

Received: October 2023 Accepted: December 2023  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i1.100>

## Oriental Whispers: Unveiling Chinese Cultural Influences in Classical Kurdish Literature

Shabnam Dadparvar<sup>1\*</sup>, Ismael Shams<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*The integration of Chinese elements into Kurdish poetry has engendered a multifaceted tapestry of literary expression, underscoring the constructive repercussions of cross-cultural influences. The magnetic allure of the Silk Road, an ancient trade route bridging the realms of the East and West, has left an indelible imprint on Kurdish literature and folklore. In addressing this subject, the article, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, endeavours to scrutinise the manifestation of China in Kurdish texts through the compilation of data obtained via text analysis and examination of primary sources in Kurdish literature (Divāns). In pursuit of this objective, the works of eminent figures spanning classical to contemporary periods of Kurdish literature have been meticulously investigated. Given the substantial influence of Persian literature on Kurdish authors, a comparative analysis of specific narratives becomes noteworthy for discerning readers. Notably, within the prominent narrative of Khosrow and Shirin, the character Farhād is conspicuously depicted as Chinese in certain texts. Similarly, in Kurdish literary contexts, Prophet Mani in Persian texts, assumes the role of a distinguished Chinese painter. This research intricately mirrors a triangular prism, illustrating the interconnection and linkage between Kurdish, Iranian, and Chinese cultures and works of literature. Within the tapestry of Kurdish literature, China emerges as a compelling vision, embodying both global dominance and utopian ideals—a vision remarkably prescient of our contemporary geopolitical landscape. According to the research findings, in the eyes of Kurdish writers, China has become a utopia, a symbol of unparalleled power, prosperity, and aesthetic charm. This consistent positive depiction serves as a testament to the idealised qualities associated with China—a beacon of prosperity and cultural richness in the narratives. The admiration embedded in the positive imagery of China in Kurdish literature thus underscores a profound appreciation for what is perceived as the zenith of power, affluence, and aesthetic allure within the tapestry of Chinese civilisation.*

**Keywords:** Kurdish Literature, Chinese Cultural Elements, Persian Literature, Gorāni, Sorāni, Kurmānji.

### Introduction

Kurdish people are primarily concentrated in the mountainous regions of the Middle East, spanning across parts of modern-day Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Throughout history, these areas have been at the crossroads of various civilisations, trade routes, and cultural exchanges. Undoubtedly, the Kurds, like many other communities in the region, might have had some knowledge of China through merchants, scholars, politicians, and artists. China, with its long history, has been a significant player in trade and cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, connecting East and West. This Road facilitated the movement of goods, ideas, and people across Eurasia, and it's conceivable that indirect cultural influences reached the Kurdish regions (Abdulla, 2023).

The Kurdish people have their origins in the ancient regions of Iran, and their role in the formation of ancient states such as the Medes and the Sassanid, as well as several significant empires within the Islamic

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor in the History and Culture Department, Tianshui Normal University, Tianshui, Gansu, China. Email: [shabnam.dadparvar@gmail.com](mailto:shabnam.dadparvar@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Language and Literature, University of Allameh Tabataba'i, Tehran, Iran. Email: [esmailshams@atu.ad.ir](mailto:esmailshams@atu.ad.ir)

world, is undeniable. It is true that currently, the Kurds are deprived of a specific territory, but considering their long history and the presence (Abbasi, 2010) of Kurdish governments in various regions, notably along the Silk Road, they have been exposed to diverse cultures, including the Chinese. Moreover, Kurds have demonstrated a keen interest in poetry and literature since ancient times and notable works in this field are readily available.

The corpus of Kurdish literature has been significantly influenced by the literary contributions of Persian poets, notably figures such as Ferdowsi, Nizāmi, Rumi, Sa'dī, and Hāfez (Hafiz) (Ghazvini & Ghani, 2001). The impact of these Persian luminaries on Kurdish poets has manifested across diverse modalities encompassing translation (Amini, 2010), quote, parody, allusion, and obtaining the thematic motifs and content drawn from the aforementioned poetic lineage (Pārsā, 2009).

The discourse concerning the interplay of China and Māchin (chin o māchin) [Chin&Māchin]<sup>1</sup> within Kurdish literature is inherently intertwined with broader literary paradigms observable within Persian poetry. In select instances, using these terms and their belongings in Kurdish poetry resembles their utilisation within the Persian poetic tradition. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that certain scholars endeavour to trace the origins of Kurdish written literature back to the formative epochs of Islamic civilisation (Mutabchi, 1989).

However, what remains unequivocal is that the first surviving works of Kurdish literature scarcely extend beyond the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Preceding this era, Kurdish authors articulated their oeuvres in Persian and Arabic. The starting point of the emergence of the Kurdish territories encompassed by the Ottoman Empire, particularly notable, is the locus known as the "Island of Ibn Umar." This geographical enclave existed within the Ottoman geopolitical landscape during the interplay of Safavid and Ottoman conflicts. Poets from this locale composed their verses in the Kurmānji variant of the Kurdish dialect. As temporal progression unfolded, poets representing diverse Kurdish dialects, such as Gorāni/Hawrāmī and Sorāni, emerged, embellishing the literary landscape with compositions in their respective linguistic idioms. Notwithstanding the pronounced emphasis on poetic creation, it is lamentable that Kurdish prose found its stride belatedly within the modern epoch of Kurdish society. Regrettably, substantive materials about these works remain sparse and limited in scope.

This research delves into an exploration of the nuanced portrayal of China and its cultural tapestry within the poetic compositions of Kurdish poets and writers. The analysis is structured along the three principal dimensions of Kurdish linguistic and written literary tradition: Kurmānji, Gorāni, and Sorāni. Regarding the literature review about the impact of Chinese cultural elements on Kurdish works, unfortunately, a comprehensive investigation has not been conducted to date. To address this deficiency, the authors of this paper have examined approximately twenty *Dimāns*<sup>2</sup> from Kurdish-language poets alongside some books representing various dialects, evaluating diverse narratives within this corpus. However, this article examines the bodies of work produced by poets and authors who notably integrated Chinese concepts into their literary compositions. It is imperative to underscore that other authors have also roughly employed these concepts in their works. Nevertheless, due to constraints, it is unfeasible to encompass all such instances within this paper. The exclusive outcome of scrutinising these works is expounded upon in this discussion. Through an examination of various works, pertinent questions arise: In what manner has Chinese culture manifested in different Kurdish literary pieces? Furthermore, what role and

<sup>1</sup>In historical Persian and Kurdish manuscripts, China was denoted as the contemporary Xinjiang region. The territories corresponding to the southern expanse of the present-day People's Republic of China, along with its eastern sector adjoining India, were designated as Māchin. Etymologically, the initial component of this term (mā) derives from "mahā," signifying 'big.' Consequently, the terminology "Māchin" conveys the connotation of "Great China", or Indochina.

<sup>2</sup>In literary contexts, Diwān, a term adopted in Persian, Turkish, and various other languages, evolved to signify a compilation of poems authored by an individual—either in the form of selected works or encompassing the entirety of a poet's oeuvre.

significance do China and Chinese cultural elements occupy within the Kurdish societal context? To address these questions, it is imperative to examine the history of Kurdish literature. This discourse initiates by examining the impact of Chinese cultural factors on various poems by classical poets and their utilisation of diverse elements pertaining to China in their poetic compositions. This work also emphasises the transcultural nature of storytelling, where threads from diverse traditions intertwine to create a tapestry of rich narratives. The Kurdish poets and storytellers of the past, through their exploration of Chinese culture, provide a lens through which the researchers can examine the intricate interplay of cultures, the universal power of storytelling, and the ability of literature to predict and shape the people's view of the world, both past and present. Subsequently, an analysis of these elements will be undertaken.

## The Impact of Chinese Elements on Kurdish Poems

### *Kurmānji Dialect*

The preponderance of Kurdish language speakers aligns with the Kurmānji dialect, referred to as "Bādināni", within Iraq's linguistic context. This dialect predominates among the Kurdish populace in Türkiye, Syria, specific Iraqi regions encompassing Dohuk and Badinān, and within Iranian Kurdish communities in Māku, Urmia, and the North Khorasan territories (Blau, 2010, 2). Within the early epochs of the Kurdish classical era, notable figures emerged as prominent poets in this sphere. Ali Hariri<sup>1</sup>, Faqih Tayrān<sup>2</sup>, and Mulla Ahmed Jaziri<sup>3</sup> are noteworthy among them. However, Mulla Jaziri stands out in his distinct focus on China and its associated themes, surpassing his contemporaries in the attention devoted to this subject matter.

