

Liu Zhi:
The Great Integrator of Chinese
Islamic Thought

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History is replete with stories of visionaries whose genius was unappreciated in their own time and place. Many luminaries have been criticised, some even persecuted, by the governing authority under which they lived, or by their public or by both. Some have found acceptance abroad or have been vindicated posthumously. In the words of Jesus, ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home.’¹ The Prophet Muḥammad followed in the footsteps of the prophets who preceded him. He was jeered at, reviled and struggled for decades against members of his own clan and tribe before overcoming his enemies and uniting Arabia under the banner of Islam. The message of Islam thence spread in all directions, claiming followers over a massive swath of Afro-Eurasia. Those who tread the prophetic path, trammelled by adversity, must be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of delivering their message. The followers of the prophets similarly have faced initial hardships before enjoying success, their triumphs sometimes becoming clear only after their deaths. According to the *ḥadīth*, ‘Scholars are the heirs of the prophets.’² For some 1,400 years, Islamic scholars have carried the legacy of the prophets, earning thereby obloquy and acclaim, or some measure of each.

Within a century of the Prophet’s death in 632 CE, Islam’s eastward expansion had brought Muslims to China, but it would take almost a millennium before the legacy of Islamic scholarship reached its Chinese apogee in

the person and the writings of Liu Zhi (c. 1660–c. 1730), the most prolific and celebrated of the *Han kitāb* writers. Liu Zhi embodied Chinese Muslim simultaneity, reflected in his ability to participate in both the Islamic and Chinese intellectual worlds as an insider. Calling upon his literary talents and linguistic finesse, he seamlessly integrated Islamic and Confucian values and tenets into his worldview, which enabled him to harmonise the two traditions in his writings. As reflected in his work, Liu Zhi understood himself truly to be the heir of both the Islamic prophets and the Chinese sages, whom he conflated into a single class under the Chinese term *sheng*, thereby integrating Chinese and Islamic concepts of the ideal person, ‘a human being endowed with special qualifications that make him a suitable mediator between the divine and mundane realms’.³ Liu Zhi thus harked back to Confucius and Mencius, who had expressed the notion that righteousness was not an exclusively Chinese virtue.

This Confucian idea reached its culmination in the universalistic teachings of the Song dynasty (960–1279) philosopher Lu Jiuyuan (Xiangshan) (1139–92), whom Liu Zhi invoked. Lu wrote compellingly of sages coming from both the East and the West. The Islamic tradition likewise affirmed that God had sent prophets to all nations,⁴ and that distinctions such as East and West are meaningless in the face of God’s omnipresence.⁵ By integrating Confucius and Muḥammad into a single brotherhood, Liu Zhi could substantiate the claim that their respective teachings derived from a single source of moral authority, a universal Truth transcending temporal, geographic, linguistic or cultural differences:

The sage of the West, Muḥammad, lived in Arabia long after Confucius, so far removed in time and space from the Chinese sage that we do not know exactly by how much. Their respective languages are mutually unintelligible. So how is it that their *dao* is in full accord? They were of one mind. Therefore, the *dao* is the same.⁶

Like the prophets, scholars achieve transcendence through their words and deeds. But they are nevertheless also products of their particular time and place. In the case of Liu Zhi, this was Nanjing of the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911), under the reign of the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662–1722). As Chinese society, and particularly its literate elite, recovered from the traumatic

fall of the Ming (1368–1644), the Qing attempted to transform their conquest regime into a legitimate imperial dynasty. The new imperium sought to establish hegemony and, despite its own foreign origins, to project an image of legitimate rule over an ethnically and culturally diverse realm.

The Manchus' own identity reconstruction created an opportunity for various other cultures to promote positive self-definitions in their pursuit of validation and security. Chinese Muslims were among these ethnocultural communities that, despite putative non-Chinese ancestry centuries earlier, had become a naturalised segment of Chinese society.⁷ In many ways, Liu Zhi epitomised a community in the process of defining itself after a millennium-long evolution accelerated by dramatic changes in the Ming period and the turbulence of the Ming–Qing transition.

Liu Zhi was not 'without honour' in his hometown during his lifetime. Born into a gentrified Nanjing Chinese Muslim family with a scholarly pedigree, later in life he travelled in elite non-Muslim literati circles as well. During his lifetime, Liu Zhi was already acknowledged as an important member of the Chinese Muslim scholarly establishment, as the finest product of the 'scripture hall education' (*jingtang jiaoyu*).

Beginning his studies with his father, Liu Sanjie – a noted *Han kitāb* author in his own right – and then, starting around the age of twelve, under the tutelage of Yuan Ruqi (b. c. 1640), Liu Zhi would have cut his teeth on the basic *jingtang jiaoyu* curriculum, which likely included reading and recitation of the *Qur'ān* and elementary Arabic and Persian instruction. Liu Zhi's early education at the mosque at Nanjing's Wuxueyuan (Garden of Military Studies) also included the basic ritual practices of Sunni Islam.

