

CHAPTER 26

The Implicit Dialogue of Confucian Muslims

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Muslims have lived in China for well over a thousand years, tracing their lineage back to an emissary sent by Muhammad to the emperor. The first historical records of a Muslim presence date back to about 20 years after Muhammad's death, with a mission that arrived at the court in 651. Historians have found no concrete evidence of dialogue between Muslims and Confucians before the seventeenth century, when Muslims began writing about their religion in Chinese. By the end of the nineteenth century they had published several hundred books and treatises in that language, and this literature provides ample evidence that they were engaged in a constant dialogue with Confucianism, even if this seems to have taken place largely within their own books. Little evidence has appeared that the Confucian scholarly elite took notice of the Muslim writings.

The Chinese Islamic literature has sometimes been called by the hybrid word *Han Kitāb* (Han Qitabu 漢克塔補), the Chinese books. The authors have been called the *Huiru* 回儒, the Muslim literati, because they utilized terms and concepts that reflected the neo-Confucian synthesis brought about by scholars of the Song Dynasty. It is perhaps not without relevance that Zhu Xi (d. 1200), the most famous of the Song scholars, was a contemporary of the greatest of the Muslim synthesizers, Ibn al-Arabī (d. 1240). The intellectual visions of both masters played major roles in shaping the *Huiru* worldview.

The movement to express Islamic teachings in Chinese goes back to the mid-sixteenth century, when a group of scholars decided to add the Chinese classics to the traditional Islamic canon. In his study of the history of this school of thought, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (2005: chapter 1) explains that Hu Dongzhou 胡登洲, who died toward the end of the sixteenth century, undertook to establish a new curriculum that would impart Chinese learning in addition to the usual Arabic and Persian. Having understood that Muslims were becoming ever more ignorant of their own religion, he saw no other way for the ulama to transmit Islamic learning to monolingual Chinese. The

first major literary fruit of this movement appeared in 1642 with a book by Wang Daiyu 王岱輿, who taught in Nanjing and died in Beijing. Called *The Real Commentary on the True Teaching* (*Zhengjiao zhenquan* 正教真詮), it covers the main theoretical and practical teachings of Islam in a thoroughly Confucian idiom. Benite has argued convincingly that Wang Daiyu and other Huiru saw no contradiction between their Islamic and Confucian learning. As he writes, "Chinese Muslim scholarly identity, while dialogically constructed, was one by which these scholars understood themselves as simultaneously Chinese and Muslim" (Benite 2005: 13).

The Islamic Background

Within 30 years of the publication of Wang Daiyu's book, Muslim scholars translated four Persian books on Islamic thought. As far as we know, no other Muslim texts of major theological significance were translated into Chinese before the twentieth century. The first became the most popular source for Islamic teachings in China down into modern times. The original Persian, called *The Path of the Servants from the Origin to the Return* (*Miršād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ila'l-ma'ād*), was written by Najm al-Dīn Rāzi (d. 1256), a Sūfī teacher of Kubrawī lineage from the city of Rayy (on the outskirts of modern Tehran). At 550 pages it is longer than the other three texts put together. It was translated by Wu Zixian 伍子先, a member of an important scholarly family from Nanjing, with the title *The Fundamentals of the Return to the Real* (*Guizhen yaojiao* 歸真要道), and was published in the year 1670.

Two factors were especially important in the choice to translate Rāzi's *Path of the Servants* into Chinese. First, it was recognized throughout the Persianate lands of Islam (from the Ottoman realms into Central Asia, India, and China) as one of the clearest and most comprehensive statements of Islamic teachings and practices in any language. Second, it highlights what Muslims saw as a serious lack in Confucian thought, that is, the refusal to talk explicitly about the beginning and the end, creation and eschatology. The standard terms "origin" and "return" in Rāzi's title show that the overall discussion is framed by the basic Islamic teaching that all manifest reality comes from God and goes back to him.

