

A Review on the Huiru Movement and Key Terms of Traditional Chinese Thought Used in Wang Daiyu's Work¹

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Abstract

The locations of some geographies are exclusive in the history of the world. These geographies have a special place with the belief and thought systems that they generated on their own. China, the prominent one among these geographies, is one of the most rooted civilizations in history. Many great philosophers, notably Laozi and Confucius, appeared in Chinese civilization. Another specific geography is the Middle East. This geography has been the cradle of civilization of many religion and belief systems. Islam had arisen in the Arabian Peninsula and shortly became a universal religion spreading throughout the world. In the middle of the 7th century, Islam reached China, a faraway country to the Arabian Peninsula. For an official date, we could claim the year of 651 when Caliphate Uthman sent messengers to China. On this date, Tang Dynasty was ruling in China. Islam, which entered China in the period of Tang Dynasty, has spread throughout China. Especially in the period of Yuan Dynasty, Muslims aggregately migrated from the western border of China to the inner regions of China. Over time, Muslims dropping Chinese lands as a little seed turned into a giant forest. Thus, after centuries, the Huizu ethnic group, an indispensable component of Chinese social structure, emerged. As for the Chinese and Islamic civilizations, they have been in interaction with one another from the very beginning. However, the beginning of the exact intellectual interaction was during the end of the Ming Dynasty. This interaction was then named as Huiru (回儒) in the meaning of dialogue between civilizations. This term is of critical importance for our study since the interaction between these two civilizations caused the Chinese Islam understanding to emerge. Huiru has become the richness of both Chinese Muslims and Chinese society. Huiru movement has been carried to present day by Chinese Muslim Scholars mainly. One of the leading names in the Huiru movement, Chinese Muslim scholar Wang Daiyu is of significant importance

for our work. Therefore, our study will be in the form of a review and evaluation on the key terms of traditional Chinese thought used by the Huiru movement, in particular by the Chinese Muslim scholar Wang Daiyu. This period, when the intellectual interaction started will be the focus of our study.

Keywords: *Huiru, Wang Daiyu, Chinese Muslim, Islam in China*

1. Introduction

Chinese civilization has been in a continuous interaction with other civilizations throughout the history. In particular, western border of China has been the most important geographical region for China to know western civilization and culture. Although countries have borders on geographical maps, there are no borders on cultural maps. China has been connected to the world continentally and through sea routes ever since. Likewise these two have been the rest of the world's access channels to China. These two channels generate revenue both materially and non-materially. The material revenue of these channels is trade and non-material revenue is culture. In other words, through these channels, not only trade goods were transported from one point to the other, but also priceless and imponderable "culture" made a journey between civilizations. As a result Chinese culture and other cultures have been in interaction with each other. Therefore, cultural interaction in Chinese history is one of the best examples of the famous saying "*The road is civilization.*"

Silk Road acted as an important bridge for religions entering China. Religions that were non-existent there were able to enter China thanks to the Silk Road. For example; Shamanism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, etc. entered China in different periods. The geographical conditions and the course followed by Islam in entering China are very important. During 7th century, Tang dynasty (唐朝) was ruling in China and Islam entered China in that period. Silk Road and sea routes were both effective in the entrance and spread of Islam into China. Two prominent powers of the world in 7th century, Arabic and Chinese empires, got closer economically through the Silk Road and sea routes.

China met Islam for the first time around 618-626 during the era of Prophet Mohammed, and made its' first official contact in 651 during Caliph Uthman's era. After the Battle of Talas in 751, the peace period among Chinese and Muslims was interrupted; but the An Lushan rebellion in 755 revived the companionship between Chinese and Muslims. As the An Lushan rebellion was suppressed, Chinese and Muslims became neighbours. In other words, the Muslims were no longer "outsiders" but "natives". Whether the entrance date of Islam into China is 651 or earlier, the fact that Islam has reached China shortly after its birth in Mecca is undeniable. The entrance of Islam into China is important not only for Islam and Chinese civilizations but

also for the whole world culture. With Islam, “papermaking”, one of the four great inventions of Chinese, arrived first in Samarkand, and then to Arabic world and then to Europe. The encounter and then the subsequent interaction of Islamic culture and the Chinese culture made a significant contribution in blending the western civilization with the eastern civilization.

After a general review given above, it would be useful to briefly touch on the issue of Islam in the Yuan and Ming Dynasty eras in terms of our topic.

The Yuan Dynasty is a different period for Chinese history. This is an interesting period not only because founding members of the dynasty were not Chinese, but because step by step, the body of government officials moved away from Chinese to the Mongolians or to people who were referred simply as foreigners such as Arabs, Persians and Turks. Another aspect of this period is that during this time, China opened up to the world and many foreign nationals entered into China. Muslims, entered into China during this period intensely. In fact, this situation was described in the Chinese History Records with the slogan of “*Huihui everywhere*” (Zhongguo Yisilan Jiao Xiehui, 2011: 258), and it was emphasized that the entrance of Muslims into China was really fast. The Muslims were generally consisting of Arabs, Persians and Turks. In this period, Muslims were no longer a community around a certain region of China in small groups, and they spread all over China and became one of the building blocks of China’s social structure. This is the period when the foundations of the future Hui nation, which will be a part of China later, is established. We should indicate a striking point here; while the Mongolians are known to be a damaging nation for majority of the Muslim world, for Muslims living in China they are known to be the nation that paved the way. Again, during this period, in addition to building many new mosques, old and unused mosques were restored and Muslims were allowed to live their religion. During the Yuan period, many Muslims not only served as government officials but they also served in good positions.

