

## Confucian Knowledge and Concepts in the Translation of Islam in China

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This article aims to explore how Confucian knowledge and concepts were adapted, consolidated, and negotiated in the translation of Islam in China. Translation has always played a key role in producing and disseminating knowledge across cultures and languages, but little has been discussed to identify “the intimate connection between translation and the mediation of knowledge” (Baker 2018). Drawing on the studies of Chinese Confucian scholars on Islam, such as Wang Daiyu, Liu Zhi, and Ma Dexin, this article argues that Islam in China features many aspects of Neo-Confucianism that highly appreciate secular morality resulting in Confucian Islam, and that this was rationalized based on the similarities between Confucianism and Islam, placing Islam on a par with Confucianism for indigenization.

**Keywords:** China, Confucianism, Islam, Translation, Confucian Islam

## Introduction

Scholars have not reached an agreement as to when Islam was first introduced to China. However, according to *Chiu Tang Shu* (舊唐書), *The Old Book of Tang*, Islam was officially introduced in 651 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) by Othman Ibn Affan, the third caliph, from Medina. Individual contacts between China and the Arab world may have started much earlier. Liu Zhi (劉智), a Chinese scholar who studied Islam, noted in his book *Chao Jin Tu Ji* (朝覲途記) that Sad Bin Abu Wakkas, the uncle of Muhammad, came to China in 611 with three delegates and settled down (Broomhall 1910, 61-80). It has been said that Muslim students studied at Confucian schools, and one-fourth of the students of Guojizian (國子監: central national university) were Muslims during the Yuan (元) Dynasty (1279-1368) in China. Centuries later, during the late Ming (明) Dynasty and early Qing (清) Dynasty, Muslims were called the “Hui” (回) people; Islam was called the “HuiHui” (回回) religion and had a significant influence on Chinese society thereafter. In the period of the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, Muslim-turned-Confucian scholars appeared. It was, indeed, the first attempt to localize Islam on Chinese soil. After the Ming Dynasty, China’s contact with the Islamic world in the Arab lands and Central Asia decreased due to China’s so-called “closed-door policy.” After that, Muslims began to be incorporated into the community of the Han people, through marriage and adoption, while, sometimes, some attempts to convert Han people to the Islamic religion were witnessed. Naturally, Muslims’ appearance and culture gradually became similar to those of the Han Chinese. Thereafter, Muslims were no longer called “Arabs,” “barbarians,” or “foreigners,” but called the “Hui” race, while their religion, Islam, was called “Qingzhen” (清真: fair and truthful religion).<sup>1</sup>

In academia, some Chinese Muslim scholars attempted to combine Islam and Confucianism. These scholars were born in Muslim families, grew up in the Muslim culture, and learned Arabic and Persian. They also learned Confucianism, the predominant philosophy of that time. In this process, they must have naturally acquired a basic knowledge of both Islam and Confucianism. These early Muslim scholars in China include Wang Daiyu, Liu Zhi, and Ma Dexin. Wang Daiyu theorized a structure of Chinese Islam, while Liu Zhi further developed Wang Daiyu’s theory. Ma Dexin reinterpreted Chinese Islam based on Confucian philosophy. These three scholars can be appraised as originators of studies on Chinese Islam, and this article argues that their ideologies reflect Confucian-Islam. By exploring their philosophy, this article examines how Confucian knowledge and concepts were adapted, consolidated, and negotiated in the translation of Islam in China and the extent to which such conjugation was rationalized based on the similarities between Confucianism and Islam, placing Islam on a par with Confucianism for indigenization.

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<sup>1</sup> In response to the meaning of “Qingzhen” (清真), Ma Dexin interpreted “Qing” (清) as “extreme ritual” and “Zhen” (真) as “go back to the truth” (理). “Qingzhen” means “to overcome one’s self-interest and restore it” (理). This interpretation is based on the Zhuxi (朱子) school.