Rāzi's book is a masterpiece of elegant and straightforward Persian prose. By contrast, the other three translated texts express the same metaphysical vision but with a good deal of technical vocabulary. Muslim scholars probably chose these three, despite their difficulty, because of the help they could provide in formulating a philosophical vision that would rival and even surpass that of neo-Confucianism. Two of them were translated by an influential teacher named She Yunshan 舍蘊善, who flourished during the seventeenth century mainly in Kaifeng (Benite 2005: 51–54). In 1679, he published *The Classic Searching for the Real* (*Yanzhenjing* 研真經), a translation of *The Furthest Goal* (*Maqṣad-i aqṣā*) by 'Azīz Nasa'ī (d. ca. 1300). Nasa'ī, like Rāzi, belonged to the Kubrawī lineage of Sufism. The book is a short, clear, and sophisticated presentation of basic theological and cosmological teachings drawn from the two major strands of Islamic theology and metaphysics, and indeed, the two predominant strands down into early modern times. The first of these is theoretical Sufism, whose greatest teacher was

Ibn al-'Arabi, and the second philosophy, whose most influential master was Avicenna (Ibn Sina, d. 1037). In several Persian books, of which *The Furthest Goal* is probably the best known, Nasafi was able to simplify and popularize the teachings of both schools of thought, neither of which is known for its clarity of exposition.

The Yunshan also translated a much more difficult book, *Rays of the Flashes* (*Ashi'at al-lama'at*), by 'Abū al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492), a great poet and litterateur and the most influential propagator of the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabi in the Persianate lands of Islam. He gave it the title *The Secret Inquiry into the Original Display* (*Zhaoyuan mifus* 昭元密訣). *Rays of the Flashes* is a commentary on *The Flashes*, a famous book on love by a second generation student of Ibn al-'Arabi, Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi (d. 1289), who wrote it after listening to lectures by Šadr al-Din Qūnawī (d. 1274), Ibn al-'Arabi's most prolific and influential student. 'Iraqi avoided the complicated philosophical terminology of Ibn al-'Arabi and Qūnawī and expressed the ideas in the traditional imagery of love – made famous in the West by translations of the poetry of Qūnawī's friend Rūmī (d. 1273). In his commentary, Jāmī chose to explain 'Iraqi's points in the metaphysical and philosophical language typical of Ibn al-'Arabi's school of thought. The result is a dense meditation on the Divine Reality. Jāmī's approach must have rewarded careful study, for we note that the fourth book to be translated into Chinese was *Gleams* (*Lawā'ih*), his beautifully written short summary of Ibn al-'Arabi's metaphysics and its implications for puruing the path to God. This appeared in the year 1724, translated by Liu Zhi 劉智, perhaps the greatest of the Huiyu, about whom we will speak shortly.

If we dwell at length on these four books, it is because their content and approach throw a good deal of light on the manner in which the Huiyu were able to bring about a harmonious marriage between Confucianism and Islam. By focusing on the relatively systematic explanations of Islamic theory and practice developed in the Sufi tradition, they were able to overcome the monumental obstacle faced by anyone who wants to express the teachings of an alien religion in the Chinese language. They were not so naïve as to think that conveying Islamic teachings in the language of the sophisticated intellectual tradition of China could be accomplished simply by translating and analyzing the Qur'an, even if that text is acknowledged by all Muslims as the foundation of the religion. They understood that if they were to transmit the book's message into a language other than Arabic, they would need to begin by explaining its worldview, which is no means self-evident in the book itself. Nor is it clarified by the expositions of Islamic law (the Shariah) written by jurists (*fuqahā'*) or the statements of the creed (*'aqida*) written by theologians. Books on law and creed were written for practicing Muslims who wanted to be instructed in how to act correctly and believe rightly. Typical lists of the objects of belief derived from the Qur'an mention God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, and the day of resurrection. But what exactly do these words mean? Every thinking person – and the Qur'an frequently urges its readers to reflect on their situation in the world – needs to engage in a quest to understand what he or she believes. In the Qur'an and Islamic thought generally, the semantic fields of faith (*imān*) and knowledge (*'ilm*) overlap, so Muslim scholars had little sympathy for "leaps of faith." Explication of the meaning of the objects of belief was the task undertaken by the intellectual tradition, by which we mean the three broad approaches to explaining