The period of Ming Dynasty began as Chinese took over after the Mongol rule. Owing its foundation to reactions against foreign-led government, the Ming Dynasty adopted a “*Sinification*” policy to erase the foreign traits in China. This policy was applied to an extent that the emphasis on “*Sinification*” lied at the heart of many new laws. For example, according to these laws, foreigners had to speak Chinese, marriages among themselves were banned, etc. (Hunying, Da Minglü Juan 6, n.d.). The motivation behind these prohibitions was the Sinification of foreigners. For this reason, we can say that Muslims were mostly affected by the “*Sinification*” policies implemented for foreigners during the Ming period. Because of this policy, Muslims have come to a point of forgetting their own native language over time, and have actively experienced the process of Sinification with the traditional education they received. Therefore, an identity problem arose among Muslims.

Given that the Ming Emperor Hongwu was personally interested in Islam so much so that he even wrote a *na'at* (poem for the prophet of Islam), brought some scientists to the point that the Ming era can be described as the golden age for Muslims; I have to admit that I do not agree with this view. The reason for that is, personal interest of Emperor Hongwu was never visible in the state level and so it was never implemented as a state policy, only stayed in a narrow framework. Despite all these developments, Muslims were still appointed in higher ranks during the Ming period. For example; Zheng He, the admiral of Zheng He's Expeditions to the West carried out during the Ming period, is one of the most well-known examples of this (Ceylan, 2015).

With the spread of the Sinification process all over China during the Ming Dynasty, there have been substantial changes in the lifestyle, language, culture, architecture, social life, education and even the identity of Muslims. This population, gathering around a belief and adopting a lifestyle, has been given an ethnic identity and this ethnic nation has been called "Huizu" in China. The gene map of the Huizu ethnic nation has survived to the present day based on the origins of faith rather than ethnicity (Ceylan, 2015: 113).

Chinese and Islamic civilizations have been in interaction since the first day Islam entered China. However, it was not until the last phase of the Ming dynasty that an intellectual interaction began. This interaction was named as Huiru (回儒) in the following years in reference to both interacting parties; Islamic civilization and Confucian civilization. In terms of this study, the interaction between these two great civilizations is of vital importance, because as a result of the interaction between these two civilizations, Chinese Islamic school was born. Therefore, in addition to being used to describe thought and cultural richness of Chinese Muslims, it was also used to refer to a part of Chinese people's thought and cultural richness. Today Huiru is defined as a ground where Islamic and Chinese civilizations meet on common values and blend together. In other words, it is seen and valued as an inter-civilization interaction.

The concept of Huiru was born through interaction of Islam with Confucian philosophy. If we were to analyze the term Huiru (回儒); the character "回 (Hui)" represents Islam and the character "儒 (Ru)" represents Confucian philosophy. This interaction between Islam and Confucian philosophy is an inevitable consequence of the long historical process. That is to say, this movement is the projection of worldview of a generation that grew up with cultural accumulations of both ancient Chinese civilization and Islamic civilization. At this point, translating Islamic resources into Chinese was given utmost importance because of the necessity. Some of the Chinese Muslim scholars of the time pioneered in these translations; what's more some of these scholars wrote their own books in Chinese through reading

and synthesizing. In order to convey Islam properly into a generation that grew up with Chinese culture, these books took the foundation of Confucian philosophy as a base, which could be regarded as the pioneer of Chinese culture. These scholars wanted to bring Chinese civilization and Islamic civilization closer by finding and highlighting common points in some concepts and principals of these two civilizations. This situation arose as a result of both social and academic necessity, because daily languages of Muslims became important after Islam entered China. Number of languages that Muslims speak increased concurrently with Muslim population growth, especially during the Yuan dynasty era. In reference to the languages that Chinese Muslims spoke, Arabic, Farsi and Turkish would be the leading ones. However, as a result of the Sinification policy during the Ming dynasty era, this situation changed. During the Ming era, minorities and foreigners were banned from speaking non-Chinese languages, using non-Chinese names, wearing non-Chinese clothes and getting married among themselves. Subsequently, towards the end of Ming dynasty era, the number of Muslims that can speak Arabic, Farsi or Turkish decreased by vast numbers and Muslims were sort of Sinicized. As being a “Chinese” became more dominant in their identities, Muslims started designing their future around this new feature of their identity. As a result, emphasis to being “Chinese” could be seen in every aspect of daily life. In this world, the full feasibility of newly formed and emerging identities in social life depends on education. As a result, Muslims had to make significant changes in the existing traditional Islamic education. With these changes, a systematic education has developed. This new education system opened a road for Chinese style madrasa. Thus, Chinese style madrasa education started during the Ming dynasty era.

The concept of Huiru was first introduced by Japanese scholar Kuwata Rokuro in 1925. Rokuro, defined this concept as Muslim Confucian and later he extended it to define as Sinicized Islam as well (Murata, 2000: XI). However, this work did not receive enough attention when it was first published. As a result, there is very little work on interaction of Islam and Confucianism before 1990. In the following years, without any doubt, the most important work conducted outside of China was by Japanese scholar Sachiko Murata. Regarded as an authority on Chinese Islamic thought, this scholar has written and published many articles that underlie lots of later academic works, like “*The Vision of Islam*” (with William Chittick), “*The Tao of Islam*” and “*Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*”.

