomhall also refers to the mosque and its pagoda in his book on *Islam in China*, he states:

The “Mosque of Holy Remembrance” is the largest and most ancient of all the five mosques in Canton. It is situated in the old city in Smooth Pagoda Street, which street takes its name from the unique pagoda which stands within the court-yard of the mosque.

(BROOMHALL [1910] 1987: 109)

The “unique pagoda” is the minaret, which is situated inside the mosque area. On page 108 there is a photo of the mosque entrance and the nearby minaret, which is not in a good condition, because there are trees growing on top of its roof. Then Broomhall explains the Islamic tradition concerning the origin of the mosque:

According to tradition this mosque was built by Mohammed’s maternal uncle, which tradition has already been discussed in these pages. Unfortunately for this claim, there are no ancient monuments in Canton to substantiate so remarkable a statement.

(BROOMHALL [1910] 1987: 109)

The Islamic tradition about Saad Ibn Abi Waqqas, the maternal uncle of Mohammad, who was sent to China and who is buried in Canton is not mentioned in the inscription of 1350. Then Broomhall continues:

The mosque was destroyed by fire in 1343 A.D. and was rebuilt in 1349–1351 A.D. by a certain Emir Mahmond.

(BROOMHALL [1910] 1987: 109–110)

According to the inscription the mosque burned down in the Yuan Zhizheng Guiwei era (1343) and was rebuilt and finished in Yuan Zhizheng, 10th year, 8th month, 1st day (1350). Altogether the whole procedure of planning and reconstruction needed about seven years.

Nancy STEINHARDT (2015: 60) too emphasises that “the most unusual structure of the Guangzhou Mosque is the minaret, named Guangta, or Tower of Light”, and that “it is so prominent that the complex sometimes goes by the name Guangtasi, Mosque of the Guangta”.

She does a broad research and comparison on Islamic architecture in China. Concerning the Guangta minaret she comes to the following conclusion:

The Guangta indicates that in fourteenth-century Guangzhou the Muslim community was secure enough to proclaim its presence with a minaret that projected above the low, Chinese-style outer walls of Huaisheng Mosque.

(STEINHARDT 2015: 69)

And moreover, she states that the minaret is a notable example of an “architectural announcement of Islam in China”, and that it clearly proclaims the foreign origins of Islam (STEINHARDT 2015: 70).

The word Guangta is not used by Guo Jia in the inscription, it is named *stupa* – *futu*, *sudu*, *ta* – and was considered as an element of foreign influence, originating in the Western Region.

## 6. Historical background of the inscription

The stone stele was established at the end of the Yuan dynasty in 1350. The text gives no exact information when and how the first Muslims came to Canton or China, but it records in line 10 that the master, i.e. the Prophet Muhammad, ordered his followers, the Sahaba, to go to the East; it says:

至者 (line 10) 乃弟子撒哈八以師命來東

*zhi zhe nai dizi Sahaba yi shi ming lai dong*

By order of the master, his disciples, the **Sahaba** came to the east.

However, there is no reference of the number and names of these Sahaba, even the already mentioned Saad Ibn Waqqas is not cited in the inscription. Concerning the chronology of Islam the author Guo Jia makes an approximate statement, somewhat exaggerating the Islamic period by roughly 50 years:

教興歲計殆八百

*jiao xing sui ji dai ba bai*

The teaching flourishes for almost 800 years.

The year of the inscription is 1350, which corresponds to the Hijra year 751. Guo Jia gives no exact date or year when Islam or Muslims first came to China, either he did not know, or it was not important for the author. Another later stone inscription in the mosque of the 17th century, records a concrete date of the arrival of Islam/Muslims in China. It was composed on the occasion of a repeated reconstruction of the mosque during the Qing Kangxi era, the 37th year (1698). It bears the same title as the Yuan stone stele of 1350, *Zhong jian Huaishengtasi zhi ji* 重建懷聖塔寺之記 (Record of the Reconstruction of the Huaishengta Mosque).

In this text of the 17th century one can find the statement that the Huaisheng Mosque was built “long ago” in the Zhenguan era, the 1st year, of the Tang Dynasty, i.e. 627 CE. The same date is also documented on a vertical name plate (102 x 46 cm) carved in the stone wall of the *Kanyuelou* 看月樓 (Building for Observing the Moon). The stone tablet bears three vertical character lines: in the center is the name of the mosque: Huaisheng Guangta Si, on its right side, the founding date: “Tang Zhenguan Yuannian, newly constructed (i.e. 627)”, and on the left side the reconstruction date: “Kangxi 34th year, again constructed (i.e. 1695)”. The characters are written in gold on a dark background and are surrounded by a yellow-cloud-design (Fig. 2).