## Confucian Translation of Islam

Chinese Muslims not only tried to overcome the limitations of Confucianism based on Islam but also made efforts to localize Islam in China by interpreting Islam from the perspective of Confucianism. Such attempts gave birth to a new Confucian Islam, which differed not only from preceding Confucian research but also from traditional Islam. In the sphere of East Asian culture, the encounter between Confucianism and Islam was no coincidence. Chinese Muslims had to ease the Han people's doubts about Islam in order to survive and thrive in China. For such a purpose, first of all, the philosophy of Islam had to be clearly conveyed to the Chinese so that the Chinese people could accept it. For Islam to take root in China and grow there while China's traditional culture had absolute predominance, it needed all forms of convergence with the traditional philosophy.

Islam was not translated into the Chinese language in the early days when it was introduced to China. There are many possible reasons why Islam's translation and interpretation in Chinese began so late. It might have been because Islam failed to obtain special support from the ruling class during its long development in China. More likely, however, the reason was that Islam did not conflict with the Han Chinese. In short, Muslims made efforts to keep their own religion, while the Han people did not have any bad feelings about the religion. However, when the Muslim community grew in China and conflicts with the Han people increased, the process of Islam's translation into Chinese was essential in order for Islam to take root in China. That is why the need for convergence with traditional Chinese philosophy rose inside the Muslim community. Notably, it was important for Islam to interpret itself based on the mainstream philosophy in China, Confucianism. Thus, the work of translating Islam was a tool to solve Confucian bureaucrats' ignorance and distortion of Islam, not just to convey the real meaning of Islam to China. However, even inside Muslim inner circles, there was a substantial backlash against its Chinese translation.

Orthodox Islamic doctrine bans Islam's translation into a language other than Arabic. That is why opinions about Islam's translation into Chinese were split even inside the Muslim community in China. They called the school against the translation "Jingdianpai" (經典派) and the school that argued for the need for the translation "Hanxuepai" (漢學派). The first group insisted that the Islamic scriptures absolutely had to be in Arabic, as the Koran that records Allah's revelations was written in Arabic. They said, "The Buddhist scriptures lost their original meaning when they were translated into Chinese, but the Islamic scriptures are still not vulgar as they have not been translated" (Yu Zhengu, Lei Xiaojing 2001, 73-74). They opposed the translation of Islamic scriptures for such reasons, and in using the word "vulgar," they must have been expressing their concern over the potential distortion of Islam's true meaning in the process of translation. For such a reason, the orthodox faction rejected on principle any translation of the Arabic Koran into another language.

The “Hanxuepai,”<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, rejected the idea that there was anything wrong with translating the Koran into Chinese. Wang Daiyu even criticized the argument of the other faction, calling it a vulgar idea that went against the great principle of Islam. This group believed that the essence of the Koran lay not in language characters but in the philosophy, perspective, or opinions of the people who use those characters (Wang Daiyu 1999, 284-285). Wang Daiyu rebutted the argument of the orthodox faction, saying that Islam was not distorted because of the difference in the chosen script, as the logic expressed in it remained the same even in different styles of writing the Koran. Actually, the disciples of Muhammad had written his words on slates or ceramics to better recite the words and compiled Muhammad’s words in the Koran in Arabic only after his death. That is why the faction argued that various styles had existed, and they denied a direct relationship between the Arabic language and Islam, as the language was used by different religions in the Arab lands. They concluded that the language itself was not an issue when the Koran was translated into Chinese.

They also argued that Allah’s revelations could be conveyed differently in different regions, as Allah was talking to the entire human race, not just to Muhammad in the seventh century. They insisted that, for this reason, emphasizing keeping the scriptures in Arabic ran counter to the true meaning of Islam and did not give sufficient consideration to the local conditions in China. Sticking only to the original text of scriptures while even religious leaders in China were not fluent in Arabic or Persian and did not fully understand the doctrine of Islam would only lead to the decline of Islam in China and could even distort its true meaning further. Therefore, the faction went on to argue that the Islamic scriptures had to be translated into Chinese, and the doctrine, creed, customs, and precepts of Islam needed to be introduced to ordinary people by sometimes using Chinese characters. They believed that Islam’s spread in China could be ensured only if the doctrine of Islam could be conveyed clearly inside and outside the Muslim community.