the nature of things that can be called dialectical theology (*kalām*), theoretical Sufism (*ma'rifa*), and Hellenistic philosophy (*falsafa*), even if clear distinctions among the approaches gradually becomes more difficult to sustain over the course of Islamic history. All three were engaged in the quest to understand exactly what it is that Muslims should believe. Despite their methodological diversity – which is especially obvious before the twelfth century – these schools devoted themselves to explaining the three foundational principles of the religion: *tawhīd* (the unity of God), prophecy, and the return to God (eschatology).

In the theoretical Sufism that became the dominant intellectual school in much of the Islamic world after the thirteenth century, the three principles were commonly discussed in terms of two basic issues: the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). The first issue addresses *tawhīd*, the unity of the Ultimate Reality. The second addresses human perfection from two points of view: the prophet as *logos*, that is, the divine archetype of human beings and the universe; and the prophet as the model to be emulated in the quest for God. These two issues provide the backdrop for Huiwu thought and are given one of their most succinct and brilliant expositions in Islamic literature by Liu Zhi.

In dealing with issues of theological and philosophical explication – that is, in explaining the concepts in which Muslims are supposed to have faith – the Huiwu were faced with the pre-existence of an ancient Chinese civilization represented by highly trained scholars. They had no choice but to take this tradition into account, and they did so by rethinking the Islamic worldview in terms of their own native culture. We need to keep in mind that the Huiwu were not new arrivals on the Chinese scene. Unlike the Jesuits, they did not need to learn a foreign language. In contrast to Chinese Christians, they “never configured the relationship between China and Islam as oppositional. Chinese Muslims were natives of China and saw themselves as part of its landscape” (Benite 2005: 169). Nor did they share Matteo Ricci’s hostility toward the grand synthesis wrought by the masters of the Song period. They were at ease with the neo-Confucian perspective of “immanent transcendence,” as Tu Weiming likes to call it. Their grounding in the philosophical vision of Ibn al-Arabi and his followers allowed them to read neo-Confucian philosophy as a nearly adequate expression of *tawhīd*, the unity of the Ultimate Reality that is the first principle of Islamic thought. Moreover, the goal of Confucian learning – to become a sage – was in complete harmony with the notion of the Perfect Man. Tu Weiming (Murata et al. 2009: 592) – perhaps the only contemporary Confucian to have reflected philosophically on the Huiwu perspective – sums up Liu Zhi’s accomplishments in these terms:

Inspired by both the neo-Confucian mode of thinking and Islamic philosophy, he intended to show that his intellectual and spiritual quest led him to conclude that both Confucian and Islamic wisdom point in the same direction and arrive at the same conclusion. His conviction enabled him to conduct one of the most original and systematic inquiries into the “anthropocosmic” vision of the unity between Heaven and Humanity. It seems that he intentionally rejected the strategy of justifying the truth of Islamic faith or the validity of the neo-Confucian worldview in two different languages. He opted for one consistent interpretive process to articulate his philosophy.

Liu Zhi is Chinese through and through. Far from being a missionary doing the work of a foreign church, he looked back to generations of Chinese ancestors and perceived the neo-Confucian vision as his own. As Tu Weiming (Murata et al. 2009: 608) remarks, "The Confucian legacy, like the air he breathed, was the atmosphere in which he found his personal identity." Nonetheless, Liu Zhi tells us that it took him many years to reach the point where he could articulate his synthetic vision: "Having dwelt in seclusion in a mountain forest for ten years, I suddenly came to understand that the Islamic classics have by and large the same purport as Confucius and Mencius" (*ibid.*: 94).