Liu Zhi's primary education certainly taught him to read and write Chinese, enabling him to begin studying the Confucian canon at the age of fifteen. Given the fact that between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries a large number of Arabic and Persian texts had been translated or explicated in Chinese within the *Han kitāb* network, Liu Zhi's early training in classical Chinese also allowed him to study these Chinese Islamic texts as well.

Following eight years reading the Confucian classics, according to his own account Liu Zhi spent six years with Arabic and Persian books about Islam, then three years on the Buddhist canon, and one year on Daoist texts. He also claimed to have read over a hundred 'Occidental books' (*xiyang*

shu), which most scholars suppose to be the translations and compositions of the Jesuits, active in Nanjing during the preceding century. Thus, after eighteen years of preparation, around the age of thirty-three, Liu Zhi had acquired the knowledge and honed the formidable linguistic and intellectual skills required for his career as an Islamic scholar and a professional writer of Chinese.

By the time he finished writing, the prolific Liu Zhi had produced no fewer than a dozen distinct titles. Unlike his predecessor Ma Zhu (1640–1711), for example, rather than writing one monumental volume covering the spectrum of Islamic knowledge (see Lipman, Chapter 1, this volume), Liu Zhi wrote numerous books, each focusing in detail on a particular facet of Islam. He did not specialise in a single field of knowledge, but rather worked ‘horizontally’ across a variety of literary genres. His body of works thus represents a cross-section of the canon as a whole, many of them in categories corresponding directly to the *jingtang jiaoyu* curriculum. For example, Liu Zhi wrote a book of Arabic letters and philology, the *Tianfang zimu jieyi* (*Explaining the Meaning of Arabic Letters*). He also wrote Islamic history, including the *Huihui shuo* (*Explaining Huihui*), about the historical origins of Islam in China and the ethnonym ‘Huihui’, and the *Tianfang chunqiu* (*Islamic Spring and Autumn Annals*), which dealt with Arabian and early Islamic history. Of his overtly didactic works, the best known is his *Tianfang sanzijing* (*The Islamic Three-Character Classic*), a rhyming primer of Islamic belief and practice following the Confucian genre.⁸ His corpus also includes at least one direct translation of a Persian text into Chinese, the *Zhenjing zhaowei* (*The Subtleties of Illumination in the True Classic*) (see below).

His most famous books by far constitute his ‘*Tianfang* Trilogy’: the *Tianfang xingli* (*Metaphysics of Islam*), *Tianfang dianli* (*Norms and Rituals of Islam*), and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* (*True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam*). Each of these books is devoted to a single main theme, but together they represent the systematic exposition of the author’s comprehensive view of Islamic knowledge. Liu Zhi articulated his grand vision of the interconnections among these three books: ‘As far as these books are concerned, they are three yet actually constitute one whole. They were published in incremental steps as I attained mastery [over their subject matter] to some extent.’⁹

Describing how the three texts combined to present a single, comprehensive vision of Islam, Liu Zhi wrote:

The *dianli* is a book that explains the teaching (*jiao*). The *xingli* is a book that explains the way (*dao*). This edition, the *Zhisheng [shi]lu*, is intended to explain the profound origins of the teaching and the way.¹⁰

Well respected as a scholar and as a person of character both within his community and beyond it, he did, however, also receive criticism from various quarters. Conservative voices within the Chinese Muslim community regarded his methods and ideas, and the *Han kitāb* in general, as overly conciliatory to Chinese traditions and therefore a dilution or bastardisation of Islam. Some non-Muslim critics, despite acknowledging Liu Zhi's erudition and literary skill, could not be persuaded that Islam was anything but an absurd, foreign religious teaching.

Liu Zhi was sensitive to the criticism. Although his genius was recognised by many of his contemporaries, he still yearned for approval and understanding. He expressed these sentiments in a deeply personal and reflective essay appended to his last major work, *The True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam*. In it he wrote about the trials and hardships he faced as a semi-reclusive scholar, and about his strong motivation for writing:

Particularly difficult was the fact that I had no companions or colleagues. Even kith and kin considered that I could not make a living, which is unfortunate. But I did not rest from pursuing my ambition, and with firm determination continued to expound Islamic learning in order to disseminate it among the people.¹¹

Ensnared in his studies, Liu Zhi felt isolated and misunderstood. Moreover, he worried that amid all the criticism, or even the adulation, his work received, his underlying message and overarching purpose might be lost to his readers. Significantly, he also worried about his legacy, about how future generations would regard his work:

I respectfully hope that the gentlemen of this world will remember my humble self not as one whose perceptions were extensive, nor whose expressions were ingenious, but whose single ambition was to propound and

elucidate orthodox learning, correct any errors in it, and fill whatever was lacking or omitted from it. If my embellishments generally lack grace, it is so that I could achieve a grand vision. And if I am able to bequeath my lesson to eternity, then this is the good fortune of the *dao*.¹²