Mullah Ahmad Jaziri (1570-1640) was a member of the Bokhti<sup>4</sup> clan, in the urban precinct of Jazira Ibn Umar (Amedi, 1980: 28-29). the conceptual landscape tied to China is notably enunciated within the *Divān* of Jaziri, prominently under the sway of Hāfēz 's influence (Hesari, 1989). Preliminarily, references to entities such as Musk<sup>5</sup>, Ambergris<sup>6</sup>, and the Chinese bowl are among the foremost thematic constituents in Jaziri's poetic preludes. His discerning ascription of symbolism to the Musk of Khotan (or Hotan)<sup>7</sup> is noteworthy, signifying the essence of his beloved's fragrance in his Persian poetic compositions. Juxtaposed with Khotan Musk, Jaziri pointed to Tātār Musk, an attribution conspicuous alongside Khotan Musk. It is essential to acknowledge that Tātārs, situated within the annals of Kurdish folklore and poetry, are conjoined to ancient China, weaving a symbiotic narrative tapestry within this

<sup>1</sup>In some documents he was also called Sheikh Ahmed Bohtani

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Faqi Tayran or Faqe Teyran (1590–1660) systematically gathered a multitude of folk narratives within his literary work titled "The Words of the Black Horse [Witay Aspi Rash]."

<sup>3</sup>Melayê Cizîrî, Malaye Jaziri

<sup>4</sup>Bokhti or Bohtan constituted a Kurdish principality during the medieval period, situated within the territorial confines of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>5</sup>麝香 In the Kurdish language, it is called: "میسکی بۆنخۆش" [In the Persian linguistic context, the substance is denoted as "Moshk"]; it comprises a potent-scented exudation procured from specific animal glands, notably deer. Musk has maintained its historical presence as an ingredient in perfumery and aromatic formulations for extensive epochs, primarily due to its discernible and enduring olfactory character.

<sup>6</sup>龍涎香, in Persian: 'Anbar', ambergris is a waxy, greyish substance that is produced in the digestive systems of certain species of whales. Ambergris has a distinct and pleasant fragrance, often described as musky and earthy. It has been highly valued for centuries in perfumery due to its ability to enhance and fix the scents of other ingredients in fragrances.

<sup>7</sup>In old Kurdistan, China had two parts; Khatā, [Khitans or Khatāy] and Khotan; the northern and eastern parts were called Khatā, and the western part was called Khotan. The oasis of Khotan assumes a strategic geographical position, situated at the confluence of the historical southern branch of the Silk Road, interlinking China and the Western territories, with a pivotal route originating from ancient India and Tibet, extending into Central Asia and far-reaching China. Within the corpus of Kurdish and Persian literary tradition, the toponym "Khotan" designates a city and oasis enclave in the southwestern periphery of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in the western expanse of China. The fragrant musk, the beautiful-eyed deer, and the beautiful girls of this region have reverberated prominently throughout Persian and Kurdish literary compositions. Within these poetic verses, the portrayal of exquisite beauty often entails the depiction of a maiden whose allure rivals that of the captivating denizens of Khotan.

literary domain (Jaziri, 2010, see pages 15, 17, 68, 108, 266, 325, 374, 453).

Within an alternate poetic composition, Jaziri employs the lexical entity "chin chin<sup>1</sup>," adroitly aligning its elegantly nuanced Kurdish signification with the geographical entities "khatā" and "Khotan." About his beloved's tresses, characterised by their intricate waves and dishevelled disposition, Jaziri evocatively communicates their effect upon his emotional state, inducing a form of beguilement that stirs his innermost sentiments. In a hyperbolic and embellished vein, he articulates an exaggerated sentiment, wherein he hypothetically tenders an offering encompassing the territorial dominion of Khotan and the regal seat of Khatā in exchange for a solitary strand of his beloved's hair.<sup>2</sup>

In another instance, Jaziri intricately juxtaposes the term 'chin chin,' imbued with its connotation in the Kurdish lexicon, alongside the geographical reference to the nation of China within a singular verse:

O my beloved!! The ardour and attachment I bear for you have resulted in profound detriment to my well-being and material possessions. I beseech you, if nothing else, to unveil the concealed beauty marks (moles) that reside obscured beneath your tresses. Relinquish the allure of your coiled and fragrant hair. Upon such revelation, you shall witness the Chinese populace, renowned for possessing prized substances such as Ambergris and Musk, assembling in multitudes to tender bounteous offerings of homage and reverence in your name by bringing ransom and tribute in droves.<sup>3</sup>

In the subsequent verses of this poetic composition, Jaziri articulates to his beloved the intention of the populace inhabiting Kurdistan, Vān, Shirāz, and Yang<sup>4</sup> to tender tokens of reverence. This expression of esteem is symbolised by the offering of ransom and tribute upon their very eyes, a gesture of profound veneration. Concurrently, the poet draws a symbolic parallel wherein he likens his beloved's eyebrow to an archer's bow. Through this analogy, he elucidates that the captivating curvature of the eyebrow resembles an exquisite article procured from the distant locales of Shirāz and Yang.

The allusion to the city of Yang, presently situated within the confines of contemporary China, is of particular significance within these poetic verses. The query concerning the source from which Jaziri acquired knowledge of this city remains an enigma that eludes definitive resolution. Plausibly, the poet's familiarity with this geographical entity may be attributed to its geographical adjacency to the Silk Road, a historic trade route that facilitated extensive cultural exchange. Situated within the Shaanxi province and proximate to the city of Xi'an, Yang's accessibility via the Silk Road could have feasibly contributed to Jaziri's cognisance of its existence.

Deer, commonly called the gazelle, occupies a significant position as the populace of Kurdistan deems it emblematic of China. Beyond its association with prized substances like musk and ambergris, this creature has been adorned with aesthetically pleasing qualities. Within Jaziri's *Divān*, the name of the deer finds recurrent mention, yet its usage intermittently assumes diverse connotations. Notably, the poet employs this leitmotif to draw an analogy wherein his beloved assumes the persona of a sovereign who, akin to a regal huntsman, has pursued the elusive deer. Within this context, the poet poignantly expresses that he wishes he had been the same deer (Jaziri, *op. cit.* pp. 21, 25, 133, 134).

Jaziri evinced a profound preoccupation with the discipline of astrology, predicated upon the intricate interplay of celestial constellations, planetary bodies, and zoological motifs—an interest that notably

<sup>1</sup>The appellation 'chin' designates China in the linguistic contexts of the Kurdish and Persian languages. However, the term 'chin chin' conveys the intricate textural quality of undulating or braided hair, finding descriptive utility in characterising the tresses. Evidencing an astute phonetic congruence, the poet artfully harnesses this lexical alignment, adroitly interweaving it with the toponymic references of 'Khotan' and 'Khatā' in a manner that is both linguistically resonant and aesthetically harmonious.

<sup>2</sup> زۆلفان تو بوس چین چین بکه بسکین موقابیل دین بکه/پیشکشی بک زۆلفهک تین مولکی خوتن، تمختی خمتا

<sup>3</sup> میهراته پور نمتیر کرین/خالان ژ بر بسکان دمرین/زۆلفا موسلسل عنبیرین/چین چین ژ چینی تینه باج.

<sup>4</sup>Yang County, also recognised as Yangxian (洋县), constitutes an administrative district situated within the precincts of Hanzhong, an urban prefecture within the Shaanxi Province of the People's Republic of China.

intersects with the prevailing cultural associations linked to China. Within the corpus of his poetic oeuvre, the luminaries of Mars and Venus, along with the cosmic aggregation of the Soraya cluster, recurrently surface as subjects of discourse. Furthermore, Jaziri expounds upon their astrological significance, delving into the delineations of their respective horoscopic manifestations.

The peacock is among the birds whose name the poet mentions in his anthology. The association of the peacock in Kurdish culture with China is because the term for peacock in the Kurdish language is 'chin o māchin'. Most likely, the base of this nomenclature can be traced back to the distant origin of the peacock, specifically to India, which traditionally was considered part of "Chin&Māchin" in Kurdish cultural terminology. Perhaps certain distinctive characteristics of the peacock, such as beauty, coquetry, and ostentation, have contributed to its association, akin to the deer, with Chin&Māchin in the Kurdish cultural context. Jaziri subtly references this conceptual linkage through poetic exposition, wherein the acquisition of a peacock is metaphorically portrayed as entailing the endurance of the adversities attendant upon a journey to far-distance territories. This metaphor encapsulates the notion that attaining valuable treasures frequently demands a confluence of exertion and willingness to sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

Jaziri also refers to the mountain cypress indigenous to China, a botanical entity esteemed as celestial and sanctified within Chinese cultural ethos. In an allegorical vein, he draws a parallel between the elevated stature of his cherished figure and the lofty prominence of this arboreal symbol: 'With a tall stature, the beloved approached me like a graceful and coquettish cypress tree and, with difficulty, bestowed a kiss upon me'.<sup>2</sup>

In certain verses of his poetry, he juxtaposes ambergris and cypress, combining these elements to enhance the beauty of his beloved. In another instance, he likens his beloved to a young cypress, expressing his desire to perfume her black tresses akin to musk and ambergris while adorning her with a diaphanous attire woven from the luxurious silk of the East (Chinese) and interwoven with threads of gold.