The Huiru translated books on theoretical Sufism rather than treatises on the Shariah and the creed because they knew that they could not convey the Islamic vision in an alien milieu without explaining the human situation. They translated books that address the big questions of human existence – the nature of reality itself, the structure of the cosmos, the nature of the human self, the purpose of human life. These issues are addressed in Islamic texts not by jurists, who set down the rules and regulations of everyday life, but rather by Sufis, theologians, and philosophers. Works of both philosophy and dialectical theology, however, are characterized by specific technical terminology and sophisticated methodologies that were understood only by a small scholarly elite and did not lend themselves to translation. In contrast, from early times Sufi teachers addressed not only Muslim scholars but also the common people. Unlike theologians and philosophers, who favored technical language and abstract jargon, they explained the imagery and symbolism of the Qur'an in terms of everyday human experience.

Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi

Despite the lack of evidence for discussions among Muslims and Confucians, the Han Kitāb literature shows that many of the Huiru were engaged in a constant dialogue with Confucian thought. In what follows we look at a few examples from Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi. If we limit ourselves to these two scholars, it is because other Huiru have not been studied in modern times.

In his two most important works Wang Daiyu follows the lead of many Confucian scholars by treating both Daoism and Buddhism as whipping boys. He is also critical of certain issues in Confucian thought, but not nearly with the same vehemence, and his terminology throughout reflects the language of neo-Confucian scholarship. A salient example of his Confucian orientation can be seen in the title of his short book, *The Great Learning of the Pure and Real* (*Qingzhen daxue* 清真大學, translated by Murata 2000: 81–112). *Great Learning* is the name of one of the four Confucian classics given pride of place in neo-Confucianism, and *Pure and Real* is a common designation for the Islamic tradition.

The first half of the Wang's *Great Learning* addresses tawhīd in terms of what he and Liu Zhi call the "Three Ones" (*sanyi* 三一), that is, God's unity understood from three standpoints. This discussion, about which more will be said shortly, is based on the Islamic conceptualization of God in three basic ways: negatively in relation to the world, positively without regard to the world, and positively in relation to the world. Thus the

divine essence (*dhāt*) is God as known only to himself, the divine names (*asmā'*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*) are God inasmuch as he may be properly described (such as living, knowing, desiring, powerful), and the divine acts (*af'āl*) are attributes of God that can only be understood in relation to the world (such as exalter and abaser, or life-giver and death-giver). In Wang Dakyu's account, the Real One (*zhēnyī* 真一) is the divine essence, the Numerical One (*shuoyī* 數一) is God inasmuch he has a multiplicity of names and attributes, and the Embodied One (*tiyī* 體一) is God inasmuch as he is humanly embodied in the Human Ultimate (*renjī* 人極), the perfect human being who achieves, in the well-known Confucian expression, "one body with heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things."

The second half of Wang's *Great Learning* summarizes the obligations that *tawhīd* imposes on human beings and explains why followers of the Three Teachings – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism – fail to perceive *tawhīd* adequately or live up to its demands.

Liu Zhi, who seems to have died around 1725, published the first book of what James Frankel calls the Tianfang Trilogy toward the beginning of the eighteenth century and the third some twenty years later, and he also wrote several minor but significant works. The word *tianfang* 天方, direction of heaven or heavenly square, was used to designate the Islamic tradition. The first volume of the trilogy, *Nature and Principle in Islam* (*Tianfang xingli* 天方性理), describes the worldview built on the foundation of *tawhīd* and addresses issues that we can call metaphysics, theology, cosmology, and spiritual psychology. The second, *Rules and Proprieties of Islam* (*Tianfang dianli* 天方典禮), explains the rationale for Islamic praxis in a manner similar to Rāzī's *Path of God's Servants*, but in no way like the detailed manuals of jurisprudence that Muslim scholars were wont to produce in Arabic and Persian. The third, *The True Record of the Utmost Sage of Islam* (*Tianfang zhisheng shilu* 天方至聖實錄), describes the Prophet as embodying the teachings, practices, ethos, and character traits explained in the first two volumes.