Liu Zhi was conscious of his place in history and in the *Han kitāb* lineage. His reverence for the Chinese sages and the prophets of Islam demonstrates his devotion to the ancestors and antiquity. As one of Liu Zhi's non-Muslim colleagues, Xu Yuanzheng,¹³ remarked in a preface to the *Tianfang xingli*: 'How could we have known that the breadth of Master Liu's mind was so extensive, or that his work would stretch so far back into the past?'¹⁴

This retrospection, combined with concern for his posterity, reveals Liu Zhi's sense of his own importance as a link between the past and future. Yuan Guozuo (b. 1712), the grandson of Liu Zhi's teacher, Yuan Ruqi, captured this role perfectly as he looked back at his venerable predecessor: 'Not only did he perform meritorious service to the sages of the past, but he has also brought profound benefit to the generations that came after him.'¹⁵ Similarly, Liu Zhi was convinced of the magnitude of his own literary enterprise. As noted above, he regarded his work as a 'grand vision'. Describing the purport, and acknowledging the import, of his undertaking he expressed his ambition to make known the splendour of Islam, lest it 'be relegated to one (small) corner, and . . . not be the universal learning of the world'.¹⁶

Did Liu Zhi achieve his grand vision? The answer depends on our measurements of success. He did not succeed in making Islam the 'universal learning of the world', but he did help to gain it a place at the table, so to speak, and he did so through a combination of his scholarship and his personality. He and his work were admired within his own scholarly community and, as we shall see, beyond it during his lifetime. Predictably, Liu Zhi's co-religionists honoured his work most effusively. Muslim friends and associates, in addition to praising his extensive learning and literary accomplishments, also spoke in superlatives of his character. For example, his teacher, Yuan Ruqi, wrote:

What sort of a man is Jielian? Is he not a great man? He is not great in terms of worldly affairs, but rather in . . . the virtue of the *dao*. He is not

The following passage from a preface to the *Tianfang xingli* by Lu You, a Vice-Minister of the Board of War,¹⁹ addresses the inter-relation of these qualities:

I am delighted by Master Liu's broad knowledge and rare talent for expression. His mind is on the infinite and universal; he is not only proficient in the Islamic canon, but also has a thorough understanding of the Chinese classics, and he has blended them harmoniously and woven them together to write a book in order to clarify these teachings.²⁰

Lu You depicts a scholar driven to erudition by his desire for universal knowledge and understanding, who also endeavoured (or was gifted with the ability) to express his ideas to a diverse audience. Jing Rizhen, an imperial censor of the Shaanxi Circuit, further commented on Liu Zhi's erudition with a detailed account of how well read he was:

The gentleman Liu, who goes by the style name of Jielian, is mild-mannered and restrained, studious and fond of books. Drawing from a variety of scriptures and classics, histories, novels, romances, fiction, fictitious histories, law books, books of divination, as well as the writings of the Two Schools,²¹ there is nothing he did not peruse or research. Furthermore, he was also able to reconcile all of the above with the Six Classics. He researched into the totality of Neo-Confucian metaphysics, and deeply fathomed the essential subtleties of the Confucian literati tradition.²²

It would not be exaggerating to say Liu Zhi was among the best-read men in China at the time. It appears he read just about anything on which he could lay his hands, and his extremely rare set of language skills (Chinese, Arabic and Persian) permitted him access to literary genres and canons that most of his countrymen did not have. In a preface to the *Tianfang dianli*, Yang Feilu, a fellow Muslim scholar, similarly extolled the breadth of Liu Zhi's learning: 'Indeed, there is nothing that he has not grown familiar with, but through painstaking and exhaustive research.'²³

These many accolades highlight the acceptance of Liu Zhi and his work during his lifetime by colleagues on both sides of his dual audience. Yet, while he was proud of the recognition (he published the prefaces in his books), it was likely more important to him that the people of the world should

understand the grandeur of his vision. Unfortunately for Liu Zhi, he did not live to see the far-reaching effect his writings would have in the promotion of Islamic learning in China. Some of his most notable achievements were actually posthumous honours and distinctions.

It would be impossible to estimate how many Chinese Muslims were affected, directly or indirectly, by Liu Zhi's work and his enduring legacy. From followers of succeeding generations who shared his worldview he received the highest degree of veneration. Posthumously, he has been virtually canonised within the Chinese Muslim community. His epitaph writers took the association of Liu Zhi with the 'sages of the past' to superlatives – the inscription on his tombstone in Nanjing memorialises him as a 'former worthy' (*xianxian*), the worthies being the disciples and followers of the sages according to Confucian tradition.²⁴ The maintenance of his grave down to the present day shows the extent to which later generations of Chinese Muslims have continued to revere him.

Liu Zhi came to be remembered as a 'great integrator', literally one who 'assembles great achievement' (*jidacheng*), an epithet first used by Mencius in praise of Confucius.²⁵ Liu Zhi used a similar expression to describe the Prophet Muḥammad, describing him as 'the great culmination of all the sages' (*jilisheng zhi dacheng*).²⁶ Yuan Guozuo later used the term *jidacheng* in reference to Muḥammad, yet another instance of associating the Prophet with the sages of ancient China.²⁷ It seems only fitting, perhaps, that Liu Zhi, who endeavoured so diligently to harmonise the teachings of Confucius and Muḥammad, would eventually inherit the same title as the luminaries he revered. Had he lived to hear this praise, his customary humility probably would have compelled him to decline it, though it certainly vindicated his claim to a 'grand vision'.

