Introduction

In *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (2000) I translated one short treatise by each of two major Muslim scholars, Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 and Liu Zhi 劉智. Wang announced in the title of this short treatise, *The Great Learning of the Pure and Real* (*Qingzhen daxue* 清眞大學), that he was drawing from both the Islamic and the Confucian traditions. *Great Learning* refers to a Confucian classic much studied and cited by Neo-Confucian scholars. *Pure and Real* is an expression that Muslims have used to designate their own tradition, so it is commonly translated as "Islam."

It is worth noting at the outset that the term *zhen* 眞 or "real" plays a prominent role in Muslim writings as an indicator of things Islamic. The word has a long history in Chinese thought, especially in Daoism, but never had the same favor it was to gain among Muslims, for whom it is the Chinese equivalent of the Arabic word *ḥaqq*, which means real, true, right, appropriate, and worthy. In the Qur'an *ḥaqq* is used to name God, to designate the content of prophetic revelation, to describe God's activity in the world, and to indicate the nature of ideal human activity.

When I finished *Chinese Gleams* with the help of my two collaborators, Tu Weiming and William Chittick, we decided that despite Wang Daiyu's historical priority, Liu Zhi was the more significant philosopher/theologian and that he would provide greater insight into the manner in which Muslims were able to synthesize Chinese and Islamic thought. We spent several years studying and translating *Nature and Principle in Islam (Tianfang xingli* 天方性理), which appeared as *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought in Confucian Terms* (2009). I then turned my attention back to *The Real Commentary*, which proved to be more difficult to decipher than Liu Zhi's book, no doubt

because of its relative lack of system and its pioneering quality. In any case, it provides a remarkable window into the worldview and ethos of Muslims in seventeenth-century China.

Over the past thirty years China has seen a great revival of interest in Chinese-language writing on Islam. Hundreds of books and treatises that originally appeared from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century have been republished.[1] Most of them pertain to the school of thought that has come to be called the Han Kitab 漢克塔補, a Chinese-Arabic compound meaning literally "the Chinese books."[2] This literature was produced by scholars commonly known as the Huiru 回儒, that is, Muslim scholars trained in Confucian learning, or "Confucian Muslims."[3] Despite all the new research and ongoing discoveries, it still seems safe to say that the first significant text published by the Huiru was Wang Daiyu's *Real Commentary on the True Teaching* (*Zhengjiao zhenquan* 正教眞詮), which appeared in 1642. Other works had already been printed, including two that Wang criticizes in chapter 1.8, but this book overshadowed earlier writings and became the benchmark of Islamic learning.

English readers have a fine survey of the school of thought that produced Wang Daiyu in Zvi Bendor Benite's *Dao of Muhammad*. Benite explains how the Huiru appeared as the result of the efforts of a number of significant scholars, beginning with Hu Dengzhou 胡登洲 (d. ca. 1597), who established a madrasah in Xianyang 咸陽 in Shaanxi province in the middle of the sixteenth century. Hu Dengzhou broke with the practices of traditional Islamic learning by teaching not only Islamic but also Chinese classics. His students established schools in four different cities, among them Nanjing, where Wang Daiyu was trained and subsequently taught, though in later life he moved to Beijing where he remained until his death. Wang's students praised his ability to answer questions in a clear and logical manner. It is likely that much of *The Real Commentary* was composed precisely to answer the questions that he was constantly being asked, not only by Muslims but also by non-Muslims curious about Islamic teachings.[4]

Wang tells us in the introduction to *The Real Commentary* that he compiled notes on his scholarly conversations and eventually organized them as this book. He divided the material into two sections, theory and practice. The first part explains the Islamic worldview and the manner in which it is distinct from the Three Teachings, which are Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The second part deals not, as one might expect, with the details of Islamic practice, but with the

spiritual and ethical underpinnings of practice. Wang clearly assumed that his readers already knew how to practice their religion, so he wanted to explain the rationale for that practice, not least in cases that would meet strong objections in Chinese society, such as dietary rules, the prohibition of alcohol and gambling, and burial customs. He has almost nothing to say about the typical issues that come up in books of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the field of Islamic learning that sets down rules and regulations as established by the jurists on the basis of the Qur'an and the tradition. Given the lack of attention to practice per se, Muslims and non-Muslims who imagine that Islam is basically a set of instructions may have a difficult time recognizing the thoroughly Islamic character of the book.

In Arabic, Persian, and other Islamic languages, discussion of the social and spiritual rationale for practice takes place primarily in works that the secondary literature classifies as "Sufi," even though many of the authors so classified would not have used the term in reference to themselves. I use the word for want of a satisfactory alternative.[5] I understand it to mean an approach to Islamic learning that looks for inner meaning when dealing with outward forms and that emphasizes the need to undergo transformation of the soul to achieve a constant personal engagement with God. When texts of this nature address ritual observance, they explain how practice brings the soul into harmony with God and the cosmos. In the process of undertaking such explanations, Sufi teachers have produced some of the greatest and most profound books of the Islamic tradition. To cite but one example, Ghazālī's famous *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, "Giving life to the sciences of the religion," announces in its very title the role that Sufism has played in Islamic civilization.

