



# CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS IX. PERSIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MODERN CHINA

---

## CHINESE-IRANIAN RELATIONS

### ix. Persian Language Teaching in Modern China

Persian has been taught in Muslim schools in China since the 1920s (see viii, above). Although in 1954 the government of the People's Republic of China removed Persian from the curriculum of Tajik schools in Sinkiang (Xin-jiang) Uighur Autonomous Republic (Sotūda, p. 564), as part of an ethnic policy favoring the majority Uighur population, the language was introduced into the modern Chinese educational system in 1957, when the center for Persian language and cultural studies was established in the department of oriental languages and literatures at Beijing university. At first expatriate Persians living in China or the Soviet Union were hired as teachers, and promising students were sent for further study to the university at Kabul or to Soviet universities. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Persia in 1350 Š./1971-72 (see v, above), however, direct exchanges of both students and teachers have taken place (Torābī). Persian is also taught at the Luo-yang university of foreign languages, which is affiliated with the Chinese army; thirteen female and male students were studying it there in 1990. A progression of three courses in Persian language was taught by two teachers



educated in the Soviet Union and a third educated at Beijing university (Torābī). These two are the only Chinese institutions granting degrees in Persian; the Beijing center has, however, also sponsored classes of varying duration in other cities throughout the country. In 1986 undergraduate courses in Persian language were established in the history department at Nanjing university, but in 1988 the program was limited to graduate students specializing in the history of the Yuan dynasty or of the “northwestern nationalities.” The basic textbooks are those prepared at Beijing university. Liu Ying-sheng, who conducts the program, has recently published materials for a Chinese-Persian glossary of the Ming dynasty.

The curriculum at the Beijing center includes introduction to the Persian language, comprehension of spoken language, Persian conversation, oral and written translation, composition, grammar, selected readings from literary works and from contemporary newspapers and journals, history of Persian literature, history and geography of Persia, and courses on other aspects of Persian culture. Knowledge of English is a basic requirement and is also taught at the center. In 1986 the center was authorized to extend the program to the M.A. level. Admission to the Beijing center is by competitive examination. By 1989 a total of about ninety students had been graduated from eight sections of the five-year undergraduate program. In that year eleven undergraduates and four graduate students were enrolled; they came from as far away as Sinkiang and included Tajiks (Sotūda, p. 564; Torābī). The staff comprised three professors and three lecturers; Persian and Afghan scholars are also occasionally invited to teach or lecture at the center.

The library of Beijing university contains about 3,000 Persian works, including some rare manuscripts. Several masterpieces of Persian literature have been translated into Chinese at the center: Among them are *Laylī o Majnūn* (*Lei-li he Ma-ji-nu*; 1984) by Neẓāmī, a selection of poems by Ḥāfeẓ (*Ha-fei-zi shu-qing shi xuan*, “Selection of lyric poems by Ḥāfeẓ,”; 1981), a selection from ‘Omar Ḳayyām’s *Robā’iyāt* (*Lu-bai ji* “Collection”; 1958), the *Golestān* (*Qiang-wei yuan* “The garden of red roses”; 1958) of Sa’dī translated from English by Shui Jian-fu, *Jāme’ al-tawārīk* (*Shi-ji* “Collection of histories”; 1983) by Rašīd-al-Dīn, and *Tārīk-e jahāngošā* (*Shi-jie zheng-fu-zhe shi* “The history of the world conquerors”; 1981) by Jovaynī (see viii, above). A Persian-Chinese dictionary (*Bo-si-yu Han-zi-yu zi-dian*) containing more than 60,000 entries was compiled at the center with the collaboration of two visiting scholars from Persia and published by Zhong-guo Shang-wu Yin Shu-guar publishers. It received



favorable reviews both in China and abroad and was awarded first prize in the social sciences by Beijing university in 1984 and second prize in the human sciences by the Beijing municipality in 1985. A reprint (“2nd edition”) was published in 1990. In addition, since 1988 scholars at the center have been collaborating with Sayyed Moḥammad Torābī, who was visiting professor there in 1367-69 Š./1988-90, on the compilation of a Chinese-Persian dictionary. The dictionary was two-thirds complete by mid-1990, when Torābī returned to Persia. In order to continue work on the project, Zen Yan-sheng from Beijing university has been invited to Tehran by the Mo’assasa-ye Loḡat-nāma-ye Dehḡodā (Torābī). At Torābī’s suggestion, a research center for Persian culture was also established at Beijing university, in May 1990. Its function is to sponsor translation and publication of Persian literary works; Chinese translations of Sa’dī’s *Būstān* and stories from the *Šāh-nāma*, as well as a textbook for teaching Persian in Chinese and Uighur, have already appeared (Torābī).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

In addition to information provided by Ye Yi-liang of Beijing University and Liu Ying-sheng of Nanjing University, material has been drawn from the following sources: “The Institute of West Asian and African Studies,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 21/1, 1987, p. 18.

Liu Ying-sheng, “Studies on a Classified Sino-Persian Glossary of the Ming Dynasty,” in *Studies in the History of the Yuan Dynasty and of the Northern Nationalities* (Nanjing) 12-13, 1989-1990, pp. 145-80.

“Middle East Studies in China,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 19/2, 1985, pp. 198-207.

M. Sotūda, “Tājikān-e Čīn,” *Āyanda* 14/9-12, 1367 Š./1988, pp. 561-64.

S. M. Torābī, “Zabān-e fārsī dar Čīn-e dīrūz wa emrūz,” *Keyhān-e hawāī* 906, 3 Ābān 1369 Š./21 November 1990, p. 18.



Zhu Li, "A Brief Introduction to Middle Eastern Studies in China," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 19/2, 1985, pp. 198-201.