



Spiritual Humanism: A Call to Creativity in Sufi Studies

Mânevî Hümanizm: Tasavvuf Araştırmaları Alanında Yaratıcılığa Bir Çağrı

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ABSTRACT

Chinese philosopher Tu Weiming (1940-) has spent a lifetime in dialogue with cultural and spiritual traditions beyond the *sanjiao* or ‘three religions’ (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) of the Sinic world. This engagement has included sustained intercourse with the Abrahamic monotheisms and Hellenic philosophy, Hinduism and Indian spirituality, and a variety of indigenous heritages. The outcome of such cross-cultural ferment has been the elaboration of a ‘spiritual humanist’ alternative to the secular humanism of post-Enlightenment modernity. We begin by introducing Tu’s concept of Spiritual Humanism in general and his engagement with the Islamic world in particular. Adonis is then identified as a natural ally; his *Sufism and Surrealism* is presented as a case study in Spiritual Humanism with obvious relevance for Sufi Studies. Contemporary Sufi Studies discourse, this paper ultimately argues, should likewise not restrict itself to hermetic philological analyses of traditional sources; following Adonis’s example in *Sufism and Surrealism*, it should embrace the creative reelaboration of this tradition in the face of contact with new stimuli. Tu’s Spiritual Humanism is both one such stimulus and an active Confucian embodiment of this spirit of creativity.

Keywords: Spiritual Humanism, Tu Weiming, Naguib Mahfouz, Adonis, Surrealism.

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1. TU WEIMING'S 'SPIRITUAL HUMANISM'¹

Tu Weiming has endeavoured to preserve his endangered Confucian tradition via creative transformation and cross-pollination with foreign sources: his 'Spiritual Humanism' (*jingshenrenwenzhuyi* in Chinese) can be understood as a 'Confucianism fit for the age of globalisation'.² Like Catholic theologian Hans Küng, moreover, Tu has spent his life campaigning for (and embodying) a spirit of dialogue *among* religions and civilisations; in this sense, his 'Spiritual Humanism' can be seen as a Confucian extension of Küng's *Projekt Weltethos* or 'Global Ethic Project':³

The grammar of theism strikes a sympathetic resonance in Spiritual Humanism. Sacred places (cathedral, church, temple, mosque, synagogue), hymns, songs, prayers, dances, festivals are beyond the pretensions to scientific, philosophical, or theological control. All three great theistic religions have spiritual resources and intellectual depths to inspire us to

sing songs of hope and express our gratitude to divine love. They have made profound contributions to human religiosity. Nevertheless, Spiritual Humanism may be theistic or pantheistic, but it embraces atheism and a variety of vitalism characteristic of most indigenous traditions as well.⁴

While Tu shares the Enlightenment's hostility to superstition and structures of totalitarian social control (preferring instead the Enlightenment injunction to 'dare to think and learn for oneself'), he can above all be understood as a cosmopolitan philosopher and public intellectual in search of a horizon of postmodern spirituality 'beyond the Enlightenment mentality'.⁵ Tu's commitment to the ancient Confucian ideal of *weijizhixue* ('learning for the self'), passed down via the Song-Ming *Xinxue* of Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and other neo-Confucian forebears, nevertheless has more in common with modern *literary* innovation than any drily analytic philosophical discourse.⁶ Whether one considers 'Confucianism' as 'philosophy', 'religion', 'wisdom literature' or 'miscellaneous paradigm', Tu has spent his life fighting for a broader humanistic discourse - philosophical, literary, artistic, musical - in which all modes of 'Learning To Be Human' are welcome: the 2018 World Congress of Philosophy was organised by Tu in Beijing under this very aegis.

1 This first section is an adapted and expanded self-translation of a forthcoming book chapter on Tu's Spiritual Humanism due for publication in late 2021 with the German publisher Matthes & Seitz.

2 *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos* is the title of the first third of my *Peking Eulogy* (Aichtal: Karl Schlecht Foundation, 2020), a loose 'Spiritual Humanism trilogy' and a record of my time as an Associate Researcher at Tu's Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University in 2018-19. The full text is available as an open-source download from the publisher: https://www.karl-schlecht.de/fileadmin/daten/Download/FD/FD210119_Peking_Eulogy.pdf (accessed May 15, 2021).

3 My own 2018 book *From Global Ethic to World Ethos? Building on Hans Küng's Legacy of Basic Trust in Life* offers a summary of Küng's project on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993. The full text is available as an open-source download from the publisher, the Karl Schlecht Foundation: https://www.karlschlecht.de/fileadmin/daten/Download/Buecher/Keir/From_Global_Ethic_Gesamt_PDF_Keir.pdf (accessed May 15, 2021).

4 Tu Weiming, *Spiritual Humanism: Self, Community, Earth, Heaven (24th World Congress of Philosophy Wang Yangming Lecture)*, (Independently published, 2020), 34.