After the 1990s, it was understood that studies conducted on Muslim Chinese would be lacking an academical foundation without investigating the Huiru movement, because even though this movement started towards the end of the Ming dynasty, it had vast effects on Chinese Muslims in the coming centuries.

In order to emphasize that Chinese Islamic understanding could be clearly regarded as natural, Ma Mingliang, *Yisilanjiao de Zhongguo Hua yu* uses a seed analogy in his article “*Yiru Quanjing*”.

Just as the fruit of a seed shows differences in different countries and in different climatic conditions and as it absorbs the essence of the soil of that region and then gives the color, the smell and the taste of it to its fruit; likewise after spreading out to the different corners of the world, Islam has continued to live in those countries with these countries’ Islamic understandings like this. For example Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia have their own Islamic notions and so on. We could understand this as a difference in interpretations of the same essence. The formation of Chinese Islamic style has been bilayered. The first is that over time Chinese Muslims create a style that naturally reflects themselves, and the second is that the Chinese Muslim scholars make the academic background of this general course. All the religions that came into China as outsiders were somehow shaped in a Chinese way. In other words, they were localized. For example; Buddhism entered China in the 6th century BC. India originated Buddhism was influenced by Chinese thought and virtually formed a new Buddhism religion and became one of China’s most popular religions. Thus, Buddhism and China have become two parts that complement each other. Although there are huge differences between Christianity and traditional Chinese thought, even Christianity managed to generate a Chinese style of itself (Ma, 2005: 53-54).

Just as in the seed analogy above, the Muslims that were referred to as “guests” during the Tang dynasty were now being referred as “*Huizu*” during Ming dynasty era. Starting with this period, Muslims were no longer “*guests*” but “*natives*”. Whether we use the term Sinification of Islam, localization of Islam or formation of Chinese style Islam; over the course of nearly 1400 years, i.e. over the period it has spent within the borders of China, Islam has been affected by Chinese thought, culture, literature, philosophy, from the color of China, smell of China, texture of China, etc. This interaction made a peak towards the end of Ming dynasty and the early periods of Qing dynasty.

Madrasa education in China played a crucial role in the formation and continuation of Huiru movement. Therefore, it would be beneficial to take a closer look at the madrasa education in China.

2. Madrasa Education (经堂教育)

The education model that goes back to the suffa school has an important place in Islamic history. This Islamic traditional style of education was continually improved in a certain system all over the world in the following periods and it has been the basis of education in which Islam has been taught for centuries. As a natural result of the elevated levels of social and economic prosperity

during the Ming Dynasty, Muslim population grew rapidly and number of mosques increased. Therefore, need for lecturers and imams increased. By the 16th century, establishing madrasas where Islamic education would be provided became a necessity (Gao and Li, 2013: 22). This necessity could be realised in a single sentence as follows: By the time of Ming Dynasty, Muslims living within the borders of China could not understand the Qur'an. In other words, Islam was likely to become purely ritualistic; prayers did not have a meaning, a couple of Islamic words were the lone group of survivors. The saying that best described this situation was on the wall of a Quanzhou house in 1536: "*Muslims no longer understand the Qur'an, the mere fact that they are not willing to understand it is even worse*" (Gao and Li, 2013:27-28). The madrasas, founded by Hu Dengzhou (胡登洲)^{2,3} who lived between 1522-1597 in the late periods of the Ming Dynasty, had become a school for imams and scholars, in addition to functioning as places where Muslims learn Islam. These madrasas were like a subdivision of mosques and served as an institution with a certain educational program. In general, education in these madrasas were in two different levels; primary school level and university level. Of these, the general Islamic knowledge is taught to children aged 6-7, which we classify as a primary school; what we classify as a university is an academic department where 13 works such as the Qur'an, hadith, theology, logic, morality, Arabic grammar, etc. were taught Zhongguo Yisilan Jiao Xiehui, 2011: 184). The language of education in the madrasa was Arabic, Persian and Chinese. However, we could say that a different and a new language had arisen in addition to these. The main reason for the formation of this language is the fact that many Muslims did not know Arabic and Persian or that those who seem to know these languages actually had a very limited knowledge. Therefore, the madrasa language called "xiaojing (小经)" or "xiao'er jing (小儿经)" was formed. Thanks to this language, it was possible to transliterate Arabic letters using symbols in Chinese alphabet (Chen, 2015: 81). Over time, such madrasas were opened in other Muslim-populated areas. In addition to being very important educational institutions for Muslims, these madrasas have contributed greatly to the infrastructure of the future Chinese Islamic academy. However, evaluating the madrasas retrospectively, one can see its shortcomings as well as its positive aspects. For example, madrasas have been rather slow in renewing themselves. As a result, the education provided was simply out of date and intangible; when compared with requirements of the day (Qiu, 2012: 357).

There are two main components, or two determinants of the formation of the Chinese Islamic style. One of them is Chinese style madrasa education. The other one is a collection of works that is a result of certain accumulation for centuries written in Chinese. These two components are the two pillars of the Chinese interpretation of Islam that has formed from the past to the

present. Chinese style madrasa system has been mentioned above. Now, we will continue with Chinese Islamic works.