Idol and Idolatry are additional concepts that have become intertwined with the land of China in the culture of the Kurdish people. In certain instances, the poet Jaziri metaphorically portrays his heart as an idol's sanctuary, likening his beloved and companion to an idol, and perceives himself as an idol-worshipper who adores his beloved's black tresses (Doski, 2004). Moreover, he understands genuine happiness hinges upon relinquishing this virtual affection and attaining true love.

Two other concepts closely associated with China and recurrently employed in Kurdish literature are 'Khāghān' [Khagan] and 'Faghfoor'.<sup>3</sup> In Iran and within the region of Kurdistan, the kings of China were recognised by the titles 'Faghfoor' and 'Khāghān'. Notably, 'Khāghān' was also applied to the rulers of Turkestan, which was considered part of China. In his anthology, Jaziri has also mentioned the 'Faghfoor' of China and likened his heart, brimming with his beloved's affection, to the goblet of the Chinese 'Faghfoor'. In another poem, he employs the term 'Faghfoor' as a symbol of magnanimity and jubilation because the lofty beloved, with lips akin to sugar, has chosen him as her companion. He designates himself as exultant, accomplished, and the 'Faghfoor' of China.<sup>4</sup> Jaziri regards 'Faghfoor' as a symbol of a captivating outward appearance endowed with charm and dignity. In certain instances, he likens his beloved to this symbol. He also views 'Faghfoor' as emblematic of the most powerful ruler of the time. When describing Sharafkhān<sup>5</sup>, he aspires to attain sovereignty akin to that of 'Faghfoor'. To

<sup>1</sup> جەویری هندی دێ کەشێنت هەر کەسێ تاووس دێت/گەوهروو و دۆررا یەتیم بێ تەمکێ سەر تێتێ تەلەب  
<sup>2</sup> عەر عەر خەراما بە قەدد و قامەت/یەک بوسە دامە بە سەد قیامەت.

<sup>3</sup>"The term 'Faghfoor' is of Persian origin, where 'Fagh' means God or idol, and 'pour' or 'foor' means son."

<sup>4</sup> شۆخ و شەپالا لێب ژ قەند/ئەم نازکا و ئ قەنج و رەند/بۆ دڵ ژ دڵا وە خوەند/نیرۆ یەقین قەغفورە دڵ

<sup>5</sup>He served as a Kurdish Emir in the region of Bitlis. Alongside his role as a historical chronicler, he displayed talents as a writer and poet. His literary compositions were exclusively penned in the Persian language. Among his significant contributions is the creation of the Sharafnama, a seminal work within the annals of medieval Kurdish history, authored in 1597. Through his writings, he adeptly portrayed the intricacies of Kurdish societal dynamics and the various Kurdish ruling lineages during the 16th century. Notably, Sharaf Khan Bidlisi's



him, 'Khāghān' represents the pinnacle of eloquence. When he speaks of his poetical and oratory abilities, he identifies himself as 'Khāghān' within the realm of speech.

Māni and his book 'Arzhang' continue symbolising further aspects connected to China within Kurdish literature. In the eyes of the Kurdish people, Māni is not someone who claimed prophethood during the Sassanid era; instead, he is perceived solely as an adept painter of Chinese origin. Jaziri believes that his beloved's image is far more exquisite than the paintings crafted by Māni, the Chinese artist. In another instance, he asserts that even if his beautiful beloved were to adorn herself with gold and silver and present herself, no one would glance at 'Arzhang' (Māni's book of paintings).<sup>2</sup>

The crucial point to note is that the portrayal of China in Jaziri's poetry and, indeed, in other Kurdish poets' works is depicted positively, often elevated to the status of an ideal city or a utopia. However, when a negative concept is to be conveyed through poetry, that is when the Kurdish poet resorts to employing terms such as 'Turk,' 'Turkman,' 'Turkestan,' 'Genghis,' and 'Timur'—all of which are associated with this context.

The second prominent poet of the Kurmānji dialect, Ahmad Khāni, one of the most significant Kurdish poets of the 17th century, utilised terminologies related to China within his anthology, which emerged during his encomium for the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. Like numerous other Muslim poets, he positions 'Faghfoor' and 'Khāghān' in a subordinate stature in comparison to the Prophet. He states that the Faghfoor serves Muhammad by bringing a Chinese bowl.<sup>3</sup> In his poems, he consistently incorporates the same Chinese elements found in Jaziri poetry, a practice omitted in this writing to avoid redundancy (Khani, 1988: 21).

Another renowned Kurmānj poet is Siyahpush, about whom little information is available regarding his life. However, it seems that he lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Diyarbakir, and his tomb is located in Faraghin. The name 'Chin&Māchin' is first mentioned in Siyahpush's *Diwān* in discussing the painter Māni. He describes a princess as having the same skill in painting as Māni from 'Chin&Māchin'.<sup>4</sup>

Notably, the depiction provided by Siyahpush of China and its reigning monarch is overwhelmingly positive and laudatory. He portrays the Khāghān as a gracious host, benevolent, a lover of aiding others and possessing great wealth, power, and immense popularity in his writing. With its historical connection to China and its association with nobility and royalty, Silk attire appears multiple times in his poetry. This luxurious fabric is mentioned in the context of China and is often used to emphasise the grandeur and opulence of the elite class. Siyahpush portrays the dragon positively, likening it to a majestic serpent king. He draws a metaphorical connection between the dragon and the flowing tresses of the beloved, highlighting the captivating and powerful nature of both (Siyahpoosh, 2000: 53-59, 70, 93, 111-112, 298). Almost all Chinese elements, such as the gazelle, ambergris, musk, idols, and cypress, have also been reiterated in his poems.<sup>5</sup>

---

夏拉夫汗·比德利西 بەدلیسی شەرفخانەیی impact extended beyond Iran's borders, as his works were translated by other scholars, thereby influencing Kurdish literature and societies abroad. This polymath was not only an accomplished artist but also an erudite scholar, excelling not only in history but also in disciplines ranging from mathematics to military strategy.

<sup>1</sup>The *Arzhang*, also recognised as the *Book of Images*, occupied a significant position within the corpus of Manichaean literature. Authored and embellished with visual representations by its progenitor, Māni, the primary manuscript was scripted in Syriac, followed by subsequent adaptations transcribed in Sogdian. It held a unique and noteworthy status among sacred literary works by including an array of meticulously crafted visual depictions that expounded the Manichaean cosmogonical narrative—an indispensable constituent of the textual framework.

<sup>2</sup>Within the annals of Persian history, Māni emerged as an Iranian prophet who laid the foundation for Manichaeism, a faith that predominantly flourished during the later epochs of antiquity.

<sup>3</sup> خاقان بخو هندیویی کمین بوو/غهغورور ژ خانی کاسهچین بوو  
<sup>4</sup> ژ نهققاشی دکر وان نهققاشی تهخمین/ و مکوو مانی نهققاشی چین و ماچین  
<sup>5</sup> بخور و مسک چین و عود و عنبر/د بهردا سو هتت نئو جۆمله به یمکسر.

## Gorāni/Hawrāmi Dialect

Simultaneously with the composition of Kurmānji Kurdish poetry in the Kurdish region of the Ottoman Empire, the writing in the Gorāni/Hawrāmi dialect began within the Safavid domain in Iran (Qader Muhammad, 2010). This activity appears to result from the support of the Ardalān rulers, centred in Senneh, especially after Halokhan's rule in 1616 and his son, Khan Ahmad Khan Ardalān (1638).

The first renowned poet was Molla Mustafa Bisārāni (18<sup>th</sup> century), whose poetry collection has survived. Bisārāni's influence from Persian poetry is evident throughout his entire *Divān*. His usage of Chinese-related terminology does not significantly differ from that of Mulla Jaziri and Ahmad Khāni.

Like many Kurdish poets, Bisārāni also employed the imagery of the Chinese deer, often referred to as the 'desert gazelle' or 'Khatā and Khotan gazelle,' as a motif in his beautiful poems. Nevertheless, he regards the tresses of his beloved as even more fragrant and darker than the musk and ambergris of the gazelle.<sup>1</sup> Bisārāni considers the sight of his beloved as a source of healing for his pains and his body and soul rejuvenation. In his poetry, he simultaneously likens her to therapeutic remedies such as musk and Chinese medicinal plants as a means of cure.<sup>2</sup>

In the poetry of Bisārāni, Chinese temples have a significant resonance. He regards the worship of idols and the consumption of wine within the confines of a place of Idolatry as far superior to religious pretence. Elsewhere, describing his youth, he writes: 'I have become an infidel and sold my religion for drinking wine. I have worn the monks' robes and become servants of the Pagoda'.<sup>3</sup> Chinese temples symbolise the pinnacle of beauty, ornamentation, and adornment for the poet (Bisārāni, 2020: 429-438). He likens the meadows, mountains, and fields in the spring season, rich with colourful flowers and lush greenery, to a Chinese temple.<sup>4</sup>

The second renowned poet in this dialect is Mulla Umar Zangana, who adopted the pen name "Ranjouri" and lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in Kirkuk and belonged to the Zangana tribe. In addition to his religious studies, he had a penchant for mysticism and Sufi practices. In his poetry, Ranjouri, during his supplications to the Divine, mentions the names of the twelve celestial constellations often used in Chinese astrology. Furthermore, he references certain qualities of fortune and misfortune associated with the stars (Qaradāghi, 2008: 7, 9, 24).