5 Tu Weiming, 'Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality', in Tu Weiming, *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity: Essays on the Confucian Discourse in Cultural China*, (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilisations, 2010), 58-75.

6 See Keir, *Peking Eulogy*, 446-457. For a related discussion of Tu's Spiritual Humanism and Milan Kundera's *L'Art du roman*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

Tu's Spiritual Humanism is hence something much more than a generic melting pot for a single future world culture. Each of us is born once into a world of concrete cultural and existential opportunity: the responsibility to dig deep into one's experience and to exercise ongoing critique of the learning one has received - not least via contact with the best of foreign cultures - is one that any 'spiritual humanist' takes deadly seriously as the root of *weijizhixue* or 'learning for the self'. Tu's celebration of the forgotten names of Confucian tradition - figures like Lu Xiangshan (1139-1193), Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Zhang Zai (1020-1077) among many others - is best understood as an invitation to readers around the world to explore this millennial tradition in more detail for themselves; the idea that the history of 'Confucianism' can be reduced to Confucius, Mencius and Zhu Xi is as superficial as the idea that Shakespeare and Da Vinci are the only names worth knowing from the European Renaissance. Tu is aiming for a 'dialogue of civilisations' among equals: the runaway success of Enlightenment's scientific and political innovations ought not to fool us into thinking that nothing before 1789, and nothing beyond the West, is worth knowing. The goal of such 'Spiritual Humanism as a world ethos' is not to downplay the achievements or even the outright beauty of certain aspects of European Renaissance and Enlightenment culture, but rather to enrich them via contact with peaks of human spiritual life from other times and places, thereby furthering global humanistic discourse in the 21st century.

Tu offers Western readers in particular a much-needed vaccination against the idea that 'Chinese culture' is only capable of producing hierarchical and totalitarian ideologies: the driving force in 'Confucian tradition', in Tu's view, serves gradually to liberate the individual human being for humanistic learning,

a sweet lifelong burden which has nothing to do with recognition, prestige, luxury or hegemony, but rather values 'learning for the self' for its own sake. This tradition, however, has been confronted in the last 200 years, and really in the last 500 years, with a plethora of external influences which, initially at least, weakened it. If literary voices like Cao Xueqin (1715-1763) and Lu Xun (1881-1936) had already started with the painful process of 'putting Confucian civilisation on the couch'⁷ in earlier generations, Tu sought to continue the conversation in his lifetime, all the while anticipating that such Confucian self-reflection will only accelerate and intensify in the coming century.⁸ Central to Tu's understanding of Confucian humanism in the modern and postmodern eras, however, is the importance of *tizhi* ('embodied knowledge') in such civilisational processes: neither the abstract rationality of (e.g. 'analytic') philosophy nor the 'if-then' mentality of contemporary scientism can provide answers to questions of meaning, which only direct spiritual or aesthetic experience can ever provide. This subjective experience, Tu argues, always takes dialogical forms - with Heaven, with nature, with other people and cultures, and finally with one's own self. Such an ethos will be imbibed from a whole spectrum of humanistic activity, from philosophy to literature, art, music and beyond, and not least from genuine friendship.⁹ Such a 'Spiritual

7 See Andrew H. Plaks, 'The Novel in Premodern China', in *The Novel (Volume One: History, Geography, and Culture)*, ed. Franco Moretti, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 207.

8 Tu Weiming, 'Dialogical Civilisation and *Qitongcunyi* in a New Axial Age' ('Cong Xinzhouxin Shidai Kan Duihua Wenming yu Qitongcunyi'), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014). Translations from Tu's Chinese works are all my own; I discuss the challenge of translating Tu into English in *Peking Eulogy*, 465-466.

9 See Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia (Confucianism and Dialogue Among Civilisations)*, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), 117:

Humanism' begins where 'secular humanism' ends, namely with questions of private meaning. The concrete answers that the religions, literatures and cultures of the world have variously provided to these questions over recorded human history are available to 'spiritual humanists' in all cultures. It is the task of every such humanist to recombine these influences in creative freedom.

2. THE DIALOGICAL EAST ASIAN: TU WEIMING AND ISLAM¹⁰

The defining characteristic of Spiritual Humanism is the awareness that we ought to show reverence for Heaven, for the transcendent. In my interreligious and intercivilisational dialogues over the last four decades, I have come to the realisation that Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims [and others] can take an authentic spiritual-humanistic stance, [...] provided that the term

When we consider the dialogue between one civilisation and another, we must remember that it always involves individual people, living people engaged in a process of mutual learning. The problem as I have repeatedly framed it is one of 'embodied knowledge' - trusting one's own experience as an epistemological foundation. As a simple example, consider friendship: when you first see someone, it is as if you are seeing her in a painting; you only know her outward form. Can you say you know her just because you recognise her face? You need to talk to her as well, more than once or twice. Moreover, if the person is unwilling to let you get to know her, what chance have you got? You might have all her data at your disposal, her CIA file or whatever, but you still can't claim that you know her as a friend. For that, there needs to be a mutual willingness for conversational exchange; that's the only way you can slowly build a relationship. If all you want to do is use her for some prearranged purpose, you can't call that friendship. Dialogue among civilisations is hard work because a high bar of intimacy must be met.