Confucius thought of himself as a collator and editor of the wisdom of the ancient sages, humbly insisting, 'I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own.'²⁸ The Prophet Muḥammad was instructed by the *Qur'ān* to say, 'I am not an innovator among the messengers . . . I follow only what is revealed to me.'²⁹ Both men became fulcra of their respective traditions, serving as links in the transmission of the most profound knowledge from past to present and future generations.

Similarly, Liu Zhi wrote, 'I only transmit what I have learned' from the

generations who preceded him.³⁰ In this way, he assembled and integrated that which he inherited from both sides of his ethnic, cultural, religious and intellectual background. Liu Zhi was historically situated to serve as the fulcrum of the Chinese Islamic intellectual tradition embodied in the *Han kitāb*. He merged philosophy and theology, forging a way to reconcile the theology of Islamic monotheism with a Neo-Confucian metaphysics devoid of a creator God (see Lipman, Chapter 1, this volume). Thus, he persuasively harmonised ideas from traditions that were geographically and chronologically distant from one another: ‘The teachings of the sages are the same in the East and West, and in the present as in the past.’³¹ With its crucial theory of the rectification of names (*zhengming*), Confucianism takes the use of names and epithets seriously. Later generations of Chinese Muslims referred to Liu Zhi as a ‘former worthy’ and a ‘great integrator’, demonstrating both the extent of their belonging in China as well as their profound respect and admiration.

In terms of influence on future generations, later *Han kitāb* scholars looked up to Liu Zhi and wrote laudatory prefaces and commentaries for editions of his books published after his death. The fact that Liu Zhi’s books continued to be printed and reprinted in multiple editions long after he died – some are still in print – is solid evidence of his lasting influence. Completing a full circle, some of Liu Zhi’s writings, including parts of the *Tianfang xingli*, were translated into Arabic in Yunnan in the late nineteenth century to be used as instructional texts in local mosque education (see Petersen, Chapter 4, this volume).

Probably the most widely circulated of all of Liu Zhi’s writings, the *True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam* (a biography of the Prophet), was not published by Yuan Guozuo until 1785, many years after Liu Zhi’s death. Liu Zhi’s writings strongly influenced Yuan Guozuo (see Tontini, Chapter 3, this volume), who helped to propagate them among subsequent generations, editing, publishing and re-publishing several titles. Yuan Guozuo printed the *True Record* complete with his own preface and postscript in which he praised Liu Zhi in strongly Confucian terms, writing, ‘Master Liu’s loyalty, filiality, benevolence and kindness truly were inconceivable’.³² He also appreciated Liu Zhi’s pivotal role in the lineage of Islamic scholarship:

If Master Liu had not continued his father's will, endlessly magnifying the benevolent favour of the Teaching of the Sage, how could there have been such dazzling brilliance as this?³³

Liu Zhi explicitly acknowledged his debt to previous generations of scholars, especially his own father:

My late father thought that ritual law was not understood clearly. As I am but his son and not clever, how shall I ever dare here to aspire to such ambition and say that I shall continue his undertaking? Therefore, I only transmit what I have learned.³⁴

Albeit under the strong influence of his intellectual forebears, Liu Zhi was also highly original in his use of sources and the integration of ideas coming from disparate traditions. His sources included not only the 'orthodox' Islamic and Confucian canons, but also texts that might have been deemed heterodox by some critics; that is, he liberally cited Sufi books and frequently alluded to Daoist and Buddhist writings. With regard to the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), he seems to have subscribed to the syncretic trend prevalent among the literati elite in late Ming and early Qing China (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), many of whom embraced such universalistic slogans as 'The Three Teachings united as one' (*sanjiao heyi*). Liu Zhi explicitly stated that he wrote the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* for 'the reader who thoroughly understands and practices the Three Teachings but needs to learn about Islam'.³⁵ Previous *Han kitāb* authors had mentioned the Three Teachings, but none in so positive a tone nor so willing to harmonise Islam with Chinese traditions.³⁶

This is not to say that he fully approved of either Daoism or Buddhism. Actually, in the manner of the Confucian establishment, he referred to the 'Two Schools' as heterodoxies and decried their mistaken theories of 'emptiness' and 'non-action', respectively.³⁷ Nevertheless, since Daoist and Buddhist concepts and terms had been assimilated into the religio-philosophical discourse of the age, Liu Zhi showed no compunction whatsoever about reaching across scholastic lines in order to make his case for Islam.