The following table contains a list of these works and related information such as author and publication:

<i>Author</i>	<i>Work</i>
Wang Daiyu (王岱舆)	Zhengjiao Zhenquan (正教真詮), 1642 Qingzhen Daxue (清真大学), ? Xizheng Zhenda (希正真答), 1658
Zhang Zhong (张中)	Guizhen Zong Yi (归真总义), 1661 Si Pian Yao dao (四篇要道), 1653
Ma Minglong (马明龙)	Ren Ji Xingwu (认己醒悟), 1661
Ma Boliang (马伯良)	Jiao Kuan Jie Yao (教款捷要), 1678
Ma Junshi (马君实)	Wei Zhen Yaolue (卫真要略), 1661
Wu Zixian (伍子先)	Xiuzhen Ming Yin (修真蒙引), 1672 Guizhen Yao Dao (归真要道), 1678
Sun Ke'an (孙可庵)	Qingzhen Jiao Kao (清真教考), 1720
Ma Zhu (马注)	Qingzhen Zhinan (清真指南), 1683
Liu Zhi (刘智)	Tianfang Xing Li (天方性理), 1704 Tianfang Dianli Ze Yao Jie (天方典礼择要解), 1708 Tianfang Zhi Sheng Shilu (天方至圣实录), 1721 Wu Gong Shiyi (五功释义), 1710 Tianfang Zimu Jie Yi (天方字母解义), 1710 Tianfang Sanzijing (天方三字经), ?
Jin Tianzhu (金天柱)	Qingzhen Shiyi (清真释疑), 1783
Ma Fuchu (马复初)	Si Dian Yao Hui (四典要会), 1859 Bao Ming Zhen Jing Zhi Jie (宝命真经直解), ?

Source: Li, 2006: 3-4.

These works that are listed in the table above, are the works put forward as a result of a desire to explain Islam in Chinese. When one talks about Chinese Islamic works, the first three names that come to mind are Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu and Liu Zhi. These three names are very important names in terms of Chinese Islamic history.

The pioneers of Huiru movement interpreted Islam according to framework of the relationship between religion and the human nature, while blending this interpretation with the traditional thinking of China. As a result of this tremendous effort, a framework of Chinese Islam emerged, which is nothing but a multicultural form of Islam (Wain, 2016: 25).

These brilliant names such as Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu and Liu Zhi have opened a new path by essentially standing at the centre of Islam and blending the teachings of this religion with Chinese traditional culture, i.e. the ideas and teachings of Confucius. Thus, they widened the route to the interaction between Islam and Chinese civilizations (Yang, 2012: 7). The main denominator of this interaction is wisdom and truth.

If we were to define the leading notions of Chinese Islamic school in terms of the concepts of Chinese traditional thought; two of these concepts would be “*xiusheng* (修身)” and “*hongdao* (弘道)”. The term “*xiusheng* (修身)”, means to improve the body and mind in Chinese, which resembles the struggle to rise to the rank of perfect human, or al-Insan al-Kamil, by defeating worldly desires and one’s self, or nafs in Islam. The term “*hongdao* (弘道)” is to be on the righteous path, and this is nothing but Sirat al-Mustakim (righteous path) in Islam (Sun and Xu, 2005: 27). Consequently, these scholars tried to portray Islamic and Chinese traditional thoughts as two aspects of the same truth. Anybody who reads Islamic works but neglects the works of Chinese traditional thought or just the opposite would not be able to grasp this truth. One must definitely know both sides (Israeli, 2003: 49).

In his article “*Established Islam and Marginal Islam in China from Eclecticism to Syncretism*,” Raphael Israeli notes the following about the origins of theory of Islam and Confucianism were written on the monument in a mosque:

Sages have one mind and the same truth, so they convince each other without leaving a shadow of doubt.... In all parts of the world, sages arise who possess this uniformity of mind and Truth. Muhammad, the Great Sage of the West, lived in Arabia long after Confucius, the Sage of China. Though separated by ages and countries, they had the same mind and truth (Israeli, 1978: 100).

In the given sentences above, it was emphasized that even though Islamic thought and Chinese traditional thought emerged in different geographies, from the mind and truth point of view, they are products of the same source.

The topic of Huiru is quite wide in terms of its contents. The reason for this vastness is that a lot of Chinese Muslim scholars who embraced this movement and worked in this direction. Naturally, this issue has a wide range in the history of Chinese Islam. Within Huiru studies, not only Islamic thought, but also Chinese traditional thought and Islamic studies around the world are examined from different perspectives (Hua, 2002: 38).

3. Wang Daiyu

Wang Daiyu, a Chinese Muslim scholar, lived in the late period of Ming Dynasty. Wang Daiyu was also known as “*The True Old Man of Islam* (真回

老人””, and we do not have a lot of information about Wang Daiyu. All the information we have about him comes from very few biographies and from an autobiography in his own work, “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion* (正教真詮)”. There is no clear information about Wang Daiyu’s birth and death dates in biographies or in his own autobiography. The birth and death dates given in many books and articles about him are simply inferences and estimates based on some indirect information. Among these inferences, 1584 and 1670 are generally accepted as dates of birth and death, respectively (Jin, 2008: 63-68). In his autobiography which is a part of his book “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*,” Wang Daiyu writes the following about his family origins:

My ancestors came to China as diplomats from the Arabian Peninsula during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), the Emperor of the Ming Dynasty. The Emperor allowed my ancestors to remain in China as a result of their correction in the Chinese calendar, by finding a calculation error. Thereupon my ancestors settled in China and we have a history of 300 years with the surname Wang (Wang, 1999: 34).

Wang Daiyu spent his childhood and youth in Nanjing (南京) (Jin, 2008: 70). In the following years, he moved to Beijing (北京). There are several opinions on his moving from Nanjing to Beijing. However, since there is no definite conclusion on these opinions, none of these go beyond being an assumption. What we know most certainly about the life of Wang Daiyu is that he spent the rest of his life in Beijing and was buried in Sanlihe (三里河) region outside Fuchengmen (阜成门) (Jin, 2008: 70-74).