He also references his beloved by the name Parizād in several parts, which, in Kurdish culture, signifies a beautiful Chinese woman. In one of his poems, Ranjouri refers to the beautiful Chinese beloved as (Gol-andām) and expresses that for some time now, she has been joyful while he is sorrowful.<sup>5</sup> In this context, 'Gol-andām' refers to a Chinese princess who becomes the object of affection for Bahrām, and he embarks on a lengthy journey through China to reach her. Ranjouri recurrently incorporates thematic elements associated with China and its cultural references in most of his poetic compositions (Ranjouri, 1983: 57, 91-99, 118, 222). This thematic integration is notably exemplified through metaphors such as likening the beauty of an eye to that of a deer's eye, employing the cedar tree as a symbol evoking the tall height, and employing the imagery of a white countenance, evoking associations with Chinese camphor.<sup>6</sup>

The third poet from the Gorāni/Hawrami dialect emerged as Mohammad Suleiman (1849), distinguished by the epithet 'Seydi Hawrami.' This appellation, 'Seydi Hawrāmi,' derives significance

<sup>1</sup> چۆن واچوو زلفش موشکەن یا عەنبەر/موشک و عەنبەریش و سەننە نه چەنبەر

<sup>2</sup> ماھى سەفەتۆر سیم ساق ساف/میسقالێن جە موشک ناھووێ خوتەن ناف/پەى دەردەداران ھەر نێدەن عیلاج/چووب چینیەن پەى سەردى مەزاج.

<sup>3</sup> فتوای بەر ھەمەن گێرتەنم بە دۆش/دینم دان بە مەى جە لای مەیفروش/گێرتەنم نہ دۆش خرقەى رۆ ھەبانان/کیشانم جارووی دەورێن بوختانان.

<sup>4</sup> پۆشنا رەنگ رەنگ سارا و سەرزەمین/چەمەن جە گۆل کەرد بە بوختانەى چین

<sup>5</sup> نینە چەن و مەختەن گۆل نەندام چین/تۆ ھەر خاتەر شاد من ھەر دڵ خەسگین

<sup>6</sup> نەبوو ەى سەراو نہ نیشەى کەمال/سەى سەول قامەت شوخ چەم غەزال/نەى لەیلا و شیرین گۆل نەندام چین/بدیع الجمال گۆلچەرەى ماچین

from the evocative phrase "Hunt in love's entanglement<sup>1</sup>." In his poetic portrayal of his beloved, whom he affectionately calls "Hur al-Ain," Seydi employs the appellation Parizād (fairy or angel of China), a phrase connoting the zenith of beauty, grandeur, and magnificence. In an alternate passage, the poet asks his beloved: "Do you embody a Chinese fairy, or do you resonate with the grace of a Khotanese deer? In essence, I find myself uncertain regarding the origin of your homeland."<sup>2</sup> Seydi, in commonality with his Kurdish poetic peers, has interwoven the imagery of the Tātār deer into his poetic compositions alongside the Khotan deer, asserting their intrinsic likeness. Notably, he recognised the geographical association of Khotan with Tātārstan in China, which he articulates within his Persian verses. In his poetic corpus, Seydi parallels the allure of women and the Khotan (Tātār) deer, emphasising their synchronised and graceful movement. Within this thematic exploration, he discerns in the Khotan deer not merely an appealing fragrance but also, significantly, an aesthetic criterion manifested in their captivating eyes. In an act of poetic similitude, he likens the enchanting gaze of his beloved to that of the Khotan deer, thus weaving a tapestry of sensory and visual resonance within his verses (Soleymān Seydi, 2019: 189, 198, 302-304).

The appellation "Kharāmān", as depicted in Kurdish folklore, embodies the image of an exquisite Chinese maiden possessing a statuesque stature akin to the majestic cedar tree. This name recurs conspicuously within Seydi's poetic oeuvre, where he artfully draws parallels between his beloved and this legendary figure. Indeed, the notion of the "Kharāmān deer" resonates profoundly within Kurdish and Iranian cultural contexts, serving as a poignant and recurring motif that intertwines themes of grace, beauty, and the unhurried elegance these creatures exemplify.

Abdul Rahim Madoumi (1806-1883), nicknamed "Mawlawi Kurd, [Mawlawi Tawagozi]", is a notable figure among the renowned Hawrāmi Kurdish poets. His birthplace traces to the village of Sarshate, situated within the geographical confines of Iraqi Kurdistan (Karim, 2002: 13-14). Owing to the name of Mawlawi's spouse, Anbar [Ambergris], he recurrently incorporated the motifs of musk and ambergris into his poetic compositions. Indeed, the term "Ambergris" emerges as the most prominently employed lexical entity within his *Diwān*, recurring on numerous instances, consistently connoting an agreeable olfactory essence throughout various pages of his literary corpus. One of the rare instances in which Mawlawi invoked the symbolism of the Khotan deer occurred when he composed an ode extolling 'Bābā Yādegār', an esteemed figure within the Yārsānism faith (Mawlawi, 2003: 68). In this poem, Mawlawi likened him to a Khotan deer, remarking that, through divine benevolence, the fragrance of his essence had permeated the earthly realm and ascended to the heavens.<sup>3</sup>

*Sorāni dialect*<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of written literature in the Sorāni Kurdish dialect can be attributed to the local administration of Baban in Suleymāniyāh to establish a distinct and autonomous identity, often in rivalry with the local Ardalan dynasty in Sanandaj. This development gained particular prominence during the reign of Abdurrahman Pāshā Bābān in 1816. Molākhezr, the son of Ahmad Shah Weys, known by the

<sup>1</sup> نەخجیری تەلمەکی خوشەوێستی

<sup>2</sup> پەریزادی چین، ناھوی خوتەنی؟/من نەمەز انوو جە کام وەتەنی؟

<sup>3</sup> ناھووی خوتەنی، قەیز نیلاھی/ناقەبی ناف راهی جە مە تا ماھی

<sup>4</sup> There are some other Sorāni dialect poets, and their writings, much like other Kurdish poets, extensively utilise terminologies associated with Chinese culture. However, refraining from their inclusion is practiced in this context. Muhammad, known as Mehwi, (born in 1909 in Sulaymaniyah), Mohammad Mahwi. *Diwān*. Edited by Abdul Karim Modarres and Mohammad; Sheikh Reza Tālebani (1835-1910), hails from a place known as "Chamchamāl," near Kirkuk. Sheikh Reza Talabani, *Diwān*. Edited by Shukur Mustafa. Erbil, 2010. Also, Zhian Aziz, *Sheikh Reza Talabani: An Unknown Kurdish Poet*. Third Iranian Research Congress, edited by Mohammad Roshan, Tehran, 1974; Mirza Abdul Rahim Sāblāqi, known by the pseudonym "Wafā'i" (1844-1902), a resident of Mahabad; Mohammad, son of Abd al-Qadir Marivani, known by the pen name "Qāne" (born in 1965) Abdul Rahim Vafai. *Diwān*. Edited by Mohammad Ali Qaradaghi and Mohammad Saeed Najari. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications, 2011; Mulla Abdul Karim Saeb, known as "Zāri" (1905-1982), born in Saqiz, Iran. Mulla Abdul Karim Sa'eb Zari. *Diwān-e Zari*. Edited by Mohammad Sa'eb. Saqqez: Mohammadi Publications, 2010.



epithet "Nāli," played a pivotal role as the progenitor of the Sorāni school of poetry within the Baban government, with his active period dating to 1857. According to Mohammad Mulakarim, the editor of *Divān Nāli*, the nickname "Nāli" derives from the Persian term "Nāl," signifying a pen, reed, or melodious bird. An examination of *Divān Nāli* reveals a distinct affinity in portraying themes related to China, resembling the style of Hāfez's poetry (Parsa, *op. cit.* 32). This similarity is not unwarranted, as Nāli's compositions exhibit a profound influence from Hāfez's sonnets to such an extent that he earned the epithet "Kurd Hāfez." It is imperative to acknowledge that Nāli distinguishes himself among Kurdish poets through his imagery through similes, puns, and alliteration poetry as prominent features in his poetic oeuvre (Nali, 1985: 17-20).