His willingness to borrow from a wide range of teachings notwithstanding, Liu Zhi's inspiration came first and foremost from the Islamic and

Confucian canons, which he regarded as co-orthodoxies: ‘Although the principle (*li*) is expressed in Islamic books, it is no different from what is found in the Confucian canon.’³⁸ As Lu You had indicated, Liu Zhi was ‘not only proficient in the Islamic canon, but also [had] a thorough understanding of the Chinese classics, and he has blended them harmoniously’. After the *Qur’ān*, *Hadīth*, Four Books and Five Classics, he explored the vast commentarial and philosophical traditions of both Islamic and Chinese literature. But perhaps the strongest and most direct sources for his own work of integration came from *Han kitāb* authors of the generations before him, especially Wang Daiyu (c. 1570– c. 1660) and Ma Zhu.

The influence of these earlier *Han kitāb* scholars appears most obviously in Liu Zhi’s metaphysics, cosmology and theology. Wang Daiyu had received a traditional Chinese Islamic education before realising its limitations and starting ‘to read books on metaphysics and history’.³⁹ These more advanced studies likely introduced him to the Neo-Confucian and Sufi ideas of the underlying oneness of ultimate reality that suffuse his writings. Liu Zhi similarly focused on theories of metaphysical oneness, which he conflated with the Islamic principle of divine unity (Ar. *tawḥīd*). By extension, he emphasised the monistic idea that everything originates in unity and ultimately returns to unity. He expressed this in Neo-Confucian terms as the ‘complete union of Heaven and Man’, in turn evocative of the Sufi spiritual concepts of annihilation (Ar. *fanāʾ*) of the limited ego and subsistence (Ar. *baqāʾ*) in union with God.

Wang Daiyu’s worldview undoubtedly influenced Liu Zhi’s, though the latter surpassed the former in his conciliatory stance with regard to Chinese tradition. Wang Daiyu had employed Confucian ideas and terminology, but ‘maintained the fundamental truths and superiority of Islam’, whereas Liu Zhi tended to place ‘Islam and Confucianism on an equal footing’.⁴⁰

Liu Zhi expressed his debt to Ma Zhu in evoking similar cosmological constructions, attempting to reconcile Qur’ānic creationism with the Chinese paradigm of a self-generating cosmos:

much like Ma Zhu before him, Liu Zhi simply glossed over this essential metaphysical incongruity and, as we shall see, grafted the creator, Allah,

atop the Chinese cosmological scheme as a prime mover existing before and beyond the vicissitudes of ‘creation and transformation’.⁴¹

We may also observe Liu Zhi’s simultaneous faith in God and commitment to Confucian ethics in his epistemological reasoning about theology. Just as he and Ma Zhu had modified the traditional Chinese cosmology by introducing the creator God, Liu Zhi also inserted the Islamic theistic principle into basic Confucian epistemology:

If someone . . . does not know who the Lord and Master is, then how could he be one who ‘extends knowledge and apprehends the principle in things’, penetrating the mysteries of Heaven and Earth?⁴²

Any literate Chinese reader would have easily recognised the phrase ‘extending knowledge and apprehending the principle in things’ as an allusion to the *Daxue* (Great Learning). That Confucian text describes how to achieve world peace based on cultivation of the individual self, the entire process beginning with the extension of knowledge (*zhizhi*) through the investigation of things (*gewu*).⁴³ Following this classical thought closely, Liu Zhi advocated ‘enlightening one’s mind and seeing into one’s own nature’, then ‘following nature and cultivating the way’.⁴⁴ Where Liu Zhi differed from the traditional Confucian programme was in his integration of the theistic component: all is predicated upon first acknowledging the Islamic God as Lord and Creator.

Both Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi were natives of Nanjing, the most cosmopolitan city of late imperial China and an intellectual nexus for many schools of thought. They could not help but be influenced by the ideas that circulated in the city. And there was no shortage of reading materials in Nanjing’s unparalleled libraries and bookshops. Wang Daiyu famously participated in animated interfaith discussions with members of Nanjing’s literary and religious elite. Yet Liu Zhi’s open-mindedness surpassed Wang Daiyu’s, as reflected in his reading lists, which went beyond the canons and secondary literature of Islam and the Three Teachings of China. Liu Zhi was the first *Han kitāb* writer explicitly to claim Christian writings among his sources: ‘one hundred thirty-seven types of Occidental books’.⁴⁵ Jesuit literature in Chinese was readily available in Nanjing at the time, and Liu

Zhi availed himself of it. Yang Feilu confirmed this as he briefly described the sum of Liu Zhi's curriculum:

He studied the Islamic classics in his youth, and tackled Confucian studies when he grew older. He subsequently amassed besides a broad knowledge of the Two Schools and European literature.⁴⁶

Traces of Liu Zhi's borrowing from Christian, and possibly even Jewish, sources may be detected in his theological discussions, especially his quest for appropriate nomenclature for God.⁴⁷

Liu Zhi read Islamic sources without discrimination. The distance of Chinese Muslims from the heart of the Islamic world removed Liu Zhi and other *Han kitāb* scholars from deep prejudices and burning debates among rival schools of thought that affected the West and South Asian Muslim literary elites. Liu and his colleagues could treat any Arabic or Persian text, whether Sunni, Shi'ī, or Sufi, as genuinely Islamic and orthodox. Liu Zhi's bibliographies feature Sufi texts with particular frequency, for by the time Liu Zhi began writing in the late seventeenth century, Sufi ideology had diffused throughout the world of Islamic thought. Chinese Muslim teachers, too, had already assimilated Sufism into their curriculum, and even the early *Han kitāb* authors had incorporated Sufi ideas into their writings.