Even though his ancestors had a history of nearly 300 years, Wang Daiyu did not go through Chinese traditional education as a child. His Chinese was sufficient to write and speak the language in his daily life. He mentions that he learned the traditional Chinese education in his 20s upon his curiosity (Wang, 1999: 34). During this learning process, he read works on Confucius, Daoism and Buddhism, which could be considered three important beliefs and thought systems of the Chinese traditional thought system. He conducted several studies on these works. These readings and studies were built upon the Islamic educational background of Wang Daiyu, which goes back to his childhood and youth. In later years, Liang Yijun (梁以浚) described him as “expert of four religions (四教博通)” (Wang, 1999: 4) in the preface of “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*”, referring to Wang Daiyu’s versatile intellectual feeding. As one can understand from this description, Wang Daiyu is a Chinese Muslim scholar who has taken his readings on Chinese traditional thought seriously and has succeeded in blending it with his own world of thought. Wang Daiyu is one of the leading names in the formation of the Chinese understanding of Islam. He was influential on scholars who

came after him with his thoughts. For this reason, in a congress titled “*Islam and Confucianism*” held in Nanjing in August 2002, a Confucianist scientist made the following comment about Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi: “*I realized that, in addition to understanding the Confucian thought, there were deeper impressions and observations about Confucius in Wang Daiyu’s works, and this amazed me. Therefore, names such as Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi definitely studied on, as they deserve further attention*” (Yang, 2012: 7-8).

As discussed above, it would not be wrong to say that information about Wang Daiyu’s life merely consists of his autobiography which is a part of his work “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*”. Therefore, information on Wang Daiyu’s life is not likely to go beyond that autobiography. We will try to learn the interpretation of Chinese Islam, led by Wang Daiyu, through his own works “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion* (正教真詮), *Great Learning of Islam* (清真大学), *Rare and True Answers* (希真正答)”.

The primary sources that we need to take into account in order to fully understand Wang Daiyu’s Chinese Islamic thought are his works, which are regarded as keystones of Chinese Islam. Each one of these works brings the thought of Wang Daiyu to the present day. When we review previous studies conducted on works of Wang Daiyu, it can be seen that there is no clear chronological order of his writings, exact date of completion for each work is unknown. The only thing we know for sure about the order of his works is that the work titled “*Rare and True Answers*” is the last one. There are various opinions about which one of the other two works, “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*”, or “*Great Learning of Islam*” was written first. These three works were brought together and published by Ningxia Renmin Publishing House in 1985. The order given in this publication is “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*”, “*Great Learning of Islam*” and “*Rare and True Answers*”.

When we look at the works of Wang Daiyu, we see traces of the concepts of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism belonging to Chinese traditional thought. However, the fact that these works enclose such terms does not necessarily mean that each concept or expression matches the ideas of Islam, as these concepts were sometimes used to explain the thought of Islam more clearly, and sometimes to emphasize that some of these concepts are completely opposed to Islamic thought. For example, he underlined that the reincarnation belief of Buddhism is not accepted by Islam.

4. Analysis of Some Concepts of Chinese Traditional Thought Used by Wang Daiyu in His Works

When we say Chinese traditional thought, we are talking about a cultural accumulation of nearly five thousand years. Chinese traditional thought has quite a long history and considering the world thought history, it is one of

the rare thought systems that continues without breaking its connection with the past. Especially the Chinese writing plays a crucial role in permanence of Chinese culture, being an indispensable carrier of the culture. Today, studying the history of Chinese writing alone would make it possible to see the depth of Chinese traditional thought.

As Islam entered into China and developed there over time, a new social class emerged. Later, this social class became a nation and was called Huizu. After this point, Huizu became supra identity of Muslims living in China. With the formation of this identity, changes in language, culture, thought, lifestyle and various fields would become inevitable. Language, which is an indispensable tool for Muslims to learn their religion, has gained importance. Learning Arabic and Persian languages and their usage diminished rapidly among Muslims over time. These languages have nearly vanished in China so much so that excluding the scholar class, there were almost nobody speaking Arabic or Persian. This led to the need to explain Islam in Chinese. In other words, this was not an option but a necessity. Wang Daiyu was one of the first to see this necessity. We give an example of some concepts belonging to Chinese traditional thought.

4.1. *One* (一)

The lexical meaning of term “*yi*” is “one,” and it is one of the most basic concepts of Chinese traditional thought; many new concepts were derived from this concept. For example, *tongyi* (统一), *heyi* (合一), *tian ren heyi* (天人合一), etc. This term is even used to mean the essence of the universe. Having an important place in the world of Chinese thought, this concept has been used by many Chinese philosophers. For example, one of China’s greatest philosophers, Laozi, has used the concept of “*one*” in many places (Daode Jing, n.d.).

Wang Daiyu also used the concept of “*yi*” when describing the concepts of “*zhen yi*”, “*shu yi*” and “*ti yi*”, which are the main topics of his works.⁴ By using the term “*yi*”, Wang Daiyu wanted to explain the essence of everything, the beginning of everything, by grace of whom everything comes into existence, that is to say, Allah. Of course, there is not a one-to-one match between the “*yi*” used by Wang Daiyu and the “*yi*” belonging to the Chinese world of thought. That is because the content and essence of creation and creator in Islamic thought and existence and creator concepts in Chinese thought are different. However, with “*yi*”, one and only God, Allah was emphasized by Wang Daiyu and it was mentioned that whatever is enclosed by the term “*existence*”, it was created by Allah and that all of these creations would return to Allah, that is, the “*one*”.