Nāli's poetry not only praises his poetic prowess but also underscores the widespread admiration it commands, affirming that many ardent devotees exist for his verses. He audaciously positions himself as a contender for the symbolic "Khāghān throne," which, in Nāli's conceptualisation, epitomises the zenith of power, prestige, and valour. He extends the connotations of the Khāghān, a sovereign title often associated with the kingdom of China, into the realm of poetry, which signifies the pinnacle of literary authority. In another segment of his oeuvre, alluding to his burgeoning fame and poetic mastery, Nāli asserts, "Nāli now dons the regal diadem and wields the authority of a monarch." Furthermore, he draws a vivid comparison between his literary compositions and the artistry of visual depictions of Māni, accentuating the vividness and imagery inherent in his written works. Nonetheless, in a separate poetic composition, he humbly concedes that the beauty of his beloved's eyebrow transcends human capacity for portrayal, asserting that even the accomplished Māni, renowned for his artistic skills, would fall short in capturing its resplendence. Instead, Nāli attributes the creation of such ethereal beauty solely to the divine hand of God (Majdi, 1976: 414).

Nāli has referred to a range of elements within his poetic compositions, including Faghfoor, silkworms, and silk fabric, all of which bear significance in the context of the cultural and historical associations between Kurdistan and China. In an alternate poem by Nāli, he masterfully invokes the imagery of caravans traversing vast distances, transporting precious cargoes of musk and ambergris from the distant lands of China to the heartland of Kurdistan. Employing a captivating simile, he poetically likens the strands of his beloved's hair to carriers bearing weighty musk and ambergris.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, one of the distinctive features of Nāli's poetic discourse lies in his unconventional usage of the dragon as a symbol imbued with positive connotations, the same as Chinese use, a departure from the predominantly negative role dragons occupy within Kurdish cultural narratives. In Kurdish culture, dragons typically bear negative connotations and are seldom associated with positive attributes. However, Nāli's innovative interpretation diverges from this norm. In a specific poem, Nāli eloquently likens the cascading tresses of his beloved, elegantly draped upon her belt, to a dragon fulfilling the role of a guardian for her cherished treasures.<sup>2</sup>

The second renowned poet in the Sorāni dialect is Abdurrahman Bag Sāhibqarān, nicknamed Sālem Bābān. He was born during the 19th century in Suleymāniyah, Iraq, leaving an enduring literary legacy within the Kurdish poetic tradition.

Like other Kurdish poets, Sālem alludes to the Chinese Emperor Faghfoor, using him as a symbolic reference. In doing so, he also acknowledges the formidable artistry of Chinese painters and their ability to depict the grandeur of the Chinese Emperor (Sahibqiran, 2015). Sālem's poetic style bears witness to his beloved's enchanting beauty and captivating nature, akin to how Chinese paintings demonstrate the extraordinary prowess of Chinese artists in the realm of imagery and ornamentation for the Chinese

<sup>1</sup> سەرگراڤه قافله سالاری رێی چین و خەتا/چوونکە باری عەنەبەر و مەسکە لە زۆلفەینی دوتا  
<sup>2</sup> خەلقە حەلقە زۆلفی سەر قۆبەیی هەماسی کەوتوو/مەحرەمی سێزەر، بەلێ گەنجووری گەنجە نەزەهە

Emperor.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he artfully weaves a harmonious portrayal by juxtaposing Faghfoor, the Great Wall of China, and the beloved's flowing hair. Sâlem poetically asserts that the tribute of the Indian mole would never reach its intended recipient, for the strands of her hair have ascended to royalty within the walls of the Chinese castle, creating a vivid and picturesque metaphor.<sup>2</sup>

The temples of China, symbolising the exquisitely crafted statues of deities made by the Chinese, find resonance in Sâlem's poetry. In a composition of eloquence, he draws a captivating analogy between the beauty of his beloved and the allure of Chinese deity statues. He expresses, "Every night until dawn when I converse with you in my reverie, you recount the tales of the temples of China to me."<sup>3</sup>

Another renowned Sorāni Kurdish poet is Hāji Qādir Koyi (1897), born in the city of Koya in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. However, he moved to Istanbul, composed most of his poems, and ultimately passed away. Hāji Qādir, in his celebrated works, references China and Khatā for the first time while describing his odes. In one poem, he conveys that 'everyone can see China and Khotan in the hair of his beloved'. He cleverly employs wordplay in several instances, juxtaposing China and Khotan with chin and Khatā (in Kurdish). He likens his beloved's raven-black hair and blushing face to the Māchin Desert.<sup>4</sup>

Haji Qādir, as a nationalist poet, unlike classical poets, pays attention to contemporary historical events. For instance, he refers to the war between Japan and China when advising the Kurds to pursue education and industry and to be cautious about relying on the Turks (Koyi, 2011: 77, 132, 148, 155). He writes, "Look at how Japan conquered and devastated China with its technology and industry."<sup>5</sup>

### The Influence of China on Kurdish Folklore Narrative Poetry

The Kurdish folkloric poetic narratives are equivalent to the Latin term "epic" and its Greek forms, "eposia" (epic poem with a specific poet) and "epopia" (epic poem without a specific poet) (Konstan & Raaflaub, 2009: 301). In Kurdish literature, the term 'Beyt [verse in English]/Gorānî/Strān' has been employed in at least three distinct meanings: in a very general sense, it encompasses all elements of Kurdish oral literature, including Lāwok (ballads), Heyyrān (lyric poetry), Band (narrative poetry), and even some parts of songs and folk stories (Modarres, 2010). In a relatively broad sense, it includes its specific meaning but also extends to encompass "Lāwok" and "Heyyrān" (Azāl al-Dīn, 2010: 15). In a specific sense, the phrase refers to a unique and distinctive genre that, despite its similarities with Kurdish legends and stories on the one hand and with "Lāwok" and "Heyyrān" on the other, constitutes a particular genre of its own (Oskarman, 2004: 108). Unlike legends and stories, a 'Beyt/Gorānî/Strān' is composed of a poem with specific syllabic patterns (Afrouzi, 2000: 537).

The Kurmānji Kurdish people throughout Kurdistan refer to the poetic genre known as "Beyt as 'Hozān'; that person who reads it is called 'Hozānwān'. In this context, Hozān carries the meaning of a tribe or clan, and thus, Beyt or Hozān encompasses those events and occurrences that have left a collective impact on the spirit of a specific tribe or clan, which are subsequently composed into poetic form. In addition to the term Beyt, some other researchers have used the term 'Cherike'<sup>6</sup> and have classified it as encompassing epic narratives, heroic tales, thrilling dramas, and inspirational and nationalistic compositions (Ayubian, 1941). They consider this phrase to possess beauty, precision, clarity, and eloquence that transcend mere description (Mokri, 2010).

<sup>1</sup> سەبەکی شەیرەم شاھیدە بۆ دڵزۆبایی دۆلەیرەم/سوورەتی چینی دەکا تەزبەینی فەغفور ئاشکار

<sup>2</sup> بە کەس ناگا خەراچی هیندوویی خال/لە قەلەبی چینی زۆلفا بوو بە فەغفور

<sup>3</sup> هەموو شەمێ تا سەحەر بۆ دڵ خەیاڵت/حکایت می کەند بێخاڵە چین

<sup>4</sup> لە نۆقووشی غەزەلم چین و خەتا داماون... هەموو چین و خەتا لەم لا لە زۆلفی لام هۆویدایە.... کە سوودای زۆلفی پێچینی لە نێو چینی نوامیان بوو/خەتا و چین و خوتەن

یەکسەر گرێفتار بوون لە ژێر قەرز

<sup>5</sup> ئەهلی ژاپۆن بە فەن و سەنەاتی چاک/سەیری چۆن چینی گرت و کردی بە خاک

<sup>6</sup> چریکە

There are various Kurdish epic narratives such as *Sultan Ibrahim and Noush Afarin* documented by Almās Khān Kandoulaci and Mirzā Shafī (Qobadi, 2011); *Babram and Gol andām* by Qāder Fatāhi Qāzi (Qāzi, 1967) and also documented by Mām Ahmad Lotfī, however, none of them have linked with and reflected China as much as the narrative of *Khurshid o Kharāmān* [*Khurshid* (in English sun) *from East and the Chinese Kharāmān*] (Lotfī Kar, 2014). Various dimensions of this narrative have discussed China, Khāghān, Faghfoor, Khatā, Khotan, Turks, and Tātārs (Rahimpour, 2014).

It is a romantic epic composed in the Gorāni dialect of Kurdish. It follows a syllabic meter and has been passed down through generations in Kurdish-speaking regions for centuries. This epic has a folkloric nature and was traditionally recited by bards and ordinary people in nighttime gatherings and coffeehouses. A love story about the young prince Khurshid from the West who fell in love with a Chinese princess Kharāmān and embarked on a journey to China. Within this narrative, myriad facets of Chinese culture intertwine, illuminating the favourable stance that Kurds hold toward Chinese influences (Bahrami, 2010).