Given the constant attention of Sufi authors to the inner meanings of external forms, it should not be surprising that Wang and other Huiru drew heavily from Sufi writings. Among all Muslim scholars, the Sufi teachers were most adept at penetrating the received mode of expression and explaining its significance to their audience, often without recourse to the standard expressions in the transmitted learning. The Sufis stood in marked contrast to the jurists, whose role has been to clarify the precise details of activity as delineated by the Qur'an and the Sunnah and who always insisted on exact conformity with the received modes of expression. For the jurists, the basic issue has always been how to do things correctly. For Sufi teachers, correct activity is necessary, but they also insisted that activity brings about the transfor-

mation of the soul only in proportion to the practitioners' understanding of the reality of correctness itself and the rationale for conforming to it. Jurists explain how, and Sufis explain why. As Islam spread to regions more distant from the center, the need to explain why became more pronounced. It was especially strong in China, where Muslims were faced with a civilization possessing great powers of assimilation while they themselves found it more and more difficult to master Persian and Arabic, the two main languages of Islamic learning.

If I mention Persian before Arabic, it is not because I have forgotten that Arabic is Islam's sacred language, but because Persian tended to be the language of instruction in what is often called the Persianate realm—which extends from Eastern Europe through Turkey to Iran and Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and China. Arabic continued to be the language of ritual, but Persian was likely to be used in the classroom, even when Arabic texts were being studied. In China itself, Arabic did not begin to replace Persian as the primary Islamic language until the late nineteenth century, with the decline of Huiru learning and an influx of "reformers" trained in Arab countries. Today Persian learning is preserved mainly in a few women's mosques; in China as in many other places the women are more attached to the ancestral ways than the men.[6]

The number of books translated from Persian and Arabic into Chinese before the twentieth century is not known, though scholars have suggested as many as twenty-five titles, including texts on grammar (the Qur'an was not translated in its entirety until the 1920s).[7] A great deal of research remains to be done before the details of these translations can be established with any certainty. Of the translated books, four are known to have been used by the Huiru as sources for their thought, but only one can be identified as a source for Wang Daiyu (Liu Zhi, in contrast, used all four). This is *Mirṣād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ila'l-ma'ād* (The path of the servants from the origin to the return) by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1256), a teacher affiliated with the Kubrawī Sufi order. This long Persian book, available in a good English translation, provides an overview of basic Islamic teachings about God, the cosmos, the human role in creation, and the path of achieving human perfection. It was extremely popular in the Persianate lands of Islam, and indeed, it is arguably the best summary in any language of the overall Islamic worldview as understood before modern times. It was also the first Islamic book to be translated into Chinese, by Wu Zixian 伍子先 in 1670, twenty-eight years after the

appearance of Wang's *Real Commentary*. The translation remained a basic textbook of Chinese Islam into the twentieth century.

It is likely that Wang also studied a second book that was later translated into Chinese, that is, *Maqṣad-i aqṣā* (The furthest goal), by 'Azīz Nasafī (d. ca. 1300). Nasafī, like Rāzī, was affiliated with the Kubrawī order. His short and lucid Persian text explains basic Islamic learning in a straightforward but rather philosophical style. Its manner of presentation is quite different from that of Rāzī, who employs relatively little technical terminology and speaks to those not trained in the Islamic sciences. Parts of Nasafī's book are popularizations of the teachings of the school of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240), perhaps the most influential theologian in later Islamic history. In contrast to Liu Zhi, however, Wang shows little evidence of being familiar with teachings specific to Ibn al-'Arabī's school of thought.

In *The Real Commentary* Wang outlines Islamic teachings on God, the universe, the human self, and the manner of living properly in the world. In doing so he uses the language at his disposal, that is, the literary Chinese of the day. This was dominated by the Neo-Confucian synthesis, so it brought together terminology and concepts from all Three Teachings. Nonetheless, like many Confucian authors, Wang is harshly critical of both Daoism and Buddhism. At the same time he is inclined to appreciate the Confucian classics as explained by the Neo-Confucians, though not to the same degree as Liu Zhi, for he does not hold back from highlighting the inconsistencies and shortcomings that he sees in the Confucian canon.