In the bibliography to the *Tianfang xingli*, Liu Zhi identified four Sufi sources as foundational: (1) al-Rāzī's *Mirṣād al-ʿIbād min al-mabdā ila'l-maʿād*⁴⁸; (2) al-Nasafī's *Maqṣad-e Aqṣā*⁴⁹; (3) Jāmī's *Ashīʿāt al-lamaʿāt*⁵⁰; and (4) *Lawā'ih fi bayān maʿāni ʿirfaniyya*.⁵¹ The first three of these books had already been translated into Chinese and circulated within the Chinese Muslim educational network when Liu Zhi was a student; he translated the fourth himself. Like his *Han kitāb* predecessors, by translating Liu Zhi also contributed to the curriculum of the *jingtang jiaoyu*, continuing a tradition begun by Hu Dengzhou (1522–1597), the great pioneer of Islamic educational reform in China.

Liu Zhi's use of Sufi ideas and writings was nothing new in China, but his systematic documentation of these sources was innovative among the *Han kitāb* authors. In this regard, Liu Zhi followed in the footsteps of contemporary Neo-Confucian scholarship, which recognised bibliographies as a mark of erudition. During this period bibliographies grew increasingly important

as a feature of the Confucian textual studies (*kaozheng*) movement.⁵² Once again, we see Liu Zhi borrowing a Chinese literati practice systematically to enhance Islamic scholarship, while bequeathing to posterity a grasp of his own sources of inspiration.

Liu Zhi's erudition and affirmation of Confucian values made him acceptable, even welcome, in non-Muslim literati circles. These qualities probably also contributed to the unique distinction of the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* within the entire *Han kitāb* canon, namely, its inclusion in the *Siku quanshu* (Compendium of the Four Treasuries). The *Siku quanshu* was compiled under imperial commission between 1773 and 1782, making inclusion of his work in it yet another posthumous honour for Liu Zhi. When the Qianlong (r. 1736–96) court called for books and manuscripts from all over the empire, Yuan Guozuo responded by submitting a bibliography of existing *Han kitāb* texts,⁵³ the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* prominent among them. Yuan Guozuo may also have presented a copy of Liu Zhi's book, along with its companion volumes, the *Metaphysics of Islam* and *True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam*, to the emperor in 1782.⁵⁴

When one considers how many Neo-Confucian and non-Confucian texts did not appear in the *Siku*, the status of the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* as the lone representative *Han kitāb* book appears momentous. In actuality, while this was a great honour celebrated by Chinese Muslims and helped to solidify Liu Zhi's pre-eminent (posthumous) status within his own community, it did not guarantee universal approval. The selection process used by the *Siku quanshu* Commission extended far beyond simple inclusion or exclusion. The Commission evaluated thousands of texts, many of which they rejected as politically or ideologically objectionable. Of these, some were not only excluded, but also actually burned, making the *Siku* not only imperial China's largest literary compendium, but also a sweeping censorship initiative, often called a 'literary inquisition'.

Nor did every book that avoided the Commission's pyres achieve the unequivocal approval of the imperium. Some, such as the *Norms and Rituals of Islam*, gained mention in the *Annotated Catalogue*, a somewhat more ambiguous category part way between the perfectly acceptable and the utterly reprehensible. Rather than a complete reprinted text, granted to the most orthodox and approved works, the *Catalogue* included the title, author and

a review of those books judged to contain mostly virtuous material, but also some things outside the norms of Confucian propriety. The *Siku* commissioner who read the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* wrote a review that objectively described Liu Zhi's personal history and scholarly accomplishments as well as a summary of the book's contents. At the end of the blurb, however, he offered these editorial remarks:

Everything is explained in detail, with great respect for his own religion's teaching. Islam is fundamentally far-fetched and absurd. However, [Liu] Zhi has extensively studied Confucian texts, so he intermingled various ideas from the Classics in order to embellish his discourse. His literary style is actually rather elegant. However, the premise is at its root untrue and so the clever literary ornamentation does him no good.⁵⁵

That is, the reviewer paid Liu Zhi a compliment so backhanded that he scarcely veiled its prejudicial and negative conclusion. Had Liu Zhi been alive to read the review, he likely would have been mortified by the opinion that his writing was stylish but insubstantial. Judging from what he had written about his motivation for studying and writing, indeed, his whole *raison d'être* as a person, he would have been most disappointed by his failure to persuade such a highly placed and cultured reader of Islam's universal appeal. But it is doubtful that any degree of erudition or eloquence on Liu Zhi's part would have changed that. He faced the same insurmountable ideological wall that any non-Confucian teaching – Christianity, for example – would have faced in late imperial China.