Another remarkable and splendid tale within Kurdish literature pertains to the story of *Shirin and Farhād* which is called "Khosrow and Shirin," in Persian. It is one of the most significant tales that intertwines with Chinese culture and Chinese identity. Although various versions of this story exist in Kurdistan, this writing predominantly draws from Khosrow and Shirin Khānā Qobādī, which is a selective translation from Nezāmi Ganjavi's *Khosrow and Shirin*, and several Kurdish regional and vernacular narratives (in Hawrami/Gorani dialect) such as "Shirin and Farhād" by Almās Khān Kanduleyi, "Mollā Wald Khān Gorān" and "Mirzā Shafīe Pāwehi's" versions. Before delving into the main theme, it is essential to explain this story's origin briefly.

In Iranian culture, this story is primarily attributed to Nezami Ganjavi and subsequently to Khānā Qobādī, who recorded it as "Khosrow and Shirin." However, as Sir Percy Sykes<sup>1</sup> mentioned, "The basis of this legend is Farhād's love for Shirin" (Sykes, 2003). Therefore, it should be noted that the story's original form in Kurdish folklore is that of "Shirin and Farhād." Perhaps one of the earliest narratives can be found in the Tabari *Tarikhnama*, attributed to Bala'ami. He writes, "He [Khosrow Parviz] had a wife named Shirin, a Roman slave girl, and nowhere was more beautiful than her. For this reason, Farhād fell in love with her and began cutting the Bisotun Mountain because of her. Each stone he cut from the mountain was so heavy that a hundred men could not lift it, and that mountain is still there today" (Bal'ami, 1997).

The Kurdish narrative highlights the role of Farhād, making him the primary hero of the story while simultaneously introducing him as a Chinese character. In Kurdish folklore, Khosrow's role is understated, and the emphasis is more on Shirin and Farhād. Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, the first historian of Kurdish and Kurdistan during the Safavid period, identifies Farhād as a Kurd<sup>2</sup>, but among the general Kurdish population and even some Kurdish historians, Farhād was famously known as *Farhād-e-Chini* [Chinese Farhād] (Sanandaji, 1987).

In the 14th century, Salimi Jorooni composed "Shirin and Farhād," focusing exclusively on Shirin and Farhād. In Jorooni's rendition, Shapur, a friend of Farhād, is Chinese, and he introduces himself to Khosrow Parviz by saying, "I am from a distant land, China, and my name is Shāpur (Jorooni, 2003: 18-79). I am a servant of the king and a loyal subject."<sup>3</sup> He told Shirin that he has an artist friend called Farhād and refers to him as the master of painting.<sup>4</sup>

Shirin and Farhād by Almās Khān Kandulei is an independent work inspired by the common culture of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Percy Sykes (1867-1945) was a multifaceted individual who served as an explorer, diplomat, military officer, and intelligence operative. He spent a quarter of a century living and journeying through Persia.

<sup>2</sup> و اعجوبه دوران و نادره زمان سر حلقه عاشقان جفاکیش و سرخیل وفا کیشان محنت اندیش اعنی [یعنی] نهنگ دریای محنت و پلنگ کوهسار مشقت (فرهاد) که در زمان خسرو پرویز ظهور کرده از طایفه کلهر است.

<sup>3</sup> بدو گفت از کجایی و چه نامی/ که در خوبی، به از ماه تمامی/ بگفتا بنده را شاپور نام است/ غلام شاه را از جان غلام است/ بسی شیرینی و تلخی چشیده/ ز دارالملك چین اینجا رسیده

<sup>4</sup> مرا یاریست در نقاشی استاد/ شنیده باشی نام او را فرهاد

the Kurdish people, particularly in Kermanshah and its surrounding areas (Kandouleh-i, 1994). Mirza Shafi Pāvehie and Mollā Walad Khān Gorāni's story also share many similarities with his work. In the folk narrative of Almās Khān, Farhād is depicted as the son of the Emperor of China who, after dreaming of Shirin, falls in love with her and embarks on a journey to the Western lands in pursuit of this love. Shāpur, an official in the court of China, is tasked with finding Farhād after he departed from China (Salehi and Parsa, 2008).

the Kurdish poet Khānā Qubādī's rendition of the classic tale of Shirin and Farhād is a captivating narrative that not only explores the themes of love, sacrifice, and tragic fate but also showcases a notable infusion of Chinese motifs and cultural elements. Khānā skilfully weaves these elements into the fabric of his poetry, adding depth and richness to the story (Qobādī, 1989: 3, 206, 325).

The presence of Chinese motifs, such as references to Chinese silks and textiles, the repetition of "Khotan" and "Khatā," and the allusions to Chinese musk and Khāghān, invites readers to delve into the intersection of Kurdish and Chinese cultures. Khānā's incorporation of Chinese elements in this iconic love story is a testament to the intricate interplay of cultures and influences in Persian and Kurdish literature (Tayefi et al. 2010).

In Khānā's *Dimān*, this fusion of Chinese culture with the Shirin and Farhād narrative not only adds a layer of exoticism and allure but also reflects the broader tradition of Persianate literature, where authors often drew inspiration from various cultures along the Silk Road. His lyrical exploration of these Chinese motifs within the context of Shirin and Farhād underscores the cultural exchange and synthesis that has taken place along the historical Silk Road. It stands as a poetic bridge between the Kurdish and Chinese worlds, reminding us of the beauty that can emerge when different cultures come together through the power of storytelling.

### Folktales

It is worth noting that many national myths share commonalities due to economic and cultural interactions between nations. In Asia, the multifaceted connections between Iranian, Kurdish, and Chinese narratives, illustrate the interplay of cultural elements and shared motifs across these stories. This suggests significant shared motifs and archetypes between Chinese and Kurdish folklore, demonstrating a profound intercultural connection beyond mere coincidences. The transmission and preservation of these tales in different regions of Kurdistan further highlight their cultural importance and persistence (Chew, 2002).

For instance, stories related to the prowess of Fengshen Yanyi<sup>1</sup> and Fengshen Bang<sup>2</sup>, the most famous ancient Chinese myths and poetic compositions<sup>3</sup>, show remarkable similarities compared to Iranian legends, which are unparalleled among other nations. The life stories of kings such as Kavus and Zhou wang [King Zhou]<sup>4</sup>,

---

<sup>1</sup> 封神演義

<sup>2</sup> 封神榜

<sup>3</sup> *The Investiture of the Gods* is a 16th-century Chinese novel belonging to the gods and demons (shenmo) genre, making it one of the prominent vernacular Chinese works of its kind during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Comprising 100 chapters, its initial publication in book form occurred between 1567 and 1619, although another source suggests that it reached its finalised edition in 1605. This narrative seamlessly weaves together various elements encompassing history, folklore, mythology, legends, and fantasy. The story unfolds in a period marked by the decline of the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BC) and the ascension of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC), intricately entwining Chinese mythological components such as deities, immortals, and spirits. The authorship of this significant work is attributed to Xu Zhonglin.

Within the novel, numerous narratives unfold where a myriad of supernatural entities descend into the human realm, wielding their magical abilities to reshape the destinies of mortals and alter the course of history. Some more renowned anecdotes are Nüwa and King Zhou, Daji and Bo Yikao, Ji Chang and Jiang Ziya, Bi Gan Loses His Heart, and The Foursome of Nine Dragon Island.

<sup>4</sup> 许仲琳. 中国古典小说普及文库: 封神演义 [Popular library of Chinese classical novels: The Romance of the Gods], (China: 太白文艺出版社, 1995).

Ji Chang, as well as princes like Siavash and Ying Yao, along with the actions and deeds of heroes such as Wang Mo, Yang Sen, Gao Youqian, and Li Xing, and Jiang Ziya with Rostam in *Shahnameh*, exhibit such striking resemblances that it appears they draw from a shared and common source.

Kurdish legends, to a considerable extent influenced by Iranian narratives, are not entirely isolated from this overarching trend, exhibiting substantial parallels with Chinese folklore (Salimi, 2002). The most prominent Persian story in which a direct link between Iranian, Kurdish, and Chinese tales is established is the narrative of *Hossein Kurd Shabestari*, featuring a Kurdish hero. This narrative portrays a captivating tale of valour, trade, and misadventure involving Iranian and Chinese elements, reflecting the intricate interplay between the two cultures within the Kurdish narrative (Lotfi Nia, 2002: 45).

"The Tale of Golkhandān and Gol" is one of Kurdish culture's most significant oral narratives, closely associated with China. It is featured in the book *Kurdish Myths*, compiled by Mansour Ya'qoubi. This book encompasses 48 myths and stories collected and organised by the author from the Kurdish communities in Kermanshah, Songhor, and Kuhdasht in Lorestan Province. The story reflects the rich tapestry of human culture, where stories from different corners of the world can blend, influence, and inspire each other, creating new and compelling narratives that resonate across generations and geographical boundaries (Yaghooti, 2006: 6-10).