4.2. *Wuji* (无极) and *Taiji* (太极)

These two concepts are among the most important concepts of Chinese traditional thought and have taken their place in the works of thought in almost every period. The concept *Wuji* first appeared in Laozi's work (*Daode Jing*, n.d.). The concept *Taiji* is first mentioned in the "*Book of Changes* (*易经*)" (*Yi Jing and Taiji*, n.d.). In the following years, many philosophers and thinkers worked on these concepts. Among these works, a very important one was written by the great thinker Zhou Dunyi (周敦颐) (*Zhou Dunyi*, n.d.), who lived during the Northern Song Dynasty. In his work titled "*Diagram Explaining the Supreme Ultimate* (*太极图说*)" (*Taiji Tushu*, n.d.), Zhou Dunyi emphasized that *wuji* and *taiji* are the most important concepts in the formation of the universe and things. *Wuji* and *taiji* are closely related concepts. These concepts are the formulation of creation and existence in Chinese thought.

Just like the concepts "*yin-yang*" or "*dao*", the concepts *wuji* and *taiji* may refer to different meanings on their own. Therefore, we believe that it will be more accurate to use these concepts together in the text as "*wuji and taiji*".

The term *wuji* has several meanings which are; something without polarity, something without any starting point, something with no beginning and no end, something with no limit, infinite, space, etc. (Editorial Board, 2014: 393-887). In addition to these, it may also mean something with no taste, no smell, no color, no shape, no name, etc. The term *Taiji* means the beginning of existence, the mother of everything, the origin of everything, the symbol of existence, etc. (Li, 2004: 1260).

Taiji, unlike *wuji*, is visible and known. After giving these definitions, based on the thesis that there can be no *taiji* without *wuji*, we can say that the main essence is "*wuji*".

Starting with *wuji* and explaining the existence of the universe, this process continues with *taiji* (太极), *liang yi* (两仪) and *yinyang* (阴阳). This whole process, which looks like concentric circles, is almost like the formula of an order.⁵

4.3. *Two Realms* (两仪)

This concept is essentially related to *wuji* and *taiji*. The most important part of creation after *taiji* is *liang yi*. In essence, the earth and heaven or *yin-yang* form a magnificent cycle, which are complements of each other.

Taiji is neither one being two nor the method of dividing it by two. It is precisely two coming to life from one (Yuan, 2012: 113). The debate on whether *taiji* was dividing one into two or one giving birth to two continued

for a long time. Making a synthesis of the discussions on this issue, Yuan Yucheng made the following comment in the concluding section of his work “*Taiji Sheng Liang Yi*”:

On the yin-yang theory set in Yijing, taiji is divided into two. These are yin and yang. Taiji gave birth to yin and yang, (here) one is divided into two. Although there are fundamental differences between these two theories, there is a close relationship at many points. In the first one, taiji is divided into yin-yang, this process is (also) the birth process of yin-yang from Taiji. This is the relationship between the two. If we were to look at this relationship alone, we could not understand the difference. This is wrong (Yuan, 2012: 115).

Debates on whether yin-yang was formed by dividing taiji into two or it was born directly from taiji still continues. However, in both views, the starting point of yin-yang is taiji. Yin-yang is a part of taiji in both cases, whether by division or by birth.

4.4. Yin-Yang (阴阳)

Yin-yang is one of the most important concepts of Chinese philosophy from past to present. In addition to Chinese philosophers, history writers have also expressed their views on yin-yang. In fact, historians’ work on yin-yang has become the focus of new academic studies today (Fang, 2018). These terms sometimes represent the balance in opposites, which exists in all areas of the existence since the initial creation and the subsequent processes, and sometimes they represent male and female. Yin-yang is the name of a balance represented by opposites. In other words, it is the name of the order and balance that occurs when the opposite situations balance each other such as hot-cold, dark-bright, hard-soft, etc. According to this view, anything in the universe can be known only through its’ opposite.

4.5. The Three Cardinal Guides and The Five Constant Virtues (三纲五常)

The three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues value system is another deep-rooted concept of Chinese traditional thinking. This value system, which dates back to Confucius before the Qin Dynasty, was conceptualized by one of the famous philosophers of Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) (Lu, 2018: 64). In the history of Chinese thought, it was proposed that only by practising this value system, society could reach prosperity, both socially and administratively. For this reason, this value system has been promoted and was always kept in the forefront in every period of Chinese history.

The three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues include both essence and existence. In general, the concepts of three cardinal guides

involve ideas of existence. The five constant virtues include more essence-related concepts (Lu, 2018: 69).

The three cardinal guides classify relationships between people. These guides focus on the relations between king-official (supervisor-employee), father-son and husband-wife. These guides propose that if these relationships are intact, social relations can be built on a solid ground (Lu, 2018: 68), because the most fundamental relations of the society are the relations between these three classes and these relationships will last forever.

The concept of five constant virtues is a part of the Chinese traditional thought. This concept belongs to the Confucian school. The road map leading to the desired perfect human was designed by putting the individual in the centre. In other words, we can say that these virtues are what an individual must possess in order to be a virtuous person. These virtues are: benevolence/love (仁), righteousness/justice (义), rituals/propriety (礼), wisdom (智) and faith/fidelity (信). These virtues are very important for finding one's self. Even today, the modern world still emphasizes the importance of these virtues.