However, most scholars today question this early arrival of Muslims to China during the 7th century<sup>39</sup>, though there have already been contacts between China and the West in pre-Islamic times.<sup>40</sup> Predominantly Persian traders of the Sasanid Empire (224–651) travelled to China along the Silk Road by land and by sea, and several delegations from Persia are documented in the *Dynastic Histories* (CHAFFEE 2018: 13–15). From the 8th century we have an eyewitness report of Du Huan 杜環, who came to Kufa, the early capital of the Abbasid Empire (750–1258), as a prisoner of war, after the Chinese army was defeated in the Battle of Talas (today Uzbekistan). After 10 years he returned to China by ship and arrived in Canton. He wrote down his experiences and knowledge of the Abbasid society, which were later integrated in the *Tongdian* 通典 (Encyclopedic History of Institutions). This early information on the Islamic world was also adopted into the official Tang History.

During the Tang Dynasty the southeastern port of Guangzhou became one of the most important trading centers of the east, where many merchants of Western Asia lived in special foreign quarters. In the 9th century the tradesman Sulaymān compiled a book on his travels to the Far East, titled *Account of China and India* (AHMAD 1989: XIV–XV). It reports on the special law of extritoriality in Khānfū (i.e. Guangzhou); this text was adopted by Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī and integrated into his book *Silsilat al-Tawārīkh* (Chain of Histories):

(12) Sulaymān, the merchant, relates that in Khānfū, which is the meeting place of the merchants, a Muslim is made an arbitrator by the ruler of China to settle the disputes arising among the Muslims visiting this region; this is what the King of China desires.

(AHMAD 1989: 37)<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Chen Qing gives a good overview on the “early years of Islam in China” (CHEN 2018: 7–18).

<sup>40</sup> On the historical relations between China, Central Asia and the Roman and Byzantine Empire from ancient times until the Tang dynasty see LIEU and MIKKELSEN (2016).

<sup>41</sup> The French translation by Jean SAUVAGET (1948: 7): “Le marchand Solaiman rapporte qu’à Canton, qui est le point de rassemblement des commerçants, il y a un homme musulman que le chef des Chinois a investi du pouvoir de trancher les conflits entre les musulmans qui se rendent dans cette région: et cela sur le désir particulier du souverain de la Chine.”

The decline of Guangzhou was caused by the rebellion of Huang Chao, who in 879 sacked and plundered the city, destroyed its infrastructure, and killed thousands of inhabitants, also a great number of foreigners, Muslims, Christians, Jews, etc.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the maritime trade was transferred to the northern port of Quanzhou during the following Song Dynasty (960–1279). Quanzhou became the center of maritime oversea trade, and during this time several mosques were built in the city supported by Muslim merchants.

However, the heyday of Westerners and Muslims was during the Yuan Mongol period (1279–1368). Muslims had a higher social status than the Chinese and could attain important political and military positions. This is also documented in the first lines of the stone inscription, where the persons responsible for the stone tablet are mentioned, two of them are Mongol officials – Sademishi and Seng Jiame. Muslim travellers coming to Yuan China were impressed by the wealth and comfort of their fellow believers. In his book, the traveler Ibn Battuta recounts the situation involving the Muslims in China:

In every Chinese city there is a quarter for Muslims in which they live by themselves, and in which they have mosques both for the Friday services and for other religious purposes. The Muslims are honoured and respected.

(GIBB 1953: 289)

The Chinese however are unclean in his eyes, as they “are infidels, who worship idols and burn their dead like the Hindus,” and moreover they “eat the flesh of swine and dogs, and sell it in their markets” (GIBB 1953: 289).

But then Ibn Battuta is quite impressed of the city Sin-Kalan or Sin as-Sin, the Arabic name for Canton, which he describes as the: “city of the first rank, in regard to size and the quality of its bazaars” (GIBB 1953: 289). And to him the most important Chinese products was porcelain: “One of the largest of these is the porcelain bazaar, from which porcelain is exported to all parts of China, to India, and to Yemen” (GIBB 1953: 289).

Like Sulayman in the 9th century, Ibn Battuta explains the special rights of foreign Muslims living in their own quarters, under their own jurisdiction.

In one of the quarters of this city is the Muhammadan town, where the Muslims have their cathedral mosque, hospice and bazaar. They have also a qádí and a shaykh, for in every one of the cities of China there must always be a Shaykh al-Islám, to whom all matters concerning the Muslims are referred [i.e. who acts as intermediary between the government and the Muslim community], and a qádí to decide legal cases between them.

(GIBB 1953: 289)

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<sup>42</sup> Abū Zayd speaks of 120,000 massacred foreigners, the Arab author Mas’udi (896–956) of 200,000 killed Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians (CHAFFEE 2018: 48).

So, in the eyes of a Muslim merchant, Canton was despite its negative and unholy aspects, a good place to live and to make abundant profits.