Chinese Muslim scholars tried to translate Islamic terms using Confucian terms while endeavoring to interpret Islamic doctrine and creeds using Confucian means. Such academic traditions became the mainstream trend in the Muslim community in China after the Ming and Qing Dynasty period. Even though Hanxuepai argued that the Islamic scriptures had to be translated using Chinese characters, this did not mean that the original meaning of the scriptures could be distorted. Concerning the translation of Islamic scriptures into Chinese characters, the Chinese characters refer to neo-Confucian terms. It was not easy for them to adhere to the original meaning of the scriptures while translating them using neo-Confucian terms.

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<sup>2</sup> The Islamic religious leaders nurtured in China at that time generally used Chinese for their religious and missionary activities. That is why religious figures who used Chinese in religious activities belonged to the “Hanxuepai.” The members of the “Hanxuepai” were limited to Muslim religious leaders who translated the Islamic scriptures into Chinese, especially those who insisted on the need to interpret Islam based on the mainstream philosophy of that time.

Humboldt said that in the act of translation, the spirit unique to the destination language should be able to be raised to the level of the spirit unique to the original language. Thus, according to Humboldt, the depths of other cultures cannot be considered without respecting them (Kim 2009, 101). That is why Wang Daiyu said that Islamic scriptures should be translated by those who have a deep understanding of both Islam and Confucianism. He emphasized that the identities of both Confucianism and Islam must be preserved while complementing each other. He also said the following:

Islamic scriptures and Chinese characters do not correspond with each other. Those who know Islamic scriptures cannot be deeply knowledgeable about the Chinese language, and those who have learned Chinese cannot know Islamic scriptures. Only after the compilation of the complete orthodox scriptures could the subtle meaning of Islam be revealed with the Chinese characters of the eastern land. Therefore, I intended to develop people's listening ears in depth by publishing the book (Wang Daiyu 1999, 34).

Chinese Muslims felt that Muslims should have not only an accurate understanding of Islam but also a basic knowledge of Confucianism, in order to convey the true meaning of Islam to the Chinese people. Actually, most Muslim scholars in China learned Islamic scriptures at home and studied Confucianism in school (Liu 1988, 7). The Muslim scholars in China established the unique religious philosophy of "Confucianism-Islam" by translating Islam into Chinese characters.

Translation is a semantic coupling of two unequal entities and concepts (Liu 2018, 368-387). Translation, therefore, often masks the act of making equal inherent differences. That is why Paul Ricoeur said that translation is nothing but an activity of continuously going back and forth between a foreign language and one's native language (Liu 1988, 103). This activity of going back and forth between two languages is an essential tool in the process of translation by an individual translator, and the entire process of translation by Muslims in China can be seen this way as well. In other words, it is possible to approach Islam from the perspective of Confucianism (以儒詮回). In that case, the issue of protecting the uniqueness of Islam is raised, and a new form of translation is performed: approaching Confucianism from the perspective of Islam (以回詮儒). However, this way of translation also has limitations, as it is not able to maintain and guarantee the characteristics of Confucianism. Therefore, translators come to consider trying a dialectic convergence of the difference between the two ways of translation, which can be seen as the process of circulating from one's native country to a foreign country and then again from the foreign country to one's native country. Indeed, the convergence between Confucianism and Islam by Muslim scholars in China took such an approach, trying to interpret the Islamic doctrine and creed based on the rules of

Confucianism. This academic trend became the mainstream among Muslims in China after the era of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

## Conjugation of Confucianism and Islam

Muslims believe in Allah's creation of the world and His Last Judgement. In other words, the relation between Allah and humans in Islam is similar to that between lord and servants, and Islam only allows for complete obedience to Allah. In contrast, the religious ideology of such supreme existence does not exist in Confucianism. Confucianism cares much for human relations, while Oryun (五倫), which regulates relations between parents and sons/daughters, the king and courtiers, a husband and wife, adults and children, and friends, serves as its doctrine. In this regard, Confucianism is an ethical philosophy rather than a religion, while Islam is a religion that only allows for firm belief in it. How, then, can Islam as religion and Confucianism as moral ethics be merged?

Regarding this issue, Muslim scholars in China focused on the similarities and differences between Confucianism and Islam. Ma Dexin said, "I must say what is similar in the two religions, as well as what is different between the two" (Wenshizhishi Editorial Staff 1996, 48). Chinese Muslims saw that Islam and Confucianism were similar in their positive perception of the earthly realm, as Islam also puts more emphasis on the real world than on the afterworld. Such an ideology can be seen from the following words by Jin Tianzhu (金天柱).