One needs to keep in mind that Wang was addressing Chinese-speaking Muslims of the seventeenth century. He does not display the modern inclination to search for religious harmony and brotherly love, so he makes no attempt to downplay differences or to stress similarities. His stance is often polemical. Addressing readers immersed in Chinese culture, he is aiming to lead them back to their Islamic roots using the resources of Chinese thought. He is not engaged in an outward dialogue with representatives of other traditions, even though his use of Confucian terminology makes it inevitable that the Chinese and Muslim worldviews are constantly interacting in his soul and his writings. In *The Dao of Muhammad* Benite has a good deal to say about the manner in which the Huiru were able to harmonize their Chinese and Muslim identities.[8]

Given that Wang spent a number of years studying the Three Teachings, he was surely aware that many of his arguments against

them were oversimplifications. In fact, he notes in his introduction that one of the criticisms he met when he showed his manuscript to readers was that he had not given due credit to Neo-Confucian thought. "You have quoted only superficial and extraneous arguments. You have certainly not sought deeply after their subtleness." In response he agrees that "The way of Confucius and Mencius for cultivating the body, regulating the family, and governing the country is the same as our way," but he adds that it is necessary to bring out the profound differences, particularly their failure to address either the Real Lord per se or posthumous becoming.

To put Wang's response in more Islamic terms, he is saying the Muslim understanding of religion (*dīn*) includes three fundamental principles of thought, that is, *tawḥīd* (the assertion of divine unity), prophecy (*nubuwwa*), and the Return to God (*ma'ād*). Confucians ignore the first and the third, and this means that their instructions on how to achieve right thought, right speech, and right activity fail to address the fullness of the human situation, even if these instructions are congruent with Islamic ethics and morality. In chapter 1.7 Wang shows his sympathy with the Confucian teachings when he says that the reason for their inadequacy must be the burning of the books by the first emperor of the Qin dynasty (in 210 BCE), an event often recalled with sadness by Confucian scholars.

Wang implicitly acknowledges that Confucius was a prophet, that is, the highest category of human being in Islam. The fact that the Huiru adopted the word *sheng* 聖, sage, to translate the Arabic words for prophet (i.e., *nabī* and *rasūl*), suggests that they generally considered this to be the case. In fact the Huiru understanding of sagehood (which in Chinese is before all else the station of Confucius) parallels the manner in which Muslims in the central Islamic lands understood the Qur'anic teachings about prophecy: Although God sent prophets to every people, the original teachings were lost or distorted, so Muhammad was sent to restore them to their pristine and unadulterated form. For those living in the Chinese realm, it was hardly a stretch of the imagination to say that Confucius was one of the 124,000 prophets sent by God, beginning with Adam.

We should grant at the outset that Wang Daiyu is not attempting to bring out the subtleties of Chinese thought or to acknowledge that the Three Teachings do in fact address issues of *tawḥīd* and the Return in their own ways. Wang differs here from Liu Zhi, who takes a much more conciliatory position, drawing freely from the Three Teachings

on issues of metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual psychology. When we do acknowledge Wang's goal of providing an adequate picture of Islamic teachings in Chinese while discouraging Muslims from looking for guidance outside their own tradition, we can better appreciate the extent to which he has succeeded in harmonizing Islamic and Chinese thought without distorting the essential principles and teachings of Islam.

Wang Daiyu

Little is known about Wang Daiyu other than what he says about himself at the beginning of *The Real Commentary*. He mentions neither his teachers nor his students, though some details can be gleaned from the text studied by Benite in *The Dao of Muhammad*, that is, *Jinxue xi chuan pu* 經學系傳譜 (Register of the lineage and transmission of the classical learning), written by Zhao Can 趙燦 in the 1670s. According to Zhao, a school was established in Nanjing by one of the students of Hu Dengzhou, namely Feng Yangwu 馮養吾. Feng's teachings were then continued by his student Ma Zhenwu 馬眞吾, who was succeeded by Ma Junshi 馬君實, of whom Wang Daiyu was a student.[9]

The most detailed account of Wang Daiyu before modern scholarship is found in Lan Zixi's *Tianfang zhengxue* 天方正學 (The true learning of Islam) published in 1862. The author tells us that his book is a simplified version of the teachings of Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi. The first chapter provides six diagrams outlining Islamic learning, including a depiction of the chain of prophets. Chapter 2 has six sections explaining the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, not only in terms of script and pronunciation, but also in terms of cosmological symbolism. Chapter 3 deals with the meaning of the Shahadah or testimony of faith in twenty-nine sections. Chapter 4 clarifies nature and mandate (*xingming* 性命), that is, the spiritual and cosmological roots of the cosmos. Chapter 5 explains the invisibility and concealment of the Real One in twenty-four sections. Chapter 6 has thirty-eight sections explaining "the essential purport of *The Real Commentary*," that is, Wang Daiyu's book. Chapter 7, called "Epitaphs of the Real Humans" (*zhenren mouzhi* 眞人墓誌), describes forty-nine prophets and friends of God, beginning with Adam. Among those depicted are Qur'anic prophets, the legendary emperors Fu Xi 伏羲 and Shennong 神農, Mary, Jesus, and Muhammad's parents. After

describing Muhammad himself (number 22), the text turns to his family and the rightly guided caliphs, and then mentions some of Islam's well-known saintly figures. In the fortieth section it describes Wang Daiyu as the first of ten Chinese figures. With the exception of the scholar Ma Minglong 馬明龍 (d. 1679), the remaining eight "real humans" of China have not been identified.[10] Here is Lan's description of Wang Daiyu:

> This real human's family name is Wang, his given name Dai, and his honorific Daiyu. At the time of the Ming Dynasty, he was commended as a worthy scholar of Chinling [Nanjing]. In order to take an examination for the third degree he traveled to Beijing. He spent many years accumulating the learning of the way of Islam. He wrote *The Real Commentary on the True Teaching*, *The True Answers of the Very Real*, and *The Great Learning of the Pure and Real*. His interpretations of the Western Classics are evidence that his learning is of the utmost truth and his principles of the utmost clarity. His explanations of the rich and deep content of the Western Classics are refined, extensive, and accomplished. He penetrated thoroughly everything from ancient times to the present. Those who read him will surely sigh deeply and say, "The learning of this real human is not easy to obtain!" The learning of the Western Classics is refined, extensive, and accomplished. Never has there been such a person! How rare is the learning of the real human! Not easy is it to obtain!
>
> The Western Classics have deep purport. While listening to the recitation of the texts, the quick-witted hear spiritual penetration in the sound. Their hearts become still and their intentions satisfied; they repent of previous transgressions and advance straight to the Root Origin. But if someone who is not quick-witted listens, it will be as if he has never heard it before. Those who have penetrated the books of Confucianism but have not penetrated the Western Classics do not understand the language or what the talk is all about. People know that there are sages and worthies in Confucianism, but they do not know what makes the sages and worthies of the West sages and worthies.

> There are some who can recite but cannot expound, there are some who can expound but cannot penetrate to the essence, and there are many who can neither recite nor expound. There are also many who have penetrated the books of Confucianism but are not acquainted with the Western Classics. This real human penetrated the Confucian books as well as the Western Classics that are refined, extensive, and accomplished—this indeed is not easy to obtain, so people sigh deeply. This real human cultivated the real nature and principle and, with genuine nature, he went home to the Real. His tomb is in Sanlihe, outside the Fuzheng gate of Peking, where he became the centerpole of the landmarks.

How then did Wang Daiyu "penetrate the Confucian books as well as the Western Classics"? A few words of introduction about his basic teachings may help readers understand what Lan Zixi had in mind. Otherwise, readers familiar with Islamic thought but unacquainted with the Chinese worldview will find it difficult to see Wang's deep Islamic training. In any case, it will be helpful to say something about the original Arabic/Persian form of Wang's teachings.

Tawḥīd Chinese Style

At all times and places, Muslims have affirmed that their tradition is built on the notion of *tawḥīd*, literally, saying one or voicing oneness. To be a Muslim is to acknowledge the unity of God, the ultimate reality. All else follows upon this. One of *tawḥīd*'s first implications is that the universe along with everything it contains comes forth from God, is constantly sustained by God, and finally returns to God. This teaching is commonly discussed in terms of the doctrine of the Origin and the Return (*al-mabdaʾ waʾl-maʿād*). The overall picture is sometimes called the circle of existence (*dāʾirat al-wujūd*). Liu Zhi's *Nature and Principle in Islam* is built on this circular plan, and Wang Daiyu's book refers to it repeatedly, though not with such clarity or detail.

Notice that the Return, the third principle of Islamic thought, is understood as the necessary complement of the Origin. In looking for

a Chinese equivalent for these two terms, the Huiru settled on Former Heaven (*xiantian* 先天) and Latter Heaven (*houtian* 後天), a pair much discussed in Confucianism. Typically, the Former Heaven is said to be a realm of formlessness (*wuxing* 無形) before things enter into existence; the Latter Heaven is then the realm of forms (*xing* 形) in which we dwell now. The Former Heaven is thus the descending arc of existence, in which all things enter into formal existence from the Real One. The Latter Heaven is the ascending arc, in which all things travel back to the invisible and formless realm from which they arose.

Wang's basic critique of the Chinese traditions has to do with *tawḥīd*. According to his reading, the Three Teachings either miss it entirely (Daoism and Buddhism), or they offer inadequate and vague formulations (Confucianism). He typically speaks of Daoism and Buddhism together, characterizing them as teachings that focus not on the Real but rather on emptiness (*kong* 空) and nonbeing (*wu* 無). He faults Confucianism for not grasping the subservience of the Three Ultimates to the Real Lord. More generally he criticizes all Three Teachings for forgetting both the Origin and the Return. As he puts it, "If you constantly examine the classic books and the histories by the various scholars, you will hardly see and hear matters concerning the original beginning and the essential end" (130–31).

The doctrine of the Three Ultimates became a mainstay of Neo-Confucian thought with a short text called *The Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*, by Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (d. 1073). The three are the Non-Ultimate (*wuji* 無極), the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), and the Human Ultimate (*renji* 人極). According to an influential interpretation by the great Zhu Xi 朱熹 (d. 1200), the Non-Ultimate designates reality before the appearance of forms, and the Great Ultimate designates reality after the appearance of forms.[11] Using similar language, Wang writes, "The Non-Ultimate is the beginning of formlessness in heaven, earth, and the myriad things, and the Great Ultimate is the beginning of form in heaven, earth, and the myriad things" (53). As for the Human Ultimate, he is the person who becomes a sage, thereby integrating the whole of reality and achieving the final goal of human existence.

