

Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation

Islamic History and Civilization

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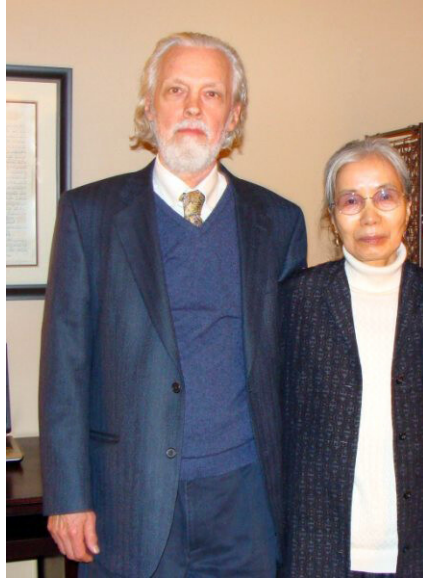
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William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata
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Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation

*Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick
and Sachiko Murata*

Edited by

Mohammed Rustom



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: Art work by Behnaz Karjoo.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <https://catalog.loc.gov>
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022048693>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0929-2403

ISBN 978-90-04-52902-1 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-52903-8 (e-book)

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From the preface of Jāmī, *Lawā'ih*, trans. William C. Chittick in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yü's Great learning of the pure and real and Liu Chih's Displaying the concealment of the real realm*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000, 134



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Foreword

In the Name of God, the All-Good, the All-Merciful



I have known William Chittick and Sachiko Murata for over half a century as their teacher, friend, colleague, and scholarly collaborator. It was in 1964, when I was the Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut, that I first met a young American student named Chittick in one of my classes and during a public lecture I gave at the University. He drew my attention as a gifted student and potentially a serious scholar. During that year he also visited historical Islamic cities in Syria and became deeply attracted to the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition. After returning to America for his senior year and having received his bachelor's degree, he came to Iran where he spent the next dozen years finishing his doctorate at the University of Tehran, becoming later an instructor at Aryamehr University of Technology and the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy when I headed both institutions.

It is remarkable how quickly he mastered Persian and later Arabic. I know of no Western scholar who speaks, reads, and writes Persian as well as Chittick does. Soon after he arrived, he came to see me about the subject for his PhD thesis and I suggested to him that he edit and comment upon 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's commentary upon Ibn 'Arabī's *Nasqh al-fuṣūṣ*. He wondered at that time who Jāmī was but in a few years he produced a remarkable work that was soon published and remains to this day one of the major works on theoretical Sufism (*'irfān-i naẓarī*). This work also marks the beginning of Chittick's special interest in Ibn 'Arabī whose works he also studied with some leading Persian masters. I had the occasion to introduce him to such well-known authorities of Islamic thought as Sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim 'Aṣṣār, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, the latter becoming a very close friend of Chittick. The young Chittick also came to know the famous Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu who was one of our main teachers at the Imperial Academy and with whom Chittick also studied the *Fuṣūṣ*. The Chitticks also helped the Izutsus in countless material ways when the Japanese scholar and his wife were in Tehran. Before long Chittick became immersed in the works of Ibn 'Arabī. I remember

that after I wrote *Three Muslim Sages*, the last part of which is devoted to al-Shaykh al-Akbar, I told him that I was now leaving Ibn ‘Arabī for him to pursue. He went on to produce several seminal works on him, works that have established him as the leading scholar of Ibn ‘Arabī in the English-speaking world.

As for Sachiko Murata, she had come to Persia from Japan to study Shi‘ite Law, especially as related to family matters; but she also devoted herself to Islamic and Iranian studies in general at the University of Tehran, where she met Chittick, an encounter that led to their marriage. While in Tehran, Murata wrote a short treatise on *mut‘a* or temporary marriage in both Japanese and Persian. The treatise is so well written and clear that it has been reprinted numerous times and is still widely read in Persia. She also became fluent in Persian and at home she and Chittick speak Persian together rather than English.