## 7. Special terminology used in the inscription

As already mentioned above the inscription has some peculiarities and special terminology, which is unusual for an Islamic text of this time. In the 14th century Islam was already widely spread in China, by Muslim merchants coming from West- and Central Asia. This is documented by numerous tombstones in China bearing the *nisba* – the name which shows the place of origin of a person for example from Bukhara, Khorasan, Isfahan, Aleppo, Jerusalem etc. (MUKAI 2016: 249–250). These persons, who died far away from home were regarded as martyrs, and the phrase “He who dies in exile, dies a martyr” (MUKAI 2016: 247) is often seen on old tombstones in Muslim graveyards.

The translation and use of Islamic terminology in Chinese started already with the arrival of the first envoys at the imperial Tang court in the 8th century, who came from Dashi (Arabia), bringing along presents as tributes to the throne. So, information on foreign people, their customs, and the products they brought to China were already known to officials and educated Chinese, living in the eastern seaports.

What is however interesting in our text of 1350, is that many of these relevant Islamic words, which already existed in Chinese, and are used in historical texts and documents, are not used in this inscription. These are for example the important place names Mecca and Medina, or the central word for God – Allah.

For Allah the author Guo Jia uses *Tian* – heaven – the first character in line 14:

與其徒日禮 (line 14) 天祝釐

*yu qi tu ri li tian zhu li*

And the followers are doing daily rites and are praying to **Tian** (i.e. Allah).

Mecca and Medina existed already in Chinese historical works, documented in the *Zhu Fan Chi*<sup>43</sup> 諸蕃志 (A Description of Foreign Peoples) written by the Song author Zhao Ruguo 趙汝适 in the 13th century. Among others it cites the Islamic place names Mecca (Majia 麻嘉),<sup>44</sup> and Baghdad (Baida 白達).<sup>45</sup> Medina (Modina 摩地那) as well is documented in the *Tang Histories* (10th cent.).

<sup>43</sup> *Zhu Fan Chi* (Description of Foreign Peoples) is a collection of notes on foreign countries and their products. For the English translation, see HIRTH and ROCKHILL ([1911] 1966).

<sup>44</sup> HIRTH and ROCKHILL ([1911] 1966: 24, no. 23).

<sup>45</sup> HIRTH and ROCKHILL ([1911] 1966: 135, no. 30).

However, the inscription, names the Kaaba the Stone House (line 9 and 20) and uses the long-existing word for Arabia, i.e. Dashi<sup>46</sup> in the poem (line 20).

The following terms are used in the inscription:

### Terms for the West

Xiyu 西域 Western Region

Xitian 西天 Western Land

### Names for China

Zhongzhou 中州

Zhongxia 中夏

Zhongtu 中土

### Names for Mohammad

Mahema 馬合麻 Mahema is for the Prophet (peigambar) Mohammad

Mahemo 馬合謨 Mahemo is the organizer/promoter of the mosque activities

Peigambar 擗奄八而 馬合麻 piyanbaer Mahema Prophet Mohammad

### Sahaba – disciples of Mohammad

The word Sahaba 撒哈八 is recorded in the text, however no names, not even of the famous Abi Waqqas, whose tomb is regarded by many believers to be situated in Canton, and who is documented in later inscriptions and historical works.

### Buddhist terms, which are unusual for an Islamic text

Damo 達磨

*Buddha-dharma*

Tian 天

Heaven (i.e. Allah, God)

Sudu 窣堵 and Futu 浮圖

stupa (i.e. minaret)

## 8. Conclusion

The inscription *Zhong jian Huaishengsi ji* 重建懷聖寺記 (Documenting the Reconstruction of the Huaisheng Mosque) is one of the oldest Chinese Islamic stone inscriptions in China. It was erected at the end of the Yuan Dynasty in the year 1350 in Guangzhou, after the mosque burnt down in 1343. Regarding the planning, construction, and activity of the mosque, five persons are mentioned in the text: Guo Jia, Sademishi, Seng Jiane, Mahemo and Hajji Hasan. The most important was Guo Jia, the offspring of a famous family of officials and who

<sup>46</sup> HIRTH and ROCKHILL ([1911] 1966: 114, no. 22).

was the military commander of Guangdong at this time. Because of his energy and political relations, the Islamic community could rebuild the mosque again, which existed already in the city before.

The documentation of the reconstruction of a religious building belonging to a foreign religion, demonstrates the successful integration and acceptance of the Islamic community in China. Nevertheless, the inscription gives only little or indirect information on the religion of Islam, especially the poem at the end of the text more describes the atmosphere of nature, and the setting of the mosque than its religious purpose and function. Concerning its terminology, the text is quite well adjusted to its Chinese surroundings using Buddhist or Chinese words for Islamic theological termini and conceptions, and thereby it indicates that the process of assimilation occurred already under Mongol rule and not, as often assumed, with the beginning of the following Ming dynasty.

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Fig. 1. Original inscription from 1350, reprinted in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (HIMLY 1887).



Fig. 2. Stone tablet of the Kanyuelou (Building for Observing the Moon) with the inscription “Huai Sheng Guangta Si”. © B. Stöcker-Parnian.