Some other famous tales in this regard include *Mirzā' Mahmood*, as recorded in Margarita Roodenko's work, *The Kurdish Myths*. This collection primarily comprises tales from the Kurdish population residing in the Caucasus region (Roodenko, 1978); *Chinese Cup*, in the Kurdish Kurmānji folklore of Türkiye and Syria, references to Chin&Māchin, and Chinese concepts and elements have been made. One of these tales, titled "After Hardship Comes Ease, and After Ease Comes Hardship," was documented by the Kurdish author "Seyda Tîrêj," who resided in Hasakah, Syria, but is widely renowned among the people as the "Chinese Bowl" narrative (Tîrêj, 2014); *Prince Ahmad and the Chin&Māchin's Parizād* from Mukriyan region in West Azerbaijan province of Iran (Salimi, 2012); *Khurshid Shah* by Kourosh Amini (Amini, 2020); *Dervish<sup>2</sup> and the Princess of China*, popular in Hawrāmān region; *The Pearl-Toothed Boy and the Golden-Haired Girl*, the renowned legend in certain regions of Kurdistan.

These captivating tales, with their blend of cultures, are a testament to the universality of folklore and the shared human experiences that transcend borders and time. It demonstrates how stories can travel across cultures, preserving their essence while absorbing the flavours of the lands they visit, creating a beautiful tapestry of world folklore. One clear observation is that the central figures in many of these stories, written or oral, are Chinese princes or princesses. China has exerted a profound influence on the collective imagination and psyche of the Kurdish people throughout history, consistently portraying a positive and endearing image of the Chinese culture. Notably, most of these Chinese characters in Kurdish stories, male or female, lack negative elements and consistently present positive characteristics.

### **Analysis of the Impact of Chinese Elements on Kurdish Literature**

The profound positive influence of Chinese culture on Kurdish literature is evident through various facets. Within the corpus of Kurdish poetry, recurrent allusions emerge to historically consequential Chinese cities, such as Chinese Turkestan, Khotan, and Khata. These poetic references signify a deliberate engagement with the cultural and historical tapestry of the region, reflecting the interplay between Kurdish literary expression and the rich historical narratives associated with these cities situated in China. The depiction of the greatness, breadth, and power of the land of China with the Great Wall serves as a symbolic portrayal of an ideal place characterised by wealth, economic prosperity, and general affluence. The allure of this

<sup>1</sup> The term "Mirza," shared in both Persian and Kurdish, functions as an honorific title that precedes the family name of an esteemed figure, such as an official or scholar. In the case of a royal prince, it is employed as a title following the individual's name.

<sup>2</sup> mystic



vision becomes a universal aspiration, shaping the collective dreams of Kurds.

In the realm of Kurdish literature, the theme of affection directed towards a Chinese persona exhibits a notably higher prevalence compared to Persian literary compositions. While in Persian literature, such thematic elements are predominantly discernible in the oeuvre of Khwaju Kermani, particularly in "*Homāy o Homāyun*," Kurdish literary works consistently emphasise the centrality of a Chinese beloved within various narrative contexts (De Bruijn, 2009).

The depiction of astute, politically adept, and influential monarchs, exercising dominion over subordinate rulers, epitomises a governance paradigm characterised by both authority and benevolence. This portrayal accentuates virtues such as altruism, generosity, and philanthropy, emphasising the promotion of familial loyalty, the welfare of progeny, and the practice of hospitality, along with considerate treatment of foreign guests. Consequently, these narratives construct a favourable portrayal of Chinese leadership values.

The portrayal of exceptionally beautiful Chinese women, distinguished by their statuesque stature reminiscent of cedars and adorned with unparalleled black hair, accentuates the aesthetic allure associated with Chinese beauty. This attraction transcends geographical boundaries, enchanting the hearts of men hailing from various corners of the globe.

Enhancing the positive imagery are references to the idols and adornments present in Chinese temples and pagodas. These elements function as allegorical representations of the distinctive beauty and cultural opulence associated with China, thereby contributing to a favourable depiction within the literary milieu of the Kurdish context. Upon examination of the existing literature, there is no indication that poets from the classical Kurdish era had the opportunity to physically visit China. The incorporation of Chinese idols, idolatry, and depictions of Chinese temples in Kurdish literature appears to stem from the conceptualisation by Kurdish poets and writers of authentic Chinese religious practices, often manifested in the form of idolatry. This inclination may be attributed, in part, to a limited connection with the geographical expanse of China, leading Kurdish poets to prioritise the aesthetic facets of Chinese temples and pagodas over delving into the philosophical underpinnings of Chinese religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism.

The incorporation of silk fabrics, porcelain bowls, and Faghfoor cups, serves to underscore the profound admiration for Chinese craftsmanship and cultural artifacts. These symbolic elements function metaphorically, representing sophistication, luxury, and artistic excellence within the narrative. Such symbols contribute nuanced layers of positive connotations, enriching the overall portrayal.

A notable expression of Chinese influences in Kurdish literature is discerned through allusions to Chinese animals, both tangible and mythical, within the verses of Kurdish poets. Instances of significance include references to the Chinese deer, emblematic of beauty, particularly in the context of its eyes, and the likening of the beloved to it, known as the Chinese gazelle, accentuating not only its physical allure but also the pleasing fragrance associated with it. Additionally, the Chinese peacock, representing Chinese beauty, is denoted in Kurdistan by the term "*chin o māchin*." In certain instances, the dragon in Kurdish literary works assumes positive connotations. The Chinese perception of dragons as sacred, viewing themselves as descendants of these mythical creatures and associating dragons with luck and prosperity, finds resonance in the works of specific Kurdish poets. In some manuscripts, the dragon is portrayed as a symbol of fortune and well-being.

China has maintained a longstanding reputation for the production of aromatic substances, notably distinguished by the purity and fragrance of its musk. This renowned Chinese musk features prominently in the verses of classical Kurdish poets, assuming a distinctive presence within the realm of Kurdish

literature. The poetic incorporation of Chinese musk into Kurdish literary works imparts a revitalising essence to Kurdish poetry, symbolising a harmonious fusion of cultural elements.

The reference to Chinese constellations and astrology, coupled with the appreciation of exquisite Chinese Māni paintings, highlights a notable embrace of Chinese knowledge systems and artistic expressions within Kurdish literary works. This engagement in intellectual and artistic exchange plays a pivotal role in enhancing the thematic diversity of Kurdish literature, symbolising a positive synergy between the two cultural domains. In essence, the integration of these elements into Kurdish literary discourse not only imparts aesthetic depth but also cultivates a positive cross-cultural appreciation, fostering a harmonious relationship between the traditions of the Kurdish and Chinese cultures.

The frequency of the usage of the term "chin" (China in the Kurdish language) in the poetic and prose compositions of Kurdish writers is relatively conspicuous. In Kurdish poetry, the word "chin" has been creatively employed, giving rise to extensive wordplay and linguistic manoeuvres.

Amongst the cohort of ancient Kurdish poets and writers, the representation of China manifests more as a conceptualisation than a distinctly defined and acknowledged reality. This portrayal unfolds gradually, evolving from a state of initial ambiguity to a more discernible construct over time. The conceptualisation of China within the literary works of ancient Kurdish poets and authors suggests a dynamic process of cultural and cognitive engagement, wherein the understanding of China is shaped and refined through an evolving lens of perception, ultimately contributing to a nuanced and maturing depiction within the cultural and literary consciousness of the Kurdish tradition.

## Conclusion

The intriguing journey through the intricate nexus of Chinese culture and Kurdish literature has revealed an uncharted realm of cross-cultural influences. It is a testament to the Silk Road's profound capacity to shape narratives, languages, and cultural viewpoints across vast distances and periods. Kurdish poets and storytellers, particularly those speaking Hawrami, Sorani, and Kurmanji dialects, have been touched by the mystique of China. Words such as deer [gazelle], cypress, Khatā, Khotan, and dragons, have been incorporated into their verses, enriching the linguistic tapestry of Kurdish literature.

Yet, not merely the linguistic dimension is evidence of China's influence on Kurdish literary landscapes. These artistic expressions are seasoned with a positive portrayal of China itself. Kurdish literature evokes a vision of China as a dominant world power and utopian land, strangely prescient of contemporary geopolitical realities. In the eyes of Kurdish writers, the land of China emerges as a utopia, depicted as the epitome of power, wealth, and beauty. This portrayal is consistently cast in a positive light, illustrating the idealised attributes of China as a beacon of prosperity and cultural richness in the narratives. The positive imagery of China in Kurdish literature thus reflects an admiration for the perceived zenith of power, affluence, and aesthetic allure associated with the Chinese civilisation.

The cultural and linguistic exchange between China and the Kurdish region exemplifies the resilience of multiculturalism. It transcends boundaries, time, and geography to weave together a complex tapestry of storytelling that embodies the age-old human fascination with the exotic and the unknown. In essence, the impact of Chinese culture on Kurdish literature is a testament to the universality of literature's power to connect cultures and people. It underscores the enduring allure of the Silk Road, whose echoes continue to resonate in the verses and stories of Kurdish poets and storytellers. As these voices continue to echo down the centuries, they invite people to explore the boundless possibilities of cultural exchange and the profound interplay of history, storytelling, and the kaleidoscope of human experience.