If there is a Muslim who wants to leave his home to become a religious ascetic, he can do so only after his parents have already passed away or when his relative who has raised him or his married child can serve as head of the household instead of him. Then he must carry out all his responsibilities and cut himself off from all beliefs other than religious ones.... There is a world of difference between living an ordinary life of being loyal to the sovereign, serving and respecting parents devotedly, keeping up one's credit among friends, taking good care of women, children, and servants, helping widows, orphans, and troubled people, offering religious services at the right time, worshiping God, and making efforts to practice the good and leaving the world to practice asceticism alone (Jin 2000, 133).

Chinese Muslims criticized the sect, believing that "a union with God" (人主合一) could be reached only by completely leaving the secular world,<sup>3</sup> while emphasizing that people have

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<sup>3</sup> "A union with God" is the ultimate goal of Sufism. Islam believes that human beings come from God (the lord) and have to return to God. It also believes that human beings will have to be resurrected on the day of the apocalypse, to be brought to judgment. However, Sufism sees the return to God not as a matter after death but

to approach Allah while staying in the current world. Indeed, there existed a sect of Sufism that approached the union with God alone, rejecting marriage in order to live a life of abstinence. Chinese Muslims were very skeptical of such sects. (Jin 2008, 111) The philosophy behind the criticism was similar to the Confucian value to focus on the current world. They did not deny asceticism but saw it as a path that could be chosen only after fulfilling one's moral responsibilities in the human world. Muslims in China thus believed that social activities and responsibilities were the most important factor to advance toward the path to becoming a holy man. They criticized Buddhism and Taoism for their asceticism, arguing that only Confucianism and Islam were the right paths. In fact, the majority of religions, including Christianity and Buddhism, emphasize the afterlife rather than the earthly life, but Islam connects the life in this world to that in the afterworld. In other words, Islam believes that if one lives a life that complies with the will of Allah through the practice of religious values in this world, he will become united with Allah. Therefore, Islam does not refer only to the religious system, but also to human life itself, including all human activities such as politics, economics, society, and culture. Consequently, Islam has a system of religious belief and practice that encompasses all religious and secular aspects. Such ideology sees that the Confucian philosophy is no different from the Islamic belief that heaven order (天命) and human nature (人性) are one.

Such a philosophy of Muslims in China, focusing on the current life, was influenced by Sufism, and the ultimate goal of religion for them was to achieve union with God in reality. The philosophy of union between humans and God is similar in structure to the Confucian philosophy of union between heaven and humans. Islam is divided into Sunnism, which places importance on religious doctrine, and Sufism, which focuses on religious belief. Sufism spread to China, and had a tremendous influence on Islamic leaders in China.<sup>4</sup> Sufis regard becoming like the prophet Muhammad as their ultimate goal. Sufis endeavor to reinforce their spirituality by pursuing frugality based on Muhammad's words "My poverty is my pride" and

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as a pursuit of union with God through mental culture in this world. The stage of mentality that they pursue is neither a mystical experience of God (the real lord) entering into the human body, or the union between the human body and God (the real lord). It is also neither divinity entering into the human nature or human nature turning into divinity. It understands the status of union with God as a way of perceiving the fact that human nature and God are one. Still, the two are divided. Islam says, 'The master is only a master and the servant (human) is only a servant.' Therefore, seeing from the eyes of God, listening through the ears of God, and speaking through the mouth of God is seen as union with God in Islam. In *Qingzhengbinan*, Ma Zhu said, 'If I like him, I am his eyes, neck, hands, and mouth. So he listens depending on me, sees depending on me, gets drunk depending on me, and speaks depending on me.'"

<sup>4</sup> Sufism was introduced to China during the Yuan Dynasty by Sufi ascetics and missionaries. Mansur al-Hallaj (858–922), a famous Persian Sufi, arrived at Turpan in Xinjiang Province in China, and many Sufi ascetics and missionaries came to the Great Central Plain region of China starting in the era of the Yuan Dynasty. Their missionary activities had an influence on the private sector of each region. Chinese religious leaders who were in charge of teaching scriptures had exchanges with Sufi missionaries, and some of them even received spiritual instruction from foreign Sufi missionaries. Many scriptures read at oratories were written by Sufis. Some priests and students even practiced spiritual cultivation under the influence of Sufism. Sufi publications were widespread among Muslim intellectuals in China.

