

tend to talk about orientalism as though it were just one sort of theoretical approach, but of course it is far more complicated than that, even in the nineteenth century when it was being developed into the system which was to have such an impact on Western attitudes to the Middle East in that and subsequent periods.

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Sachiko Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm, with a new translation of Jāmi's Lawā'ih by William Chittick*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2000, pp. xiv + 264, paper, £15.

Drawing on the pioneering work of her teacher Toshihiko Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism* (reprinted Berkeley: University of California Press 1984) and her own pioneering work on cosmic gender relationships, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1993), *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* presents, almost for the first time, translations of original Chinese Muslim texts. The study of Chinese Islam has been much neglected in Islamic studies, yet it provides an important example of cultural acclimatisation and naturalisation in a non-Arab sphere and a stimulating alternative to studies on South and Central Asia. Interest in classical, pre-modern Chinese Islam has been rather lacking with a focus on more contemporary political issues of separatism and human rights in China drawing the attention of scholars mainly in political science and international relations. The twenty million odd Muslims in China are an important minority community and their location at the periphery in Xin Jiang makes them strategically significant. However, the focus of this work is upon classical, mainly early modern Chinese Islam, the development of a Chinese Islamic scholarly class and its literary culture defined in terms of 'Islamic Neo-Confucianism as Murata puts it.

Alongside introductions and annotations on the nature of classical Chinese Islam, Murata translates two key texts of the sapiential tradition in

China penned by two pre-eminent Chinese 'ulema. *Great learning of the Pure and Real* by Wang Tai-yu (d. ca. 1658) is an attempt to present Islam within a Chinese idiom for the Chinese Muslim community and probably the first such work since Chinese Islamic scholarship up until then had mainly been composed in Arabic or Persian. The aim is to provide philosophical, ethical and theological justification and understanding of the faith for the community of believers and it is unconcerned with matters of ritual as such since such teaching would be conveyed within the family and community. As such it is a work on the principles of Islam informed by a Sufi worldview that presents *tawhīd* couched in a Neo-Confucian moral language. *Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* by Liu Chih (d. after 1724) is a Chinese paraphrase of the Persian classic *Lawā'ih* (Gleams) of 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi (d. 1492) on the Sufi doctrine of the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and is replete with references to the Persian Sufi classics. Alongside the translation of the Chinese text is a new English translation of the original Persian work undertaken by William Chittick that allows the reader to compare the different idioms and hence audiences of the works. Thus the language of classical Persian Sufism is contrasted with the Neo-Confucian idiom of Liu Chih's work. The text is well supported by annotation and a useful bibliography and indices.

The main theme of Murata's work is Islamic Neo-Confucianism and naturalisation of Islam in China and its concomitant problems of translations and communication of doctrine within a language that is far removed from the Semitic Arabic of traditional Islamic scholarship. How does one convey the concept of God, the Qur'ān, prophecy and the afterlife in Chinese? Murata shows how these authors used existing Neo-Confucian terms and conventions and located Islam and Islamic discourse within the literary culture of early modern China. More significantly, she shows the cognate nature of much of Neo-Confucian metaphysics and ethics with an Islamic ethos and *weltanschauung*.

Murata continues her joint project with her husband William Chittick to present Sufism as the heart of classical and traditional Islam. She demonstrates the success of the naturalisation of Islamic thought in the difficult terrain of the Chinese language and the versatility of the sapiential tradition (as she calls it in *The Tao of Islam*) stemming from among others the teachings of the Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Murata focuses upon points of

complementarity. Both Confucianism and Sufism stress the importance of the 'heart' as the true faculty of perception. They both have a profoundly moral outlook on life and prefer acknowledging an intimate connection between moral knowledge and moral agency. They both stress the innate nature of human goodness and urge man to realise himself through acculturation, self-improvement and spiritual purification. The divine message of Islam is explained through the Neo-Confucian mandate of heaven.

The language of the texts is significant and provides us with a valuable insight into the self-perception of classical Chinese Islam. This is another key theme that ought to be of interest to scholars working on minority (religious) communities. These texts are for a Muslim community educated in Neo-Confucianism, seeking an understanding of themselves and their faith. They are not *apologias* aimed to non-Muslims though they do provide arguments and examples of argumentation with mainly Buddhist and Taoist sages. Given the Neo-Confucian idiom of the works, it is significant that far less ink is expended on criticising that tradition than on attacking Buddhism and Taoism. A major feature of minority discourse is the way in which pejorative appellations are transformed into badges of honour. The term *hui* is a term of abuse used by the Chinese for Muslims. But Wang shows how the term refers to the privileged nature of Chinese Muslims as microcosmic figures who represent the harmony of heaven and earth and manifest the Real (that is, God) on earth. Such are the real *Hui*.