While in Tehran the Chitticks began to collect a wonderful set of traditional *kilim* rugs and traditional curtains. Their apartment was more Persian than most Persian homes besides housing a very rich library devoted to Islamic and Japanese studies. Fortunately, at the time of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, when they were forced to leave the country, they were able to save all their belongings and books.

As in my own case, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 changed the trajectory of the lives of the Chitticks. After a few months in Turkey, they returned to New York where Chittick worked for a while with the late Ehsan Yarshater on the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* which the latter was editing. Fortunately, a professorial position opened for both of them at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where they have been teaching to this day—Chittick in Islamic studies and Murata in Buddhism and Far Eastern religions. Their home in Long Island became a haven for scholars and others seeking knowledge of religion. It is a piece of traditional Persia far away from the land that they were forced to leave. Over the past few decades when I have had the nostalgia for my homeland from which I am exiled, I have gone often to their Persian home for a few days. Besides the intellectual feast that I have found there in an ambience of great friendship, I have always been treated by Sachiko Murata’s exceptionally fine Japanese cooking in which she is a master. She has always prepared the best Japanese dishes this side of Tokyo.

Once well settled, the Chitticks began their serious scholarly activities anew. Chittick himself produced his several masterly works on Ibn ‘Arabī and Qūnawī, Rūmī, Bābā Afḍal Kāshānī, Maybudī, and many other prominent Sufis and Islamic philosophers. He even critically edited and commented upon some very salient works which were not known by the general scholarly community in Persia itself. He became famous not only in the West but also in Persia where

he is recognized as a major Islamic scholar and where he has received several national awards. In a sense he is a living presence in Persian intellectual circles although residing far away. Many of his English works as well as those of Murata have been translated into Persian.

Among Murata's works, I must mention especially her *The Tao of Islam* which remains widely popular in scholarly circles. Applying such basic Chinese ideas as *yin-yang* to the study of Islamic metaphysical, cosmological, and mystical teachings, she provides in this book both a fresh look at Islamic doctrines and also a profound work on comparative philosophy matching in significance the work of Izutsu.

A new intellectual and spiritual continent was revealed with the discovery by members of the international scholarly community of the works of Chinese Muslim thinkers such as Wang Daiyu, and Murata was one of the main actors in this event. When the gaze of a few scholars turned to this rich tradition, it came to the attention of the famous Chinese scholar Tu Weiming who was Professor at Harvard but later returned to China where a special institute was established for him by the Chinese government. He suggested to me to organize a conference together at Harvard on this late Chinese Islamic school. We decided that we would each invite a number of scholars for our "team." Of course, I invited both Chittick and Murata and that event led to the publication of several major works on this late Islamic intellectual tradition in China. Tu Weiming participated at the beginning but the work was carried out primarily by Murata who is still continuing this ground-breaking scholarly effort.

Fortunately, both Chittick and Murata are still very active as both teachers and creative scholars and the influence of their work continues to spread in both East and West as the background of those who have contributed to this volume reveals. I pray that they be given many more years of physical health and intellectual fortitude to continue to enrich the fields of Islamic and Far Eastern studies and in fact traditional studies in general. And God knows best.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Washington, June 2022

Preface

William C. Chittick was born in Milford, Connecticut, USA in 1943. He did his undergraduate degree in history at the College of Wooster in Ohio and came into contact with the field of Sufi studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB) while spending the 1964–1965 academic year as a study abroad student. After attending Seyyed Hossein Nasr's public lectures at the AUB, the young Chittick resolved to enroll into the University of Tehran's Faculty of Letters to do graduate work under Nasr's supervision. Having written his honors thesis on Rūmī during his senior year in 1965–1966, Chittick then devoted the next eight years of his life (1966–1974) to his doctoral studies in Persian literature at the University of Tehran. He also worked as a research assistant in Tehran's Center for the Study of Islamic Science from 1971 to 1972. His PhD dissertation, published in 1977 and reprinted in 1992, was a study and critical edition of Jāmī's *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ*, a major commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's own abridgement of his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* entitled *Nasqh al-fuṣūṣ*.