10 *The Dialogical East Asian* is the title of the second part of my *Peking Eulogy* (Keir, *Peking Eulogy*, 462-594). With the permission of the publisher, significant sections from Chapter 12 ('The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', 521-527) have been reproduced and adapted here.

'humanist' can be broadened and deepened to embrace a true cosmopolitanism which is both naturalistic and spiritual.

Tu Weiming, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse' (2015)¹¹

Tu's Spiritual Humanism, as we have established, is interested in spiritual traditions in their historical entirety as potential resources for individual human beings in the present; this means that even what we call 'Islamic' civilisation is really at least as old as the Prophet Muhammad himself, and certainly older than Ibn Taymiyya. To reduce 1400 years or more of human cultural achievement across an enormous geographical expanse to a caricature, and to assume that this 'Islamic world' offers nothing but pesky premodern problems to an 'enlightened' West, is to commit the gravest intellectual sin in Tu's lexicon: it is to combine 'ignorance' with 'arrogance'.¹² Writing in 2002 in the wave of the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington DC, Tu takes aim at the narrowness of a certain prominent scholar's vision:

Bernard Lewis's new book *What Went Wrong* is currently enjoying a wave of popularity in the United States. He argues that, although the Ottoman Empire was radiant in its glory 500 years ago, the challenge posed by Western civilisation in the intervening period has reduced [the formerly Ottoman Middle East] to a state of bitterness, inciting a wave of anti-Western sentiment. We might say the same thing about Confu-

11 Tu Weiming, 'Spiritual Humanism: An Emerging Global Discourse', (Dialogue of Civilizations: Rhodes Forum 2015, December 18, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya-jsyg6c_I&t=5s), (accessed January 30, 2020).

12 Tu Weiming, 'Philosophy's Spiritual Turn' (Zhexue de Jingshen Zhuanxiang'), in Tu Weiming, *Ershiyi Shiji de Rujia (Confucianism in the 21st Century)*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), 131.

cianism: the culture of the Chinese people was once glorious, but after more than a century of Western dominance, it is now riddled with weakness. And so it is said that Chinese people harbour feelings of hatred towards the West; these feelings of envy and enmity in the face of a [nonetheless radiant] Western civilisation lead to a love-hate syndrome. I am always wary when the language of abnormal psychology gets introduced into discussions like this.¹³

Samuel Huntington, a Harvard colleague, was another who argued in the 1990s and early 2000s that Islamic and Confucian civilisational ‘clashes’ with the West would be temporary; Western modes would win out over Islamic (‘fundamentalist’) and Confucian (‘authoritarian’) challenges once the embers of resistance had finished burning.¹⁴ Perhaps no one alive at that time was in a better position than Tu Weiming to understand just how breathtakingly arrogant (or, as he more politely puts it, ‘immature’¹⁵) such a stance really was and is. Though the untenability of this position has been made manifest by the demographic and social advances of non-European communities in Western societies (as well as by the failures of Western societies themselves to impose their own idealised agendas in Iraq, Afghanistan etc.), a question remained for Tu in 2002: now that ‘dialogue among civilisations’ had migrated permanently from the softer precincts of Religious Studies and other university humanities departments to the very top of the global political agenda, the question became: ‘How can we make dialogue a new constitutive norm of global

13 Tu Weiming, ‘The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations’ (*Wenming Duihua de Fazhan jiqi Shijie Yiyi*), in *Ershiyi Shiji de Ruxue*, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), 211.

14 See Tu, *ibid.*, 212-213.

15 See *ibid.* 213.

[civil] society?’¹⁶ For one thing, the treacherous language of ‘tolerance’ must be overcome:

Dialogue is only possible if there is a real desire to increase one’s understanding of one’s interlocutor. The goal of dialogue, indeed, cannot be to persuade someone else of the superiority of one’s own creed; if this is the attitude one brings, dialogue will not be successful. The reason why many scholars of Islam are unwilling to talk to their Christian counterparts is a perceived proselytising agenda; such Christians are felt to engage with Muslims in order to prove the veridicality and intellectual maturity of the Christian faith vis-à-vis Islam. Such exchange does not qualify as dialogue; [...] an extremely important principle of so-called ‘dialogue’ is that it not be seen as a tacit opportunity to spread one’s own faith or reform the views of others. ‘Dialogue’ is first and foremost about one’s own learning and self-reflection - a constant recalibration of the limitations of one’s own worldview. [...] This is the only stable mutual foundation for dialogical exchange among equals.¹⁷