It is easy to find many teachings in Islamic thought that provide a depiction of the cosmic role of prophets similar to that of the Confucian sage. One of the most salient examples in the later period is the doctrine of perfect humans (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the most sophisticated version of which is found in the writings of Ibn al-'Arabī. In one of

many ways of explaining the general Islamic position on the role of the perfect humans in the scheme of things, Muslim authors cite a saying of God, "But for thee [O Muhammad!], I would not have created the creation." In other words God knew Muhammad as the foremost of the perfect human beings before He created the universe, and He created it in order to actualize the fullness of Muhammad's perfection.

In this way of understanding the human role in existence, God's eternal knowledge of Muhammad—often called "the Muhammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*)—is the uncreated Logos, the archetype of every possibility of creation and manifestation. The universe and all that it contains are latent in this Reality, and its human embodiment appears in the persons of the prophets generally and the historical Muhammad specifically. Thus the Muhammadan Reality is the perfect transcription of God's knowledge of both being and nonbeing. If not for its presence in the divine knowledge—that is, if not for God's foreknowledge of all things—nothing would come into existence.

According to Qur'an, "His only command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be!,' and it comes to be" (36:82). Typical interpretations of this verse explain that God can only desire and speak to something that He already knows. Since He is one and the thing that He desires does not yet exist, He must know the thing—along with all other things—within His own self. For Wang Daiyu, the Muhammadan Reality—the sum total of God's knowledge of the universe—is precisely the Human Ultimate. As he puts it, "Heaven, earth, and the myriad things have come into being because they are rooted in the Human Ultimate. Were there no Human Ultimate, none of the myriad things would have been established" (204).

In keeping with Islamic thought generally, Wang Daiyu situates the Human Ultimate at a point that is both the beginning and the end of the circle of existence. At the beginning, it is the seed of all things, and at the end, it is the fruit of all. Because of the exalted position of Muhammad, he is "the great origin of the Human Ultimate" (79). The Human Ultimate in turn has two sides to its reality, which are precisely the Non-Ultimate and the Great Ultimate. In explaining this, Wang uses the typical Confucian language of "substance" (*ti* 體) and "function" (*yong* 用). The substance of a thing is its inner reality, and the function is its outward manifestation. Wang says that the Utmost Sage is he "whose substance is the Non-Ultimate and whose function is the Great Ultimate" (79). "The Great Ultimate manifests the

Non-Ultimate, so the function of the Non-Ultimate is the substance of the Great Ultimate" (74). In other words, the substance of the Human Ultimate is the Non-Ultimate, which is the root of all formlessness, and its function is the Great Ultimate, which is the root of all forms. Wang summarizes the cosmic role of the Human Ultimate in these terms:

> Before heaven and earth, the human became the root origin of the myriad beings; as the embodiment of the Real One, he became the firm principle from antiquity until now. After heaven and earth, he will be the origin to which the myriad laws go home.
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> When he goes beyond the myriad levels, he begins to go home to the Real One. Among the myriad things, he is second to the Real One, so nothing has greater honor than the human. Just as the flourishing of grass and trees and the abundance of flowers and fruits are all contained in the seed, so also the greatness of heaven and earth and the manyness of the myriad things are all included in the Human Ultimate. (117)

In discussing the concept of unity expressed by the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, Wang sometimes refers to the three Ones, a notion that Liu Zhi was to develop in more detail. According to Wang the three are the Unique One (*duyi* 獨一), the Numerical One (*shuyi* 數一), and the Practicing One (*xiyi* 習一): "The Unique One is the Real Lord, the Numerical One is the Seed, and the Practicing One is the Real Human Being" (154). In other words, the Unique One is the transcendent One of Islamic theology. The Numerical One is the Human Ultimate as embracing both the Non-Ultimate and the Great Ultimate. The Practicing One is the Perfect Human Being inasmuch as he has actualized the full human potential and returned to God by traversing the arc of ascent back to the Origin.

In terms familiar to the Islamic heartlands, we can say that the Unique One is God in His Essence, unknown to any but Himself. The Numerical One is the Muhammadan Reality, which is the uncreated prototype of all creation, embracing all that is demanded by God's names and attributes. The Practicing One is the Perfect Human Being, who achieves the goal of human existence by actualizing the whole range of divine self-manifestation in the world. In still other

terms, the Unique One is God in His exclusive unity (*aḥadiyya*), which belongs to the Divine Essence alone; the Numerical One is God in His inclusive unity (*wāḥidiyya*), which embraces the principles of all multiplicity; and the Practicing One is the human being who reaches the final stage of *tawḥīd*.