“My eyes are closed, but my heart is open.” They believe that people can encounter the love between Allah and human beings by respecting Allah. The philosophy of Sufism is similar to neo-Confucian ideology, which highlights union with the universal principle through mental nurturing while also respecting reality. Regarding such interpretation of Islamic scholars, Confucian scholars back then said that the “(Islamic) interpretation of the human mind is no different from the Confucian interpretation” (Liu 1988, 8). The philosophy that human beings can return to Allah through self-discipline was widespread among Muslims in China, which was influenced by Sufism and which resulted in substantial advancement of the theory of self-discipline. Wang Daiyu said the following:

Therefore, if scriptures are not based on Confucianism, the great principle of cultivation, refinement, discipline, and peace cannot be revealed, and if Confucianism is not based on scriptures, it cannot successfully pursue the ultimate reason that began with the beginning and that will finish at the end. If one wants to pursue both, he must choose the two enlightenments of Islam and Confucianism, and neither can be given up (Ma Zhu 1988, 121).

Wang Daiyu tried to understand Islam based on the Confucian ethic of “first cultivate your own body to control your family well, control your family well to rule the country, rule the country well to make the world peaceful” and tried to understand Confucianism based on the ultimate principle of Islam. These similarities made it possible for both to approach each other more easily. However, the opening of such possibilities did not mean convergence between the two. What was more important than that was the question of how to resolve the differences between the two.

The key to Islam is the relationship between God and human beings – that is, the divine principle. However, Confucianism puts more focus on the relationship between human beings than on the relationship between God and human beings – that is, the human principle. Therefore, Muslims in China became aware of the limitations of both Confucianism and Islam. If the Han people had regarded the differentiation of Confucianism as an absolute value or if Muslims adhered to their own doctrine and customs, severe confrontation and conflict between Confucianism and Islam would have resulted. What was required under such circumstances was a multicultural stance of recognizing each other’s uniqueness, not an assimilation of understanding Islam from the perspective of Confucianism or vice versa. Confucianism developed as an ethical philosophy in China and Islam developed as a religion in the Middle East, and each had unique characteristics and logic. Therefore, both Confucianism and Islam needed to respect the reasonableness of the other. Confucianism needed to acknowledge the limitations of its ethical philosophy and borrow solutions from Islam, while Islam also needed to accommodate the principle of Confucianism to a certain



degree, in order to localize itself in China.

That is why Muslims in China paid attention to the filial piety of Confucianism. Even if Muslims in China had succeeded in translating its scriptures into Chinese characters, it might well have prompted criticism and persecution of Muslims if the translations contradicted the mainstream philosophy of neo-Confucianism in ideological terms. Therefore, they needed to let people know that Islamic doctrine did not conflict with Confucian moral principles. Islam says that Allah created everything and that Allah rules all human behaviors. Islam emphasizes that human beings must know the will of Allah, the creator, and live according to Allah's revelation. However, Islam also puts importance on human life in communities and this world. Muhammad emphasized the Muslim community in Medina and explicitly mentioned Muslim rules and norms in everyday life. Thus, Islam highlights not only the relationship between human beings and God but also human roles and ethical norms. Islam is similar to Confucianism in that it stresses the human role in Muslim society. However, Chinese Muslims did not stop at exploring the similarities between Islam and Confucianism and went further to accommodate Confucianism. Consequently, they not only accepted Confucian secular values but also regarded human morality as a prerequisite for their religious practice.

That is why Chinese Muslims such as Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi tried to accommodate the concept of Confucian filial piety into Chinese Islam. As trenchantly evident in Wang Daiyu's remark below, Muslims in China tended to argue that Islam was similar to Confucianism and different from Buddhism or Taoism, as Islam respected the secular value of filial piety just as Confucianism did (Zhao 1989, 46).

My religion [Islam] has the same ethical values as Confucianism, and those who follow its principles do their best to stay loyal to the sovereign and fulfill their filial duty. So how could it be compared with Buddhism or Taoism?