Both Western and Chinese scholars have recognized Liu Zhi as the outstanding representative of the Huiyu. He is the only author of the school whose major works have been studied with any care in the Western literature. The American missionary Isaac Mason published an abbreviated translation of the third volume of the trilogy as *The Arabian Prophet* (1921). We published a study and translation of the first volume as *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi* (2009) and James Frankel devoted a thoughtful study to the second volume in *Rectifying God's Name* (2011). Frankel describes how Liu Zhi was able to present the Islamic perspective as an authentic continuation of the ancient wisdom of the sage kings and to illustrate the concordance of Islamic social, legal, and ritual teachings with those of Confucianism. Among all the Huiyu books, it is this second volume that was noticed by Confucian scholars, precisely, Frankel suggests, because it focuses on social harmony rooted in the five constant virtues, the framework of Confucian social theory. This is not to imply, however, that Liu Zhi ignored the profound Islamic basis for attention to ritual and society, quite the contrary. His introductory chapters on the cosmological and psychological significance of ritual and social harmony show a rare skill in applying the abstract issues of Islamic metaphysics, as discussed in the first volume of the trilogy, to the practical considerations of life in the world.

Liu Zhi situates his Tianfang Trilogy in the Confucian context by the very title he gives to the first volume: *Nature and Principle in Islam*. "The learning about nature and principle" (*xingli xue* 性理學) is a name of the neo-Confucian perspective, clearly because of the prominence given to the two terms. Scholars have sometimes considered *xingli*, nature and principle, a compound word meaning philosophy, but to translate it this way would ignore the central importance of both concepts in Liu Zhi's book. Moreover, "philosophy" in Islamic studies is used for the specific school of thought that traces its origins back to the Greeks, and there is little trace of philosophy in this technical sense in Liu Zhi's book or in Huiwu literature generally.

It is worth dwelling on the meaning of *xing* and *li* as understood by both Liu Zhi and Wang Daiyu, not least because their treatment of the terms reflects their efforts at understanding Confucian thought in a manner that would betray neither tradition. Moreover, their reading suggests that historians of Confucianism may gain some insights into neo-Confucian thought by studying the Huiwu writings. This can provide one example of what Tu Weiming means when he says that *Nature and Principle in Islam* "will broaden the philosophical horizons of Confucian thinkers and compel Chinese intellectual historians to reexamine their underlying assumptions about the Three Teachings" (Murata et al. 2009: 617).

If we follow the standard interpretations of the terms *xing* and *li* offered by Sinologists and most contemporary Chinese scholars, we will surely conclude that Confucianism has few traces of religious thinking – if by "religion" we mean the theological teachings so prominent in the pre-modern West and in Islam. Indeed, since the Enlightenment, much of Western literature has portrayed Confucianism as a social philosophy that has no use for the notion of God. We can see this view prefigured in the writings of Matteo Ricci, who criticized the neo-Confucian use of the word principle to designate the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), for, he said, the notion of principle does not allow for intelligence and consciousness (Frankel 2011: 173). The great historian of Chinese science Joseph Needham took a similar line. According to him, Confucianism "had no room for souls," or spirits, or anything smacking of the supernatural (Needham 1954–2004: 2: 475). The Huiwu, however, offered another reading of nature and principle. Both Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi employed nature, *xing*, to translate the Arabic word spirit (*rūḥ*) or sometimes soul (*nafs*), and they used principle, *li*, to render the words intellect (*ʿaql*) and soul. These three quasi-synonymous Arabic words are used throughout Islamic literature to designate the invisible, subtle reality of the human self, which is the locus of awareness, consciousness, and free will. The three terms come up constantly in any discussion of the relationship between God and man. If we translate the title of Liu Zhi's *Nature and Principle* into Arabic in a manner that would accord with his understanding of these words and the typical Arabic style of the time, it would give us something like *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, "The Book of the Spirit" (which happens to be the title of a well-known book by a fourteenth century theologian, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya). Muslims who see this Arabic title would suppose that *Nature and Principle in Islam* is dealing with issues of theology and spiritual psychology, which are precisely the topics of Liu Zhi's book.