Sachiko Murata was born in Asahikawa, Hokkaido, Japan in 1943. She did her undergraduate degree at Chiba University, where she obtained a BA in family law in 1965. After serving as a lawyer's assistant from 1965–1966 at the Iimura Law Firm based in Tokyo, Murata joined the University of Tehran's Faculty of Letters as a doctoral student in 1967. She obtained her PhD in 1971 with a thesis on the role of women in Nizāmī's *Haft paykār*. During this time, she also served as a teacher of Japanese at the Japanese Embassy in Tehran. Murata then set out to do a second doctoral degree at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Theology. She thus first completed an MA in Islamic law in 1975. Her MA thesis, which was published in Persian in 1978 and revised into an English monograph in 1987, was on the institution of temporary marriage (*mut'ā*) in Islamic jurisprudence. By 1977, she had finished all of her PhD course work and was well on her way to completing a second PhD, this time with a thesis on the theme of family law in Islam and Confucianism. Unfortunately, the revolution of 1979 spelt an end to the realization of this goal.

Chittick and Murata met and married during their time in Iran. While after their studies Murata served as Assistant Director for the Japanese Institute for West Asian Studies in Tehran and Chittick as Assistant Professor of Comparative Religion at Aryamehr University of Technology (now called the Sharif University of Technology), they both eventually took up positions at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (now called the Iranian Institute of Philosophy) in the late 1970s. As students and then teachers in Tehran, Chittick and Murata had the very fortunate opportunity to study with a number of Iran's

most illustrious scholars. Amongst their teachers were such noteworthy names as Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, Abū l-Qāsim Gurjī, Jalāl al-Dīn Humā'ī, Toshihiko Izutsu, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Sayyid Ḥasan Iftikhārẓāda Sabziwārī. The kind of academic training Chittick and Murata received was thus quite unparalleled, which partly explains why their writings display such a profound level of insight and technical know-how.

They made their permanent move to the United States before the 1979 revolution. Chittick served as Assistant Editor for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* from 1981–1984, and he and Murata joined SUNY Stony Brook as Assistant Professors of Religious Studies (and eventually Comparative Studies) in 1983. At present, Chittick is Distinguished Professor in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies and Affiliate Professor of Philosophy, and Murata is Full Professor in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies.

Throughout the course of their long and distinguished careers, Professors Chittick and Murata have received many academic honors. These include Kenan Rifai Distinguished Professorships at Peking University's Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies and Honorary Professorships at Minzu University's School of Philosophy and Religious Studies, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS).



Over the past five decades William Chittick and Sachiko Murata have contributed in major ways to changing the landscape of not only their fields of concentration—Sufism and Islamic philosophy—but also the broader disciplines of religious studies and global philosophy. Together, they have published more than forty books in the form of monographs, edited volumes, and translations, and over 300 original articles. Their writings have been translated into some fifteen languages and are taught at every major academic institution worldwide.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of their books is the manner in which they approach premodern texts of Islamic thought. They place great emphasis on the robust analysis and concrete English translation of these texts over and against any kind of simplistic and convenient theorizations of them. Indeed, one of the reasons why their writings have been widely accessible to so many different types of people is because they cut to the chase, taking their readers to the heart of the texts themselves with impressive explanatory clarity

and careful attention to rendering their technical language in terms that are cogent and consistent.

As partners in life and scholarship, Chittick and Murata have collaborated on many important projects. The best-known of their co-authored works is their introductory textbook on Islam, *The vision of Islam* (1994). This work has significantly informed the discursive categories through which scholars present and explain the Islamic tradition in the classroom, and it continues to do so.

Among Chittick's monographs that delve into the worldview of key figures in Islamic thought, three titles that typify his unmatched skills in translation and rigorous textual analysis are *The Sufi path of love: The spiritual teachings of Rumi* (1983), *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysics of imagination* (1989), and *The heart of Islamic philosophy: The quest for self-knowledge in the teachings of Afdal al-Dīn Kāshānī* (2001). Some of his more recent books include *Divine love: Islamic literature and the path to God* (2013) and his complete translation of Aḥmad Sam'ānī's Persian masterpiece *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* under the title, *The repose of the spirits: A Sufi commentary on the divine names* (2019). These two works demonstrate how central love has been to the spiritual and intellectual quest in Islam, and this over 100 years before the appearance of such great lovers as Rūmī and 'Aṭṭār.