In the same vein, Liu Zhi articulates as follows:

The relationship between parents and their children is the origin of higher and lower status in human communities. When a father and sons are defined, the relationship between adults and children is formed in a village and thereby, a distinction between the sovereign and subject can be made. Every human relationship is defined based on such a distinction. Therefore, the holy man of Confucianism taught people that the higher and lower status in human relationships should be clearly understood. That all begins from the father-son relationship. (Liu 1988,130)

In this respect, it can be argued that Chinese Muslims including Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi

embraced filial piety, the fundamental philosophy of Confucianism and reinterpreted it in the context of Islam.

Wang Daiyu further elaborated the similarities between Confucianism and Islam and developed the combined theology, as in his remark below.

There are three major duties for people living in this world: to follow Allah, to follow the king, and to follow one's parents. If these three duties are unfulfilled, three sins of disloyalty, injustice, and disobedience are committed (Wang Daiyu 1987, 225).

Therefore, in addition to worshipping the real lord, Allah, equally important is to respect parents. In order to learn moral ethics, one should respect Allah, while one should respect parents to learn benevolence and righteousness. People who wish to be sincerely loyal to Allah must be filial to one's parents, and people who fulfill their filial duties become loyal to the lord. Loyalty and filial duty are sine qua non for a righteous religion. (Wang Daiyu 1999, 225)

In his book, Wang Daiyu clearly espouses the ethics of Confucianism that can be represented as an emphasis on filial piety and loyalty, in the context of theorizing Islam. The theoretical system of Confucianism was based on filial duty and loyalty and regarded other philosophies that did not emphasize those values as heresy. That is why Islam accommodated the value of filial duty and loyalty from Confucianism. However, in Islam, the subject of people's loyalty is Allah, not the sovereign, and the subject of loyalty in Confucianism is the sovereign. Then, an issue of whom to be loyal to – Allah or the sovereign – arises. If one stays loyal only to the sovereign but not to Allah, he is no longer a Muslim. However, if he stays loyal only to Allah, he might face oppression from Chinese rulers. Such an ethical dilemma was called “two types of loyalty” (二元忠誠論) by Muslim scholars in China.

These Chinese Muslims seem to have tried to make up for the shortcomings of Confucianism based on Islamic doctrine. They may have considered that Confucianism had a systematic and detailed theoretical system in terms of human duties; it does not stipulate a relation between humans and supreme existence(s). In this context, Wang Daiyu's argument could be construed as an emphasis on the religious aspect of Confucianism, as evident in his remark below.

There is no mention at all about how the beginning and end come, or about the Creator who brought everything into being and who controls life and death. In general, the principle of human life has its beginning, middle, and end. Confucian scholars talk only about the middle period of life but do not discuss the beginning

or the end of life. Any scholar who has deeply thought about it would naturally have doubts about this.... A person in the Song Dynasty tried to proclaim the principle of Confucianism and eliminate its shortcomings, but despite his good will, his effort was ignored by God. Many other holy men have also failed to convey the truth. They have mentioned only what could be explained in words, failing to talk about what cannot be described in words (Wang Dayu1999, 380).

Wang Daiyu compared Confucianism and Islam and criticized Confucianism for not explaining the origin of humanity and everything else, as well as the afterlife. He pointed out that Islam bore a religious inclination of pursuing a return to Allah and offered a detailed and systematic interpretation of the universe and human nature. Confucianism, by contrast, failed to mention the origin and justification of the universe and humanity, even though it had a detailed and systematic explanation of the universe and human nature. Actually, neo-Confucianism systematically discussed the universe and human nature, but it does not provide a convincing explanation of what the origin of the universe is and why human beings have to lead a moral life.