## Limitations

The scholarly exploration of Sino-Kurdish relations remains a relatively underdeveloped domain within academic research. Despite the increasing geopolitical significance of both the Kurdish and Chinese communities, a limited body of literature exists to comprehensively address their interactions. The available resources are scarce and dispersed and often require researchers to navigate through a multitude of first-hand materials presented in diverse languages. This scarcity of consolidated information poses a substantial challenge for scholars seeking to gain a nuanced understanding of the historical, cultural, and political dimensions of the relationship between the Kurds and China. Furthermore, the existing research lacuna highlights the need for more dedicated attention and rigorous investigation into this intersection. The imperative for future research lies in the potential to unravel intricate connections, foster cross-cultural understanding, and inform policy decisions in an era where global interdependencies necessitate a deeper comprehension of nuanced international relationships.

## References

- Abbasi, J. (2010). *Lê Sar Shaney Raq na wabo Rokenābadi Ishq, Didari Mawalewi* [From the hard shoulder to the territory of love, meeting with Rumi]. Sulaymāniyah.
- Abdulla, A. (2023). 'The Role of Kurdistan in Shaping the Silk Road', *Kurdistan Chronicle*, Sep. 30, 2023. [Online] Available at: <https://kurdistanchronicle.com/b/2743> (Last access 2023.12.11).
- Afrouzi, B. (2000). "Oral Literature of Kurdistan, A Review of Kurdish Couplets." *Chista*, 17(6-7), March-April. 1-20.
- Amedi, S. B. (1980). *Hawzanvaniyat Kurd* [Kurdish Poets]. Baghdad.
- Amini, K. (2020). *Afsāneh-hāye Diār-e Ma* [Legends of our Land]. Sanandaj: Tafge.
- Amini, M. R. (2010). *Karegey-ri Sha'irani Rābrdoo, Didāri Mawlewi* [Influence of past poets and meeting with Rumi]. Sulaymāniyah.
- Azāl al-Dīn, M. R. (2010). *Adebi Folklori Kurdi* [Kurdish folk literature]. Hewlêr: Aras.
- Bahrami, I. (2010). *In the Shabnameh of the Kurds*. Tehran: Ana.
- Bal'ami, M. (1997). *Tarikhnameh Tabari*. Translated by M. Roshan. Tehran: Soroush.
- Bedlisi, S. K. (1964). *Sharafnameh*. Translated by M. Abbasi. Tehran: Elmi.
- Bisārāni, M. (2020). *Divān*. Edited by A. Habibi. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Blau, J. (2010). *Written Kurdish Literature. Oral Literature of Iranian Languages*. London: Zed Books.
- Chew, K. L. (2002). *Tales of the Teahouse Retold; Investiture of the Gods*. Indiana: Writers Club Press.
- De Bruijn, J. T. P. (2009). "Kvāju Kermāni". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Available at: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kvaju-kerman-poet-and-mystic> (Last access: 2023. 12. 20).
- Doski, T. I. (2004). *Sharh e Divān al-Shaykh al-Jazari* [Description of Divan al-Sheikh al-Jazari]. Dohuk.
- Eyubian, A. (1941). "Cherike-Kordi." *Journal of the Faculty of Literature*, Tabriz, 13(2), 1-20.
- Fattahi Ghazi, G. (1967). "Some Kurdish Couplets." *Journal of the Faculty of Literature* (University of Tabriz), 19(1), Spring, 53-66.
- Ghazvini, M., & Ghani, Q. (2001). *Divān-e Hafez*. Tehran: Ghoghnoos.
- Hasari, H. (1986). "Hafez va Shoa'raye Azarbayejan" [Hafez and poets of Azerbaijan]. *Keyban Farhangi*, 3(4), 1-20.
- Jaziri, A. (2010). *Divān*. Translated by S. Sadeghi. Urmia: Salah al-Din Ayubi Publications.
- Jorooni, S. (2003). *Mathnawi Shirin o Farhad*. Translated by N. Jokar. Tehran: Miras-e Maktoob.
- Kandouleh-i, A. (1994). *Hekayat-e Shirin o Farhad*. Edited by A. Gorji. Qom: Sina.
- Khani, A. (1988). *Mam O zjn*. Edited by P. Jahani. Urmia: Salah al-Din Ayubi Publications.
- Konstan, D., & Raaflaub, K. A. (2009). *Epic and History*. NJ: Wiley.

- Koyi, H. Q. (2011). *Divān*. Edited by S. H. Miran and others. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Lotfi Kar, S. (2014). *Khurshid i Khāvar*. Ilam.
- Lotfi Nia, H. (2002). *Hamāseh-hāye Ghom-e Kord [Epics of the Kurdish people]*. Tehran: Samira.
- Majdi, M. (1976). 'Nali: A Renowned Kurdish Poet'. *Seventh Iranian Research Congress*. Tehran.
- Mawlavi, A. R. (2007). *Divān*. Edited by A. K. Modarres. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Modarres, A. K. (2010). *bneh māleye Zāniyārān [The Family of Zāniyārān]*. Sanandaj: Ana.
- Mokri, M. (2010). *Gorani or Kurdish Songs*. Tehran: Danesh library: Bitā.
- Molla Karim, M. (2002). *Zhiyani Mawlavi [Mawlavi's Life]*. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Mutabchi, A. A. (1989). *Hafeẓ la Shi'ri Kurdī-dā [Hafiz in Kurdish Poetry]*. Baghdad: Gowari Kori Zāniyari Iraq.
- Nali, M. K. (1985). *Divān*. Edited by A. K. Modarres and F. Molla Karim. Urmia: Salah al-Din Ayubi Publications.
- Oskarman. (2004). *Tohfeh Mozaffariyeh [Mozaffari's Present]*. Translated by H. Mukriyani. Hewlêr: Aras.
- Pārsā, A. (2009). *Ta'sirpaziri Shāerān-e Kurd-e Iran va Iraq aẓ Hafeẓ-e Shirāzi [The Influence of Hafiz on Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish Poets]*. Tehran: Matn.
- Qabadi, K., (2011). *Sultan Ibrahim & Nooshafarin*. Edited by M. R. Amini. Erbil: Aras.
- Qader Mohammad, A. (2010). *The Sonnets of the Great Kurdish Poet Molawi in Gorāni (Hawrami) Dialect*. Translated by J. Ahmadi. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Qaradāghi, M. A. (2008). *Introduction to the Divān of Ranjouri*. Erbil.
- Qobādī, K. (1989). *Khosrow o Shirin*. Edited by M. Molla Karim. Urmia: Salah al-Din Ayyubi.
- Rahimpour, A. (2014). *Khurshid-i Khāvar va Kharamani Chin [Khurshid from East and the Chinese Kharamān]*. Bukan.
- Roodenko, M. B. (1978). *Afsaneh-haye Kordi [The Kurdish Legends]*. Translated by K. Keshāvarz. Tehran: Agāh.
- Sahibqiran, A. B. (2015). *Divān Salem*. Compiled and edited by M. A. Moderris, F. Abdulkarim, and M. Mala Karim. Sulaymāniyah: Benkei Zheen.
- Salehi, Z., & Parsa, A. (2008). "Moqayeseh Khosrow o Shirin-e Nezami ba Shirin o Farhad-e Almas Khan Kandouli" [Comparison of Khosrow and Shirin Nizami with Shirin and Farhad Almas Khan Kandolaei]. *Kavoshnameh*, 9(17), Winter, 1-20.
- Salimi, H. (2002). *Winter in Kurdish Culture*. Tehran: Soroush.
- Salimi, H. (2012). *Chirok; Afsaneha va Qesehbā-ye Kordi [Chirok; Kurdish legends and stories]*. Tehran: Ana.
- Sanandaji, S. (1987). *Tohfe Naseri [Naseri Present]*. Translated by H. Tabibi. Tehran: Amir Kabir.
- Siahpush. (2000). *Divān (Saif al-Muluk)*. Edited by J. Jalil. Vienna: Kurdish Institute.
- Soleymān Seydi, M. (2019). *Divān*. Edited by A. Habibi. Sanandaj: Kurdistan Publications.
- Sykes, S. P. (2001). *A History of Persia*. Translated by M. T. Fakhreddai. Tehran: Afsoon.
- Tayefi, S., Quy, B., & Puorshabanan, A. (2010). 'China in the Prism of Persian Poetry'. *Research of Mystical Literature*, 4(3), Spring, pp. 137-160.
- Tîrêj, S. (2014). *Dastanhaye Kordi Kurmānji [Kurdish stories of Kurmānji]*. Translated into Persian by A. F. Toupkanlou. Qom: Amu Alavi.
- Yaghooti, M. (2006). *Afsaneh-ha-ye Kordi [Kurdish legends]*. Tehran: Nagima.
- Zangeneh Ranjouri, M. O. (1983). *Divān*. Edited by M. A. Qaradaghi. Baghdad.