The first four of these five virtues (benevolence/love, righteousness/justice, rituals/propriety, wisdom) were agglomerated in the period of Mengzi (孟子), one of the great thinkers of China, and they were called the “*four moral rules* (四德)”. Later on, the virtue of “faith/fidelity” was added by Dong Zhongshu, one of the great thinkers who lived in the Han period, and number of virtues became five. Later, these virtues were called “five virtues” (Luo, 2018: 20). Finally, in the following years, they were formulated as the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues (三纲五常). This formulation involves codes from ideal people to ideal society. Wang Daiyu also used this formulation, which preserves its validity even today. In fact, Wang Daiyu has embraced these concepts so much so that he even wrote a separate chapter titled “*five virtues*” in his book “*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*”. In this chapter, instead of using the more common term *wu gong* (五功), he referred to the five pillars of Islam as *wu chang* (五常), which has an important place in Chinese traditional thinking (Wang, 1999: 207).

4.6. *True Loyalty* (真忠) and *Dutiful Child* (至孝)

Two common points between Chinese traditional thought and Islamic thought would be the concepts of “*true loyalty* (真忠)” and “*dutiful child* (至孝)”.⁶ In fact, we could say that these concepts are common points of many civilizations, in addition to these two great civilizations. There is a strong emphasis on these two concepts especially in Confucian thought. Being loyal should be practised towards the Emperor and the State; while being a dutiful child should be practised towards parents. By all means, loyalty is a must for a dutiful child. Therefore, these two concepts are highly correlated. In Islam,

the concept of loyalty is a comprehensive concept from top to bottom, but first to Allah, and to the prophet. The limits and requirements of the concept of dutiful child are clearly drawn in the Qur'an. In the 23rd and 24th verses of the chapter of Isra, Muslims are asked to behave in best manners for their parents: *"say not to them (parents) a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor!"*

4.7. *Saint/Sage* (圣)

Another concept of Chinese traditional culture that Wang Daiyu uses is "sheng (圣)"⁷. This concept means saint/sage/wise man and is used for people who are considered superior people in Chinese culture. For example, this concept is used so frequently for Confucius. Wang Daiyu used this concept also when referring to the Prophet Muhammad in his works. As Wang Daiyu used the concept of "sheng" as a replacement for the prophet, this usage gave rise to some "interesting" comments, or to some speculations and debates even. These comments or debates originate from the fact that: the use of the term "sheng" in Wang Daiyu's works corresponds to the term "prophet", therefore, in some comments, it was claimed that Wang Daiyu actually wanted to emphasize that Confucius could be a prophet (Wain, 2016: 33). In fact, there is no such comment explicitly in his works. It is very natural for a Muslim scholar like Wang Daiyu to refrain from making a clear comment here. This is because in Islamic belief, a person cannot be defined as a "prophet" unless there is clear evidence about him being a prophet. Generally, in such situations, the discussion concludes by saying "Allah knows the best". The possibility of Confucius being a prophet is generally based on the 24th verse of chapter Fatir in Qur'an.

4.8. *Sacrifice* (牺牲)

Rituals are extremely important in Chinese traditional culture. Especially in Confucian thought, rituals may never be compromised and should always be observed. One day, Confucius gave the following answer to a question of his student about sacrifice: "You cannot sacrifice the sheep while I cannot sacrifice the rituals." (Lunyu, Ba Yi, n.d.). In emphasizing the importance of sacrifice in Islamic belief, Wang Daiyu made use of this saying from Confucius. There are a number of rules that Muslims must observe during the sacrificial ritual. The last one of these rules, and probably the most important one is to do the sacrifice for the sake of Allah. Sacrifice being a way to express respect for ancestors in the thought of Confucius, it is performed for sake of Allah, or in other words to gain the consent of Allah in Islam. As we can see, Wang Daiyu chose an indirect way for telling Chinese Muslims

why sacrifice ritual is performed and what its significance was, by giving an example from Confucian thought. Thus, he started with an event they were familiar with, and exemplifying from this event he explained the importance of sacrifice worship, one of the five pillars of Islam.

5. Conclusion

As a result of the “*Sinification*” policy, which was consistently implemented during the Ming Dynasty, Muslims living in China were inclined to learn Chinese and eventually Chinese culture and Chinese traditional thinking. An inevitable consequence of this situation was: Muslims were speaking Arabic, Persian and Turkish less and less, so much so that they come to the point of forgetting these languages totally. The language used by Muslims was no longer the language of a social group, but it was the language of instruction that Muslim scholars knew and used. As a result of these developments, it became a necessity or even an obligation to use Chinese and Chinese traditional thought as a bridge in order to explain and teach Islam to the existing generation and future generations. If that bridge had not been established or that attempt was not successful at all, Islam in China could be a referring to a totally different picture today. However, claiming that this bridge between the two civilizations was used one hundred percent efficiently and correctly, or that everything was transferred smoothly with no problems at all would be far from the reality.

As the Muslim population increased, some madrasas were founded by Hu Dengzhou, in order to educate teachers and professors who will teach Muslims their religion: the language of instruction was Arabic, Persian and Chinese in these madrasas. Thus, Islam started to be taught in Chinese within an education system. Hence, the pillars of the academic infrastructure were established, in which a new interpretation of Chinese Islam would emerge.