Perhaps the gravest misunderstanding to emerge from this entry, however, is the reviewer's assessment that Liu Zhi's 'intermingling' of Confucian and Islamic concepts constituted mere literary embellishment. This evaluation indicts Liu Zhi for disingenuousness, concluding that his connection to the Confucian tradition was superficial or false. The preponderance of evidence presented above indicates that what the *Siku quanshu* Commission dismissed as mere ornamental intermingling ran deeply and consistently in Liu Zhi's identity and his writings. Contrary to the evaluation, Liu Zhi aimed at a genuine and coherent Chinese Islamic simultaneity, a deliberate effort at complete integration, or at least harmonisation, of two intellectual worlds. This integration took place within the minds of Liu Zhi and his

colleagues on an existential level. It was anything but superficial and certainly not disingenuous.

Despite the subordinate placement and ambivalent review of the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* in the *Annotated Catalogue of the Siku quanshu*, the fact that it appeared at all was of immense importance to the Chinese Muslim community, for whom Liu Zhi's posthumous achievement was, and continues to be, a great source of pride. This recognition sealed the perception of the author as the pre-eminent Chinese Muslim scholar, both within and outside his own community. It also conferred upon the *Han kitāb* canon and the scholars who produced it a status of authority and legitimacy that has endured for several centuries.

The apogee of this aspect of Liu Zhi's legacy appeared in the early twentieth century, far removed from the highly Sinicised Muslim communities of Nanjing and other cities in eastern China. Liu Zhi's books and other *Han kitāb* texts became the core curriculum for the Xidaotang (lit. 'Hall of the Western Way'), a home-grown Islamic movement founded by Ma Qixi (1857–1914) in Gansu province.⁵⁶ The Xidaotang looked up to Liu Zhi as one of the founding fathers of their philosophy and worldview, which celebrated Chinese Muslim simultaneity and regarded the future for Muslims in China as being inextricable from that of a rapidly modernising Chinese nation. This new movement thus reified an intellectual heritage for Sino-Muslim people, who came to be called the *Huizu*, that allowed them to participate as citizens in both the Republic and later the People's Republic of China (see Cieciura, Chapter 5, and Chérif-Chebbi, Chapter 8, this volume).

As an integrator and synthesiser, Liu Zhi preserved and transmitted the traditions he had received from his predecessors, created new theories and methodologies, and inspired those who came after him. As an embodiment of a thousand-year encounter between Islam and China, he honoured the past, created significant advances during his lifetime, and served as a bridge to future generations of Chinese Muslims, who saw in his person and thought a model for cultural, religious and intellectual simultaneity. Thus, beyond the 'innate metaphysical and philosophical value' of his writings, Liu Zhi:

crossed religious and civilizational frontiers and created harmony between two intellectual worlds through an appeal to the underlying unity that constitutes the basis of the perennial philosophy.⁵⁷

Identifying a core of ultimate truth (equally Islamic and Confucian), Liu Zhi may be counted as a ‘perennialist’ thinker. Yet Liu Zhi’s grand vision and ability to see beyond the boundaries of time and space, to envision a universal and ubiquitous truth, allowed him fully to claim the intellectual legacies of both sides of his dual heritage, thereby showing himself to be an heir of both the Confucian sages and the Islamic prophets.

According to a famous *ḥadīth*, the Prophet Muḥammad exhorted his followers to ‘seek knowledge even though it be in China’.⁵⁸ At the advent of Islam, who could have supposed that China would one day be a creative centre for its own form of Islamic scholarship, in the Chinese language, epitomised by the work of Liu Zhi? Blending within himself the ideals of the Confucian literati and Islamic *‘ulamā’*, Liu Zhi lived according to another *ḥadīth*: ‘The word of wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer, and so he has the truest claim to it wherever he finds it.’⁵⁹ Gathering scattered treasures from his dual traditions, he integrated them into a coherent, sophisticated body of work, and in so doing he earned honour in his own town and his own home, an honour he hoped to bequeath to his brethren throughout China.

Notes

1. Matthew 13:57.
2. This *ḥadīth* has been related by Tirmidhī, Abu Dawūd, Nasā’i, Ibn Mājah, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Ḥibbān and others. Ibn al-Mulaqqin, Zayla^cī, Ibn Ḥajar, and others deemed it acceptable (*ḥasan*) or authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*).
3. Frankel, *Rectifying God’s Name*, p. 83.
4. ‘for every nation there is a messenger in every era’ (*Qur’ān* 10:47); ‘And verily, We have sent among every nation a Messenger’ (*Qur’ān* 16:36).
5. ‘To God belong the East and the West, so wherever you turn, there is the face of God’ (*Qur’ān* 2:115).
6. Liu Zhi, ‘Yuanjiao pian’, in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 11.
7. The extent to which this assertion reflects genetic history has been disputed. Certainly, many Sino-Muslims *claimed* descent from foreign Muslims, but intermarriage between Muslim men and local women (permitted by Islamic