The Huiwu were well aware of Confucius's reticence in talking about God or supernatural beings. Wang Daiyu remarks on it in his *Real Commentary on the True Teaching*

In a chapter called "Nature and Mandate" (*xingming* 性命). Mandate is another term basic to Confucian thought and central to Huiwu thinking. Wang begins the chapter by citing a saying of the Sage (*sheng* 聖), that is, Muhammad: "If you see your nature completely, then you can see the Lord." The original Arabic text reads, "He who recognizes his own soul (*nafs*) recognizes his Lord." Wang Daiyu explains this to mean, "To know this body is to know the Real Lord's creation and transformation. To see this nature is to see the Real Lord's mysterious mechanism" (Wang 1921: 1: chapter 11). He then remarks that Confucius rarely spoke about nature, nor did he say much about *ren*, the primary Confucian virtue, a word translated variously as humanity, humanness, benevolence, goodness, and authentic human nature. Wang says that it was Confucius's grandson (that is, *Zisi* 子思) who first spoke about nature explicitly, at the very beginning of *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸): "What Heaven mandates is nature; following nature is the Dao." These two sentences, he says, "are the great origin of the Learning of the Principles," that is, neo-Confucianism, "but unfortunately, they are difficult to penetrate thoroughly." To illustrate this he cites different interpretations of nature offered by Mencius, Xunzi, Hanzi, Chengzi, and others. Finally he turns to an explanation of nature and mandate that accords with Islamic teachings.

Wang Daiyu is by no means as clear and systematic as Liu Zhi, but once we compare the interpretations of nature, principle, and mandate offered by the two authors, we can see that they agree on the meanings of the words and are both drawing from Rāzī and Nasafī. Briefly, the Real Lord brings the universe into existence by issuing the mandate, which is the divine command (*amr*) mentioned in many Qur'anic verses, such as, "His only command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be,' and it comes to be" (36: 82). The universe comes forth as a series of descending levels. Once manifestation reaches its lowest point, which is called prime matter (*hayūlā*) in Islamic philosophy and vital-energy (*qi* 氣) in Confucian thought, the creative flow reverses its direction and heads back toward the Origin. Muslim scholars call these two movements the Origin and the Return, or the Descending Arc and the Ascending Arc, and they describe the overall situation of the cosmos as "the circle of existence" (*dā'irat al-wujūd*).

Both Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi designate the two arcs as the Former Heaven (*xiantian* 先天) and the Latter Heaven (*houtian* 後天). In Confucian thought, there is a good deal of debate about the meaning of these two terms. Typically, however, the Former Heaven is understood as the situation of the universe before manifestation and the Latter Heaven as its situation now that it has become manifest. As Liu Zhi explains with the help of a series of diagrams, the Descending Arc represents a movement from invisibility to visibility, from consciousness to unawareness, from light to darkness. When God issues the mandate, the first reality to appear is the World of Principles (*lishi* 理世), called in Arabic by names such as the World of Spirits. This world has fourteen basic levels (which Liu Zhi takes from Nasafī), representing the movement of spiritual realities from unity to multiplicity. The first level, which contains all the succeeding levels as potentialities of manifestation, is called the Nature of Continuity (*jixing* 繼性) or the Nature of the Utmost Sage (*zhishengxing* 至聖性). The first term translates the Arabic expression "the Ascribed Spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-iqāfi*), which refers to the Qur'anic verse in which God says, "I blew into him [i.e., Adam] of My spirit" (15: 29), thus "ascribing"

the human spirit to Himself. The second translates the common expression "the Muhammadan Spirit" (*al-rūh al-muḥammadi*), which is one of the many names used to refer to the Ascribed Spirit.