Sachiko Murata's ongoing research on the Han Kitab and its major representatives has opened up an entirely new universe to scholars of Islamic studies and non-Western philosophy. Her first book on Chinese-language Islam, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yü's Great learning of the pure and real and Liu Chih's Displaying the concealment of the real realm* (2000), and her more recent study and translation entitled *The first Islamic classic in Chinese: Wang Daiyu's Real commentary on the true teaching* (2017), are major landmarks of scholarship. With great erudition and a linguistic range that is second to none, these works highlight how Sufi metaphysics was integrated into the language and worldview of Neo-Confucianism, thereby providing a window for Islamicists and cross-cultural philosophers into the unique nature of Islamic thought in Chinese. Murata's best-known work, *The Tao of Islam: A sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought* (1992), remains an essential resource for the study of Islamic cosmology, Sufi psychology, and divine names theology.

As teachers, Chittick and Murata have trained a variety of graduate students and have always kept the doors of their home open to those seeking to read Arabic, Persian, and Chinese texts with them. Those who have had the fortunate opportunity to study with them would readily note their characteristic hospitality, humility, and humor. Then there are of course an even wider number of people who are their students by virtue of having been significantly influenced by their scholarship.

A *Festschrift* that brings together these various kinds of *tullāb* in addition to including Chittick and Murata's countless friends and colleagues across the globe would easily take up six or seven large volumes. The essays in *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation* are therefore limited to people who have learned from them, in one way or another, over the past twenty-five years. Many of these authors are established scholars of Islamic studies today, others advanced graduate students, and still others professional educators and artists across various domains in the humanities. Suffice it to say, despite their diverse approaches to and understandings of the field of Islamic thought, one thing these contributors have in common is the profound debt of gratitude they owe to the present volume's recipients.

Mohammed Rustom
Toronto, September 2022

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Sebastian Günther for including this *Festschrift* in their prestigious Islamic History and Civilization Series; Teddi Dols for ensuring that the book pass through its various levels of review and publication swiftly and efficiently; Seyyed Hossein Nasr for writing the Foreword; the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions; and the authors who contributed to this collection in a timely manner so that its publication would coincide with the eightieth birth year of both its recipients. My research assistant Jana Newiger and the volume's production editor Noralyne Alabdullah-Maranus worked tirelessly on the articles and saw to it that every dimension of this publication conformed to Brill's meticulous standards. A number of friends and colleagues also helped out in various ways. Thanks go to Kazuyo Murata for surreptitiously obtaining essential biographical information about her aunt, and Nosheen Mian, Nariman Aavani, Muhammad Faruque, Atif Khalil, Munjed Murad, Bilal Orfali, and Cyrus Zargar for their feedback on the volume's conception and content. A publication grant awarded by the Persian Heritage Foundation allowed me to commission the stunning piece on the front cover, which was handcrafted by Behnaz Karjoo.

Mohammed Rustom
Toronto, September 2022

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Books by William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata

The chronological list below does not include translations of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata's books, as well as their many abridged and complete translations of Sufi texts that have been published in various journals and anthologies over the past several decades.

Books by William C. Chittick

Co-edited with Alireza Asghari, Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī, *Muntahā l-madārik*, 2 vols., Leiden: The Islamic Manuscripts Press of Leiden (forthcoming).

Rumi et Shams: La voie spirituelle de l'amour, trans. Jean Annetay, Paris: Editions i, 2021.

Muqārabāt fī l-taṣawwuf wa-l-ḥubb wa-l-insān, trans. Muhammad 'Ali Jaradi and Dima El-Mouallem (a special issue of *al-Maḥajja* 36 (2021), ed. Ahmad Majed).

Translator of Aḥmad Sam'ānī, *The repose of the spirits: A Sufi commentary on the divine names*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019.

Translator of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *The unveiling of the mysteries and the provision of the pious*, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2015.

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