This perception of the Chinese people was reflected in their understanding of Islam. According to extant sources, the Chinese sometimes called Allah “Buddha” and sometimes called Muhammad “Buddha.” Then, in the Song Dynasty period, Allah was expressed as heaven (天). As such, the Chinese people could not clearly understand the true nature of Allah. However, in the period of the Ming Dynasty, Allah was expressed as the “lord” (主). Muslims in China did not use the expression “Allah” in their scriptures. They understood Allah’s divinity to be exclusive, and based on Allah’s exclusiveness, polytheism was excluded in the Arab lands, and Allah was seen as the only creator and the one presiding over the universe. Muslims in China also translated this concept of the lord as the “real lord” and “real one.” However, Muslim scholars in China thought that such a term was unnecessary in China, as the concept of Allah appeared in the Middle East, where polytheism was prevalent. Therefore, they tried to interpret Allah based on neo-Confucian theory (新儒學), using terms related to the origin and essence of the world, which was the fundamental problem of Chinese philosophy. That is why Muslims in China also translated the “lord” as the “real lord” and “real one.” Chinese Muslims believed that Islam’s religious features needed to be accepted by neo-Confucianism so that it could establish a perfect theoretical system.

Generally, reason (性) is like the light of the origin. The first great order from the “real lord” (真主) was given to the human being. Truth (真) is the sole existence. As principle (道) is connected to the truth, it cannot be changed, and it is one of the world laws (理). If the “real one” is not obtained, the roots cannot grow deep, and if the roots do not grow deep, the principle cannot be defined. If the principle is

not defined, belief cannot grow thick. If it is not one, not deep, and not thick, such a principle cannot last long (Wang Daiyu 1999, 38).

Chinese Muslim scholars believed that the principle of Confucianism must come from Allah (真). As mentioned above, they did not deny the morality of Confucianism. However, they thought that such morality could be justified when it was discussed in relation to Allah. Therefore, they thought that the Confucian principle could become an unchangeable and eternal truth when it was established based on Islam. As such, they said that the Ma Zhu could not have deep roots if it failed to obtain the one and only God, that principle could not be defined if roots could not grow deep, and belief could not grow thick if principle were not defined. As such, they saw that Confucianism had to accept Allah in order to justify its theory about the universe and morality. Muslim scholars in China stated that they did not deny the philosophy of Confucianism. They also acknowledged secular values and moral nature and argued that human beings had to recover heavenly rule by overcoming personal desires. They accepted the neo-Confucian concept of the universe's creation from infinity to the great ultimate, yin and yang, and all creation, for its theory about the universe. However, they understood such a process of creation of the universe as Allah's work. That is why they insisted that while Confucianism is the form, the content should be seen as Allah (Wang Daiyu 1999, 5).

The similarities and differences between Confucianism and Islam were explained above. Confucianism focused on human morality, while Islam put more importance on the relationship between human beings and God. While Islam prioritized divine principle, Confucianism prioritized human principle. That is why Chinese Muslims tried to combine the human morality of Confucianism and the heavenly principle of Islam. The issue of how to combine the two was approached differently by different scholars. However, most scholars attempted this convergence based on the similarities mentioned above, from the perspective of the union between human beings and the lord and between heaven and human. They said that Allah created all things in the universe, including human beings, so human beings should return to Allah. Wang Daiyu tried such convergence in the form of “Zhen (真) -> Shu (數) -> Ti (體),” while Liu Zhi tried convergence in the form of “first heaven (heavenly principle) -> later heaven (human morality) -> first heaven (heavenly morality),” and the medium of such convergence was the human being. Consequently, he pursued convergence through an organic relationship between heavenly morality and human morality.

## **Conclusion**

This article has revealed how Confucian knowledge and beliefs were adapted and negotiated in the translation of Islam, focusing on the studies on Islam of three Chinese Muslim scholars, Wang Daiyu, Liu Zhi, and Ma Dexin. Although the need to conjugate Confucianism and Islam had been recognized long before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, because of social conflicts between believers in each religion, these three scholars theoretically developed a Chinese tradition of Confucian Islam.

These Chinese Muslims reinterpreted Islam based on the human morality of Confucianism; they also tried to add a religious aspect to Confucianism, based on the philosophy of Islam. Such a combination was undertaken based on the similarities between the five moral disciplines of human relations in Confucianism and the five duties of Islam, thereby placing Islam on a par with Confucianism in the context of indigenization. However, it cannot be denied that the origin of human morality in Chinese Islam was based on the one and only Allah. Even though the origin of human conscience is from transcendental Allah, it was the moral practice of human beings that led Chinese Muslims to the union with Allah. Therefore, Chinese Muslim scholars established a unique theoretical system, developing their own philosophy and religion. This article has attempted to substantiate this position.

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