Cosmic Hierarchy

In Islamic thought the cosmos or universe (*'ālam*) is often defined as everything other than God. The Huiru commonly refer to it with the Chinese phrase "heaven, earth, and the myriad things," which corresponds nicely with the Qur'anic expression, "heaven, earth, and everything between the two." Liu Zhi provides many diagrams illustrating various ways of analyzing the macrocosm (the universe as a whole) and the microcosm (the human self) in terms of both the descending and the ascending arcs of existence. Wang is by no means as systematic, but he clearly has the same sort of structure in mind.

To talk about the cosmos is to refer to everything contained by the two realms: heaven (the high realm) and earth (the low realm). Highness is defined by nearness to the Source, and lowness by distance from It. Nearness and distance are not spatial but qualitative and relative. They are determined by the relative presence or absence of the inner, invisible qualities of existence: life, awareness, desire, power, compassion, justice, and so on. These qualities are nothing but the divine attributes, for God is alive, aware, desiring, powerful, compassionate, just, and so on. Things in the cosmos are near to or distant from the Real in keeping with the intensity or weakness of these inner qualities. Beings that are relatively near can be called *shen* 神, spirits, and those relatively far can be called *xing*, forms.

Wang uses *shen* as a general designation for the interior, invisible realm of life and awareness—whether we are talking about plants, animals, or humans. Thus spirit is the formless side of things in contrast to the formal side, which is manifest or perceived. The two terms correspond almost exactly with the common Arabic pair, *meaning* (*ma'nā*) and *form* (*ṣūra*). Wang also uses spirit to refer to the two basic sorts of subtle beings, the angels and the jinn. Angels are created of light, jinn of fire, and animals of clay. Hence the jinn have an ontological status below angels and above animals. Note that *shen* is

sometimes translated into English as god or God, but that translation is clearly inappropriate in the Islamic context.

Wang uses a second term, *ling* 靈, in a way that overlaps with *shen*. To keep the two distinct I translate *shen* as spirit and *ling* as spiritual. *Spirit* is used more generally, in the range of senses just mentioned. *Spiritual* tends to be used for the specific quality of human beings that sets them apart from other creatures. Most commonly Wang uses it in the expression *xingling* 性靈, "the nature of the spiritual."

It is important to understand that *xing* 性, nature, cannot be contrasted with what we would call the supernatural. *Xing* is used as a near synonym for *li* 理, principle. The two terms play such an important role in Neo-Confucian thought that the school itself is often called simply "Nature and Principle" (Wang refers to it with this expression in several passages). The title of Liu Zhi's book *Nature and Principle in Islam* can as well be translated "Islamic Neo-Confucianism." Both Liu and Wang use both nature and principle to designate the realities of things inasmuch as they dwell in the invisible, formless realm of heaven rather than the visible, formal domain of earth. For his part Liu Zhi consistently translates Arabic *rūḥ* or "spirit" as nature, and he often uses "principle" to translate *'aql*, which means intelligence or intellect. In Islamic thought, *rūḥ* and *'aql* are taken as near synonyms, though *rūḥ* connotes life wherever it may be found in the universe; and *'aql*, though it governs the universe on behalf of God, can only be fully actualized in the human state. On the higher levels of existence *rūḥ* and *'aql* become indistinguishable. Hence the Prophet is often quoted as saying that the first thing created by God was "the Intellect" or "my spirit."

Wang uses *nature* as a virtual synonym for both *shen* and *ling*, spirit and spiritual, though generally with a broader significance. As for *the nature of the spiritual*, this designates the characteristic of human beings that sets them apart from other creatures; in Arabic, this characteristic is typically called intellect (*'aql*) or rational soul (*nafs nāṭiqa*).

To a large extent Wang's description of human nature derives from similar discussions in Islamic texts, which in turn are not unrelated historically to Aristotelianism. In short, what distinguishes plants from minerals is the vegetal spirit; what distinguishes animals from plants is the additional presence of the animal spirit; and what distinguishes the human from the animal is the addition of the human spirit, also called the intellect and the rational soul. Thus

Wang writes, "The lowest level is called the nature of begetting, the middle level the nature of awareness, and the highest level the nature of the spiritual" (113).

Wang also discusses nature as tightly bound up with mandate (*ming* 命). Neo-Confucian scholars frequently discuss these two together with a view toward the first sentence of the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean*: "What heaven mandates is nature; following nature is the way." (Wang explains why he is unhappy with Confucian interpretations of this sentence in chapter 1.11.) Along with the Huiru generally, Wang uses mandate to translate Arabic *amr*, command. On the basis of Qur'anic usage, theologians often differentiated between two divine commands, the engendering or creative command, and the prescriptive or religious command. The first is the divine word "Be!" (*kun*), through which God bestows being (*kawn*) on all things; its distinguishing feature is that it cannot be disobeyed. The second is the multifarious instructions that God has revealed by means of the prophets. These can be disobeyed, because they address human free will. As to the degree in which human beings are actually free, that is a constant discussion among theologians, Sufis, and philosophers. Typically they conclude that people are neither completely free nor completely constrained. Hence they must put what freedom they do have to the best use. Wang offers his thoughts on the issue mainly in chapter 1.3.