Liu Zhi explains that each of the fourteen descending levels of the World of Principles is more differentiated than the preceding level. "Nature" and "principle" designate the two basic sorts of spiritual realities present in this world. Following a standard neo-Confucian interpretation, he says that the two words have the same meaning, but natures designate principles that become manifest as selves, and principles designate natures that become manifest as things. Within the World of Principles itself the fourteen natures extend from the Nature of the Utmost Sage down through the natures of other sorts of sages, worthies, ordinary humans, animals, and plants, minerals, and the vast sediment. The fourteen corresponding levels of principle designate the spiritual realities lying behind the descending levels of manifestation represented in the Latter Heaven by the nine celestial spheres, the four elements, and vital-energy. In the first and fourteenth levels, nature and principle are undifferentiated. The first level of principle, called *Aershi* (Arabic *'arsh*, meaning Throne of God), is identical with the Nature of the Utmost Sage, and the fourteenth level of principle, the vast sediment, is identical with the fourteenth level of nature, vital-energy.

None of this differentiation becomes manifest until the Latter Heaven, in the form of what Liu Zhi calls the World of Images (*xiangshi* 象世). This is the realm of the Ascending Arc, in which all things are traveling back toward their Origin, moving from darkness to light, unawareness to consciousness, differentiation to unity, and visibility to invisibility. In the World of Images we see that at each succeeding level – minerals, plants, animals, ordinary humans, believers, worthies, sages – interior powers like knowledge, awareness, consciousness, wisdom, compassion, and love come to be more fully actualized. The final goal of the universe is achieved when human beings, in the person of sages and worthies, return to the Origin with full awareness of the entire Circle of Existence, thereby achieving one body with heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things.

This, in brief, is the anthropocosmic vision offered by the Huiwu, a vision which, in its overall contours, is congenial with both Islamic and Confucian cosmology and spiritual psychology. The purpose of describing reality in these terms is to allow people to understand where they stand in relation to God, heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things. Only on the basis of such an understanding can they set out to become sages, that is, to achieve the perfection of the human state that is the explicit goal in both theoretical Sufism and Islamic philosophy. In both Islam and Confucianism, this quest is profoundly intellectual, but it demands the transformation of the whole being. Tu Weiming (Murata et al. 2009: 596) describes what the quest for perfection involves in these terms:

Liu was firmly convinced that his quest for Truth and Reality is an intrinsic value independent of any instrumental or strategic missionary considerations. His *Nature and Principle* is intended to show that his faith in Islam must transcend any distorted or partial representation. Rather, it is based on a worldview that offers an adequate understanding of what Truth and Reality is. Ontological insight rather than empirical investigation is the proper

method for grasping this. . . . It involves not only the brain and mind but also the heart and body. It is inexorably a transformative act. . . . It is the outcome of multifaceted intellectual reflection, rigorous spiritual exercise, persistent meditation, and profound rumination. As a form of experiential understanding, it is neither private nor subjective. Indeed, it is diametrically opposed to subjectivism and solipsism, but not at all in conflict with objectivity, disinterestedness, and impartiality.

Another salient example of the Huiwu engagement with important notions of neo-Confucian thought can be found in the manner in which Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi discuss divine unity, *tawhīd*, even if they do not employ the Arabic word. As the first principle of Islamic faith, *tawhīd* is given prominence in all branches of Islamic thought, though theoretical Sufism offers the most elaborate expositions of its demands on being human in the world. Both Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi take care to differentiate the Islamic notion of unity from parallel notions found in Confucianism and Daoism. Wang Daiyu, for example frequently speaks about the three Ultimates – the Non-Ultimate (*wuji* 無極), the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), and the Human Ultimate (*renji* 人極) – notions derived partly from Daoism and much discussed in neo-Confucianism, ever since the famous diagram of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (d. 1073) (Kalton 1988: 37–42; Wing 1963: 463–64). Wang Daiyu claims that the Confucian scholars who spoke of the three ultimates failed to grasp that all three are aspects of the “Numerical One” (*shuyi* 數一), which is the face of the Real One (*zhenyi* 真一) gazing in the direction of creation and transformation.