Religious pluralism, multiculturalism and religious dialogue are key features of contemporary theology and religious studies. To a large extent, dialogue occurs within cognate traditions such as the Abrahamic faiths of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. But increasingly, at points of juncture, scholars are looking at wider relationships such as the meeting of Hinduism and Christianity in India. One such relationship is the encounter of Confucianism and Islam in the Chinese world and South-East Asia. Murata's work is highly significant in further facilitating this dialogue. A genuine work of comparative scholarship that contributes to the Islamic-Confucian dialogue initiated by Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Tu Weiming, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* deserves a wide audience in Islamic Studies, comparative religion and all those interested in intellectual and spiritual dialogue.

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Williams, J., *Denying Divinity: Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Traditions*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001.

There is a long tradition in a variety of religions of apophasis describing the divine in negative terms. This book compares two important traditions in this area, traditions which could not be said to have been in contact with each other, and so one has to assume that the idea of using negation as a means of definition arose within each tradition in an entirely original way. The author outlines the background of the discussion in Christianity in the Greek world, and in particular in the thought of the Jewish philosopher Philo, and then looks at the development of this idea in Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. He goes on to discuss the Buddhist account provided by Dogen, linking it with earlier Buddhist thinkers, and in particular with the concept of emptiness, and there are clearly many similar arguments and ideas advanced here as in the Christian tradition. In the last and hardest chapter Williams considers the apophatic tradition as a whole, linking it with modern thinkers in both Japan and the West, arguing that it is clearly linked with recent developments in postmodern thought. Again, what is interesting about the discussion here is not the assertion of a simple causal connection, but rather the idea that similar ideas can arise in very distinct cultures when they are trying to come to grips with the same problem.

Comparative theology is often at its weakest when it adopts a 'compare and contrast' methodology of college examinations, but here it has been successfully undertaken. The reader gets a solid account of how both Christianity and Buddhism dealt with the issue of how to define the transcendent, and the very varied responses which resulted. And yet one cannot help wondering how appropriate it is to compare Buddhism with the monotheistic religions on this point. Judaism, Christianity and Islam place such emphasis on the existence of a transcendent divinity, by contrast with most forms of Buddhism, that it is difficult to see what may be usefully abstracted from a comparison between them on this topic. The author helpfully explores the wide variety of meanings of negative theology, pointing out that negativity can be taken in a number of ways, either as posing a very radical doctrine or as being quite mild in its implications. F

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Articles

Muhsin Arāki

The place of Mysticism ('Irfān) within the
hierarchy of Islamic Sciences [1]

S. Safavi

The Practice of Mysticism ('irfān-i 'amalī)
in Islam [9]

Karīm Mujtahidī

Mullā Ṣadrā in the Narrative of Henry
Corbin [33]

Hamid Hadji Haider

Majoritarianism and Constitutionalism [43]

Reza Akbarian

The Fundamental Principles of Ibn Sīnā's
Ontology [59]

Muḥammad Taqī Miṣbāḥ-i Yazdī

Two Critical Issues in Sadrian Philosophy:
Substantive Motion and its Relation to the
Problem of Time, and the Principality of
Existence [77]

Book Reviews

Flusser, V., *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy
of Design*

Flusser, V., *Towards a Philosophy of
Photography* (Oliver Leaman) [87]

Yahya Christian Bonaud, *L'Imam Khomeyni, un
gnostique méconnu du XXe siècle: Métaphysique et
théologie dans les oeuvres philosophiques et
spirituelles de l'Imam Khomeyni* (Sajjad Rizvi) [88]

Hunsberger, A., *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of
Badakshan. A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller
and Philosopher* (Oliver Leaman) [92]

Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding
Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Sajjad Rizvi) [93]

Des Chene, D., *Spirits and Clocks: Machine and
Organism in Descartes* (Amy Mullin) [96]

Christian Jambet, *Se rendre immortel suivi du Traité
de la résurrection de Mollā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī* (Sajjad
Rizvi) [98]

Arnaldez, R., *Averroes, a Rationalist in Islam*, trans.
R. Sleight (Oliver Leaman) [102]

Goldziher, Ernest *Renan als Orientalist*, trans. P. Zalar
(Oliver Leaman) [103]

Sachiko Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang
Tai-yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu
Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm,
with a new translation of Jāmī's Lawā'ih* by William
Chittick (Sajjad Rizvi) [104]

Williams, J., *Denying Divinity: Apophasis in the
Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Traditions*
(Oliver Leaman) [107]

Wall, P., *Wittgenstein in Ireland* (Oliver Leaman)
[108]