- law) created obvious connections between Muslims in China and their non-Muslim neighbours. Patrilineal calculation may be partly responsible for this contradiction, since some scholars did (and do) not recognise women's contribution to bloodline (*xuetong*).
8. See Tontini, Chapter 3, this volume. This work is related to an earlier *Han kitāb* text, the *Sipian yaodao* (*Essential Way of the Four Chapters*), a 1653 translation by Zhang Junshi of a Persian catechistic text, the *Chahār Faṣl* (*Four Chapters*).
 9. Liu Zhi, 'Zhushu Shu', in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizhu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 357.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
 11. *Ibid.*, pp. 357–8.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 360.
 13. Xu Yuanzheng held the highest civil service examination degree (*jinshi*) and served as Vice-Minister of the Board of Rites like his father Xu Zhuo, writer of a preface to the *Norms and Rituals of Islam* cited above. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
 14. Xu Yuanzheng, 'Xu Xu (ii)', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang xingli*, p. 4a.
 15. Yuan Guozuo, 'Xu', in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 226. See Tontini, Chapter 3, this volume.
 16. Liu Zhi, 'Zi xu', in *Tianfang xingli*, p. 1a.
 17. Yuan Ruqi, 'Xu', in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 372.
 18. Xu Yuanzheng, 'Xu Xu (ii)', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang xingli*, p. 4a.
 19. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
 20. Lu You, 'Lu xu', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. 2a.
 21. That is, Daoism and Buddhism.
 22. Jing Rizhen, 'Yizhai xu', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. 5a.
 23. Yang Feilu, 'Yang xu', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. 7a.
 24. See Jin Ding, 'Liu Jielian Xiansheng Mubei'; see a photograph of the tombstone in Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, fig. 12.
 25. Mencius, *Wan Zhang*, Book II, verse 1. See also Benite, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 174–7.
 26. Liu Zhi, 'Liyan', in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 2.
 27. The term *jidacheng*, as applied to Muḥammad, occurs in Yuan Guozuo's preface to the 1785 edition of Liu Zhi's biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, *True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam*. See Yuan Guozuo, 'Xu', in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 226.
 28. Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 123, VII:1. Alternatively, 'Following the

proper way, I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients' (Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 111, 7.1)

29. *Qur'ān* 46:9.
30. Liu Zhi, 'Zi xu', in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 12a.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 12a.
32. Yuan Guozuo, 'Xu' in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 226.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
34. Liu Zhi, 'Zi xu', in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 12a.
35. Liu Zhi, 'Liyan', in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 3b.
36. Ma Zhu, for example, wrote of the Three Teachings and the movement to syncretise them as an 'affliction' (Ma Zhu, *Qingzhen zhinan*, p. 109).
37. Liu Zhi, 'Renshi pian', in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. 23–4.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 12a.
39. Wang Daiyu, *Zhengjiao zhenquan*, p. 16.
40. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 77.
41. Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name*, p. 124. See Lipman, Chapter 1, this volume.
42. Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name*, p. 124.
43. The *locus classicus* for this Confucian maxim is *Daxue* I.4. The fifth chapter of the *Daxue*, now lost, explained the meaning of 'apprehending the principle in things and extending knowledge' in detail. Modern editions contain, in its place, a reconstruction of that ancient commentary, based on the views of one of the Cheng brothers, according to Zhu Xi (see Legge (trans.), *Confucius*, p. 365).
44. Liu Zhi, 'Renshi pian', in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 23.
45. Liu Zhi, 'Zhushu Shu', in Bai Shouyi (ed.), *Huizhu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, pp. 357–8.
46. Yang Feilu, 'Yang xu', in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. 7a.
47. See Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name*, ch. 6.
48. This title, by Abū Bakr °Abdullāh bin Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1177–1265), may be translated as *The Servants' Progress from Origin to Return*.
49. This title, by °Azīz bin Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 1263), may be translated as *The Highest Aim*.
50. This title, by Nūr al-Dīn °Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414–92), may be translated as *Rays of Brilliance*.
51. This title, also by Jāmī, may be translated as *Signs in the Elucidation of the Meanings of Perception*. In addition to these four books, among his sources, Liu Zhi also listed several other well-known (mostly Persian) Sufi works, including: *Kashf al-Mahjūb* ('Revealing the Concealed') by Hujwīrī; *Kashf al-Asrār*

- (‘Revealing the Secrets’) by Maybudī; and *Tadhkirat al-Awliyāʾ* (‘Remembrance of the Saints’) by ʿAttār (Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 214 n. 32).
52. Elman, *Philosophy to Philology*, p. 160.
 53. Benite, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 156–7.
 54. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 92.
 55. Ji Yun, *Siku quanshu zongmu*, p. 240.
 56. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 188.
 57. Murata, Chittick and Tu, *The Sage Learning*, p. ix.
 58. This ḥadīth, narrated by Anas, is cited by al-Bayhāqī in *Shuʿab al-Imān* and *al-Madkhāl*, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in *Jamiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm*, and al-Khātib through three chains of transmission in *al-Rihla fī Ṭalāb al-Ḥadīth*, though it was later deemed ‘weak’ (Ar. *daʿīf*) by some scholars.
 59. *al-Tirmidhī*, No. s2611