Each being is what it is because of the mandate of heaven, which is the divine command that gives existence to all things at the level of their own specific natures, their distinctive existential characteristics. Hence, as the *Doctrine of the Mean* says, "What heaven mandates is nature." Nature derives from the mandate of heaven, which determines the modality of a thing's being. In one passage, Wang describes the basic levels of existence in the following terms, using *mandate* to designate the divine command that bestows distinctive qualities upon things and *nature* to mean the sum total of these invisible qualities within the things:

> The mandate of begetting and growth is the nature of grass and trees, which can support the begetting and growth of grass and trees. When grass and trees wither and decay, this nature disappears and perishes.
>
> The mandate of knowledge and awareness is the nature of birds and beasts, which can adhere to the begetting and

> growth of birds and beasts and allow them to see, hear, taste, know, and be aware through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart. They are not able to deduce principles, however, and when they die, this nature also perishes.
>
> The mandate of the spiritual and intelligence is the nature of the human. It combines the two natures of begetting and awareness, supporting people's growth and nourishment and allowing them to know and be aware and also to deduce the principles of affairs. Although the body dies, this nature exists everlastingly. (113)

Wang uses the term *mandate* to designate not only the creative command but also the religious command. For example, at the very beginning of chapter 1.1, he refers to the creative command by saying that the Real One is "the Being that does not receive the mandate," which is to say that the Real One is eternal Being, whereas everything else comes into existence by receiving the command, "Be!" As he puts it in chapter 1.10, "Before there were heaven and earth, the Real Lord turned the Non-Ultimate and opened the Gate of All Subtleties. At this very moment, each thing was granted its nature and mandate." Wang's second mention of mandate in chapter 1.1 alludes to various Qur'anic commandments that summarize the religious command, which he frequently calls the clear mandate (*mingming* 明命): "Drawing conclusions based on the teaching of the way is that one must comply with the clear mandate in all things, like recognizing the Lord and recognizing self, bearing witness to the Sage, going home to the Real, the five human relationships, and the one hundred actions."

In some passages, Wang uses the term *mandate* in a way that embraces both the creative and the religious command. For example, he sums up the circle of human existence as three stages of "real solicitude" (*zhenci* 眞賜), which is how he translates the word *īmān*, faith. The first stage is people's predetermined nature and mandate, before they enter into the world. The second stage is their individual growth and development once they dwell in the world. The third is their return to God after death. The mandate received in the Former Heaven is that of coming to be. The mandate recognized in this world is the clear mandate. The mandate actualized in the next world is the return to the creative command. Thus he writes,

> There are three meanings for real solicitude: obeying the One, recognizing the One, and becoming the One. Obeying

> the One is the time of receiving the mandate while existing in the Former Heaven. It is the seed. Recognizing the One is the time of complying with the mandate while existing in this world. It is the nurturing. Becoming the One is the time of returning to the mandate while existing in the afterworld. It is the fruit. (72)

On occasion Wang differentiates between nature and mandate in terms of the Former Heaven and the Latter Heaven. In the Former Heaven, people (or the natures that will eventually be actualized as people) are in the process of coming into existence. Once they are born into the Latter Heaven, they gradually actualize their potentials, thereby acquiring the natures in stages—the vegetal, animal, and human. In a more systematic treatment of these successive natures, Liu Zhi distinguishes clearly among six levels, each of which becomes manifest on the basis of a lower nature or, in the case of the mineral nature, on the basis of the four elements. If Liu were talking about temporal succession, one might be tempted to say that he is an evolutionary thinker. But like other Muslim authors who describe the ascending levels of being (Rūmī is well known for this), he is careful to point out that the return to the Origin—the "evolution" of the being—takes place by traversing, in reverse order, the descent from the One, the being's "devolution." The ladder of increasing subtlety and spirituality that we see before our eyes is the reverse of the stairway of decreasing subtlety and increasing density that preceded our entrance into the world. Liu Zhi sums up the doctrine of the Origin and Return in these terms:

> The Former Heaven undergoes transformation through the ongoing flow of the One Principle. This brings forth the nature of continuity, the nature of the spiritual, the nature of the living, the nature of growth, the nature of minerals, and the nature of the four agents. They descend in succession and stop when they reach the original vital-energy. . . .
>
> The Latter Heaven undergoes transformation through the differentiation and revelation of the original vital-energy. This brings forth soil, water, fire, and wind; metal and stone; grass and trees; and birds and beasts. Gradually they issue forth in clarity and stop at the human. . . .
>
> This is the meaning of "Descent is from the seed, and ascent is to the fruit." The fruit of the Latter Heaven is the

> seed of the Former Heaven. The coming of the microcosm is that it comes at the same time that the macrocosm descends from its ascent. Its going back is that it goes back after the macrocosm has completed its ascent from descent. To go back as the very last is to go back as the utmost essence.[12]

Liu Zhi's explanation here might be taken as an amplification of the following words of Wang Daiyu: "The Former Heaven is the mandate, and the Latter Heaven is nature. The mandate is the seed, and nature is the fruit. The mandate is not nature, yet it is not apart from nature. Nature is not the mandate, yet it is not apart from the mandate. Without the mandate, there is no nature, and without nature, [the mandate] is incomplete" (103).

