

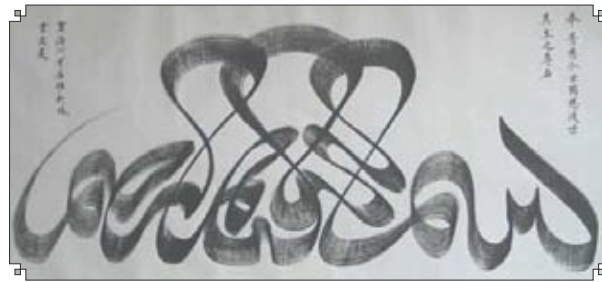


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FALL 2009 RESEARCH SEMINARS ON CHINA

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October 20 (Tuesday), 3:00 p.m.

Tokioka Room (Moore 319)

“The Search for Allah’s Chinese Name”

James D. Frankel

Assistant Professor, Department of Religion, UH Mānoa

Cosponsored with

Muslim Societies in Asia Program, School of Pacific and Asian Studies, UHM

Muslims have lived in China for over 1,200 years, and yet the Qur’ān was not translated into Chinese in its entirety until 1927—by a non-Muslim! During the first millennium of Islam in China, Muslims remained a foreign minority population. However, a dramatic flowering of Chinese Muslim cultural and religious thought occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries that produced a network of scholars who wrote about Islam in classical Chinese to form a body of literature known as the Han Kitāb. From modest beginnings translating books from the Muslim world, after generations these scholars would produce an impressive array of original works in Chinese on a range of topics, including Islamic history, practice, and theology. The challenge of expressing Islamic religious concepts in a context devoid of any clear monotheistic principle tested the limits of their scholarship and linguistic finesse. Not least of the challenges they faced was to find a term befitting the Islamic notion of divinity: what to call Allah in Chinese. Theological discussions in the Han Kitāb engage the ancient Confucian tradition, as well as Daoism, Buddhism, and even non-Chinese traditions. These writers were erudite and cosmopolitan, and synthesized diverse influences, from Sufism to Neo-Confucianism, and possibly even Jesuit and Jewish sources. Their work was both steeped in tradition and, yet, exceedingly innovative, shaping the way future generations of Chinese Muslims would be perceived and would come to understand their own ancestral tradition.

James D. Frankel holds a Bachelor’s degree in East Asian Studies and a doctorate in Religion from Columbia University. His expertise is in the history of Islam in China, a field that draws upon and informs his scholarly interests in the comparative history of ideas, and religious and cultural syncretism. Dr. Frankel’s forthcoming first book, *Rectifying God’s Name: Liu Zhi’s Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Ritual Law in Neo-Confucian China* (UH Press) examines Chinese Islamic scholarship and literature of the early Qing (1644–1911) period, specifically the writings of Liu Zhi (ca. 1660–ca. 1730).