The distinction between God’s real unity and numerical unity is commonly made in Islamic texts, but Wang Daiyu’s explanation seems thoroughly Chinese. He writes (1921: 1: chapter 1): “The Non-Ultimate is the beginning of the ten thousand formless things, and the Great Ultimate is the beginning of the ten thousand formed things.” In other words, the Non-Ultimate is the One inasmuch as it is the beginning of the World of Principles, and the Great Ultimate is the One inasmuch as it is the origin of the World of Images. He goes on to explain (*ibid.*: 1: chapter 2) that these two cosmic ultimates are embraced by the Human Ultimate, which is the uncreated reality of Muhammad or the Numerical One *in divinis* (what Christian theologians would call the *logos*). The Numerical One *per se*, however, is simply the function (*yong* 用) of the Root Substance (*benti* 本體), which is the Real One. Concerning the Human Ultimate as the Utmost Sage, he writes (*ibid.*: 1: chapter 7):

Know that the Utmost Sage is he whose substance is the Non-Ultimate and whose function is the Great Ultimate. The two wings [*yin* and *yang*] are his differentiated display and the four seasons his iteration and transformation. Heaven and earth are his covering and his carrying, and the ten thousand things are put in good order by him.

Like Wang Daiyu, Liu Zhi employs the term Human Ultimate to refer to the Perfect Man, but instead of talking about the Three Ultimates, he focuses on the Three Ones (a notion not much developed by Wang Daiyu). In the process he shows his mastery of the metaphysical exposition of *tawhīd* as developed by Ibn al-‘Arabi’s followers. Briefly, he explains that the Real One is the Root Substance, the Divine Essence, standing beyond

comprehension by anything other than itself. The Numerical One is the function of the Root Substance, or God inasmuch as he possesses many names and attributes. The Embodied One is the Human Ultimate, the Perfect Man and fully realized sage, who has achieved one body with heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things. It is through the perfect harmony of the Three Ones that all things reach their full manifestation and realization. Thus, for example, Liu Zhi writes as follows about the Real One:

Thus we know that it is One but also three. It is three and cannot not be three. That which is three and cannot not be three is the Real One's own act of hiding and manifesting.

The world is where the three Ones lodge as a whole and where pervading can be manifest. Outside the world there is a world, and that is the world of the Real Principle. Inside the world there is a world, and that is the world of the Human Ultimate.

Without the world of heaven and earth, the world of the Human Ultimate would have no assistance. Without the world of the Human Ultimate, the world of the Real Principle would have no position. Without the world of the Real Principle, the world of the Human Ultimate and the world of heaven and earth would have no way of becoming manifest by themselves. Thus the being of the world is a being that cannot not be. The being that cannot not be is the Real One's own act of hiding and manifesting.

A Note on Recent Developments

Given the prominence of dialogue among religions in modern times, it is not surprising that there have been attempts to initiate dialogue among Muslims and Confucians. One salient example is provided by Tu Weiming, from 1996 to 2008 the director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute and one of the foremost representatives of what some would call "New Confucianism." In 1993, his Harvard colleague Samuel Huntington showed him a draft of his paper, "Clash of Civilizations," and Tu passed it on to his good friend Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the foremost scholars of Islam in North America.

Tu's discussions with Nasr about Huntington's paper led to a series of conferences dedicated to Confucian-Islamic dialogue, most notably one held in Kuala Lumpur in 1995, at which Anwar Ibrahim was the keynote speaker, and four held in China between 2002 and 2010, sponsored by the Harvard-Yenching Institute and various Chinese universities, with much of the organizational work done by Professor Hua Tao of Nanjing University. Most of the participants in the China conferences were Chinese scholars of Islam, and all were grateful to have this relatively high-profile opportunity to discuss their work. Papers ranged over a great variety of issues, relatively few of them touching directly on the Hui. Most of the presentations reflected the official emphasis of recent years on the social sciences, with contributions from historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists dealing with the Muslim experience of living in Chinese society. Few on the Muslim side had any more than a rudimentary familiarity with Islamic theology and philosophy, in contrast to their Hui ancestors, but they were happy to have the opportunity to talk about social and ethical issues. The four conferences seem to have established a clear awareness of the need for Muslims and

Confucians to discuss their common issues, and all signs point to a continuation of such endeavors in the future.

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