With the onset of madrasa education, the movement of translating Islamic works into Chinese has gained speed systematically. To learn their own religion, Muslims who did not speak Arabic or Persian in particular needed Islamic works translated into Chinese or more importantly Islamic works written directly in Chinese. Therefore, this movement initiated by a group of Muslim scholars was called the Huiru Movement. This movement was the result of a necessity, not an option. One of the leading names in this movement is Wang Daiyu, who has been influential on the understanding of Chinese Islam with his work.

By the time of Wang Daiyu, Islam had already spent more than 900 years in China and in this long period of time many dynasties were established and destroyed. Each period has a unique color and texture. While Muslims were regarded mainly as a group of strangers and outsiders during the Tang

period, they were regarded as a social class that was effective all over China during the Ming period. The shaping and formation of today's Huizu ethnic group was realized during the Ming period. Due to the policies implemented in the Ming period, Muslim Chinese evolved towards Chinese Muslims. The cultural and academic infrastructure of this evolution was established by a group of intellectuals who were dedicated to explain Islam with the concepts of Chinese traditional thought. Wang Daiyu is one of the leading names of this intellectual group. Wang Daiyu is a scholar who studied Islam during his childhood and completed Chinese traditional education during his youth. Knowing the bases of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism as well as his own religion Islam, he was called "*the expert of four religions*".

Wang Daiyu left three works behind, which are "*A True Explanation of the Right Religion*", "*Great Learning of Islam*" and "*Rare and True Answers*". These works were brought together in the following years and published as a single book. These three works are among the earliest works of Chinese Islamic philosophy. While creating his works, Wang Daiyu used key concepts of Chinese traditional thought frequently without sacrificing the basic principles of Islam. However, the key point to keep in mind here is that, Wang Daiyu used some concepts directly while emphasizing that some other concepts were contrary to the basic principles of Islam. For this reason, we can see that by using some concepts he has established a close relationship between these concepts and Islam in his works, but refrained from using some other concepts. From this point of view, one has to admit that his intellectual work cannot be considered an adaptation of Islam to Confucianism. Rather, it is an effort to express ideas and principles of Islam to Chinese Muslims in the most appropriate and efficient way. The most natural and convenient way to achieve this was simply through Chinese traditional thought system, which has been adopted for centuries by the social structure and has become a value.

As a consequence of efforts to explain Islam in Chinese, which started in the Ming period, a new interpretation or a new understanding of Islam, or simply Chinese Islam emerged. This new understanding resulted in Sinitization of Muslims living in China as a part of the Chinese social structure. Thus, there was a transformation of identity from Muslim Chinese to Chinese Muslims. It would be safe to say that this situation did not arise only in China, but in all countries where Islam traveled as a stranger, at least initially. The reason of this is, being a universal religion, one of first problems that Islam had to overcome is not to compromise the basic principles in the process of localization. Therefore, just like using a term such as "the understanding of Turkish Islam", we should also be able to use a term like "the understanding of Chinese Islam". Thinking of Islam as a seed, it would be natural for Islam to take some properties of the land that it was planted while preserving its essence. If we were to use another metaphor, considering

Islam as a body, then countries' traditions and worlds of thought would be clothes on this body.

Wang Daiyu is a Chinese Muslim scholar who reflected the traditional face of China onto Islam and he has a deep influence on the formation of understanding of Chinese Islam. It is very important that many studies are carried out about his three works left behind, and that these studies gain more depth with new perspectives. In summary; Wang Daiyu ensured that an academic bridge was established between Chinese and Islamic civilizations which would allow wisdom accumulated over centuries to be transferred bi-directionally.

We have tried to underline an important point in all of the works of Wang Daiyu. This point is: what Wang Daiyu aimed to accomplish in his works was not uniting Islam and Confucianism or coming up with a joint teaching/religion. His aim was; to establish the understanding of Chinese Islam by putting basic principles of Islam to the centre of this establishment. The expression "*revelation is the essence, tradition is the face*" used by Baki Adam in his study "*Religion and Tradition in Jews*" (Adam, 1992: 44-51) really summarizes our work in a sentence. In other words, Wang Daiyu has contributed greatly to the understanding of Chinese Islam with a traditional face without touching the essence of Islam.

Notes

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- 1. This work was compiled from Ertugrul Ceylan's PhD thesis, titled "The Significance and Place of Chinese Muslim Scholar Wang Daiyu in Chinese Islam History" <<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp>>.
- 2. Hu Dengzhou (胡登洲) was a Chinese Muslim scholar with both traditional Chinese education and Islamic education backgrounds. He was born in Wei (咸阳渭城) city of Xianyang. It is rumoured that he went out of China and conducted a researched on several Islamic education models. It is also rumored that on his trip he traveled to Central Asia and from there all the way to Mecca. Starting with his return to China, he was involved in an effort to explain Islam in Chinese. The most concrete result of his effort is the establishment of Chinese-style Islamic madrasas (Gansu Sheng Minzu Yanjiu, Xibei Yisilan Jiao Yanjiu, 1985: 230-233).

3. Hu Dengzhou (胡登洲) had a Chinese traditional education at an early age, and later he focused on Islamic studies. In this respect, he is a fully fledged Chinese Muslim educator (Zhongguo Yisilan Jiao Xiehui, 2011: 171).
4. See more details in Wang, 1999: 38.
5. See more details in Wang, 1999: 38-50.
6. See more details in Wang, 1999: 229.
7. See more details in Wang, 1999: 92.
8. See more details in Wang, 1999: 301.

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