Unlike Liu Zhi, Wang does not use the terms macrocosm (the universe as a whole) and microcosm (the human self), but unsurprisingly he alludes to the standard teaching about these two, which is that everything differentiated in the macrocosm is found in an undifferentiated manner in the microcosm. What is objectively present in the outside realm is subjectively present (at least potentially) in the inside realm; hence man has the capacity to know all things, for their realities are latent in human intelligence. To actualize knowledge of the outside realm is to bring about understanding of one's own self. This is what Wang has in mind when he writes, "Just as the human is not able to abide by himself without heaven and earth, so also the myriad things are not able to exist by themselves without the human. . . . The myriad things exist through the spiritual of the human, and the human is preserved by the forms of the myriad things" (118).

Moral Perfection

Like Sufi authors in general, Wang discusses divine unity, the universe, and the creation of the myriad things because he wants to bring out the perilousness of the human situation. People have no escape from their responsibilities toward God and the universe. They have appeared in the world for a purpose and will be asked to account for themselves after death. The Dao of heaven and earth, which is nothing but the way in which reality unfolds, demands human engagement. Before all else such engagement asks people to dominate over the

dispersive tendencies inherent in their mineral, vegetal, and animal natures. Only then can they actualize "the nature of the spiritual" and achieve the true human state.

As a good Chinese, Wang acknowledges the importance of the five relationships that form the basis of a stable society, not least the relationship between emperor and subject. But he keeps to the mainstream of Islamic moral teachings by insisting that the key to all good lies in taking responsibility for oneself and exerting every effort to bring one's own self back to nature's original purity. During his time the idea that Islamic teachings aim to build a utopian society had not yet sprouted in the minds of Muslims, least of all in China. For example, Wang dedicates chapter 2.5 to an explanation of a saying of Muhammad. The Arabic text, found in the collection of Bukhārī, reads like this:

> Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be held responsible for your sheep. The commander who directs the people is a shepherd, and he will be held responsible for his sheep. The man is a shepherd over the members of his household, and he will be held responsible for them. The woman is a shepherd over the household of her husband and his children, and she will be held responsible for them. The servant is a shepherd over the property of his master, and he will be held responsible for it. Verily, each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be held responsible for your sheep!

Wang interprets this saying as a command to establish priorities in life and activity. Before all else, each person must attend to himself. This means that the heart (the mind, the inmost center of the person) must take charge of the body and all its faculties. Here Wang alludes to another hadith transmitted by Bukhārī: "There is in the body a lump of flesh. When it is sound, the whole body is sound, and when it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart." In his words,

> The sovereign king has responsibility for all under heaven. The district magistrate has responsibility for one area. The head of a family has responsibility for one family. Someone who lives alone has responsibility for his own body.

> Although all these are equal in responsibility, of most concern are the people and things of your own body, for they are the most important root. The heart is the lord-ruler of the whole body. Intention, deliberation, memory, and wakefulness are among its close attendants. Seeing, hearing, smelling, and speaking are its ministers of state. The four limbs and one hundred members are its people and things. As one body the whole of this body is one country. If the heart is unjust, then the whole body will be unjust; if the heart is true, then the whole body will be true. How can this be a small affair? (166–67)

To Wang it is eminently clear that establishing harmony in the community and the nation depends on establishing the soundness and wholesomeness of the self, and this in turn is impossible without having a clear vision of the way things actually are, a vision founded on *tawḥīd*. He summarizes the relationship between right knowledge and the goal of human existence toward the beginning of his *Great Learning*:

> When the Lord and the servant are clearly separated, and the Real One and the Numerical One are established, then only can the fountainhead of clear virtue be known. When the fountainhead of clear virtue is known, the clear virtue will be clarified. When the clear virtue is clarified, there will be real knowledge. When there is real knowledge, the self will be known. When the self is known, the heart will be made true. When the heart is made true, intentions will be sincere. When intentions are sincere, words will be firm. When words are firm, the body will be cultivated. When the body is cultivated, the family will be regulated. When the family is regulated, the country will be governed.[13]

The Confucian ideal, as Tu Weiming likes to say, is to learn how to be human. In the ontological terms that Wang Daiyu often employs, learning how to be human demands rootedness in the nature of the spiritual, which is characterized by intelligence, self-awareness, and the ability to see into the principles that govern the universe. Wang takes it for granted that the process of becoming fully human actualizes the Five Constants (*wuchang* 五常), that is, the virtues of humaneness (*ren*