We return here to the tension inherent in Tu’s avowal of Confucianism: there is something in the Confucian tradition, as Tu encountered it, worth sharing with others who may *not* have encountered it, but there is also much worth learning which lies outside the Confucian tradition as we normally understand it. Tu is not, to repeat, attacking the healthy impulse to teach and to share here, but he is pointing out that this cannot even succeed unless one is able to win the trust of one’s dialogue partner that she, too, may be a source of previously unaccessed wisdom for *you*. This is not to reduce her to a means towards one’s own

16 See *ibid.* 215.

17 *Ibid.* 215.

advancement, but rather just the opposite: it is to ennoble her with the status of true equality. This openness beyond mere 'tolerance' is difficult in any circumstances, but it may be particularly hard work when the 'other' is associated, rightly or wrongly, with a group which has harmed us in the past. When Tu claims that the endpoint of dialogue is a 'celebration of diversity'¹⁸, he uses language that has been coopted beyond recognition in the last two decades; what he means is rather a celebration of some fundamental, hard-won *equality*. Triumphalists in all times and places are 'ignorant and arrogant' because they deny such equality to non-believers. If there is only one, fundamentally 'Western' brand of 'modernisation', then there can be no 'dialogue' between 'the West' and anyone else; if 'Westerners' or anyone else are convinced they are talking to you from the future and calling you to catch up, then there can be no existential vulnerability or even justice in their relationship with you.¹⁹

The relativism question lurks quietly but visibly in these waters: it cannot be that all civilisations and individuals are equally good all the time; dialogue must establish superiorities - sometimes yours, and sometimes mine. Tu wants to give Western civilisation its fair due -in post-1919 China as elsewhere, decentralised economic exchange, a politics of enfranchisement, civil society volunteerism and a stout defence of the dignity of the individual are all recognised as 'universal' values of a welcome 'modernisation'²⁰-but the 'conversation' of human history can-

18 See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', 216.

19 One of Tu's favourite *bêtes noires* in this regard was the philosopher Richard Rorty, who was foolish enough to believe, before physically visiting China, that the world was on its way to adopting English as a global language. See Weiming, 'Dialogical Civilisation and Qiotongcunyi in a New Axial Age', 232.

20 See Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', 218.

not simply end there, Fukuyama-style, as if Islamic and Confucian civilisations in particular (the ones Huntington singles out as posing the peskiest resistance to 'Western' hegemony) have nothing further to contribute to it. It is hence no surprise that, in a bid to walk the talk for his readers, Tu turns immediately from circumscribing the limits of Huntington's vision to 'personalising' the dialogue between Confucianism and Islam:

Precisely because Huntington had singled out Islamic and Confucian civilisations as posing the biggest threat (he was particularly worried about a potential alliance between the two), Hossein Nasr and I organised the first Islamic-Confucian Dialogue Symposium at Harvard in 1993. Thirteen people attended. But then the University of Malaya, with the support of then-Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, organised a much larger event in Kuala Lumpur, attended by more than a thousand people, including many leading Muslim scholars.²¹

One important outcome of this Malaysian dialogue was to force Tu to go back and read one of the great pioneers of Muslim-Confucian dialogue, Wang Daiyu (1570-1660):

Li Chaoran from Singapore gave a paper on Wang Daiyu. Sachiko Murata had never thought much of Wang, but after hearing Li's paper, she decided to go back and read his *Qingzhen Daxue* or *Halal Great Learning*, among other works, and discovered that he had basically achieved a kind of happy 17th-century marriage of Confucian and Islamic insights. As a scholar of Confucianism, I can say that Wang Daiyu not only does not misrepresent the Confucian tradition, but also that his work contains

21 Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', 219.

many creative innovations. To be honest, I was blown away. I worked with Sachiko for five years on her translation of the *Qingzhen Daxue*, offering comments as she went along and a Preface for the completed edition. From there I delved into the worlds of other Chinese Muslim scholars from the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, such as Liu Zhi (1660-1739), Ma Zhu (1640-1710) and Yusuf Ma Dexin (1794-1874). I was forced to conclude that the post-17th-century extension of the traditional Chinese *San-jiao* (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) to include Christianity was still one short: from the 17th Century on, China was marked by five great religious traditions.²²

Although one can trace the presence of Islam in China back well over a thousand years, the sophistication of Wang's *Halal Great Learning* forced scholars of Islam unfamiliar with China to stand up and take notice; the assumption that such serious pre-19th-century work was confined to Arabic, Farsi and Turkish had been thoroughly exploded.²³ The examples of Wang and Liu, moreover, undermine the status of Matteo Ricci as the paragon of intercultural dialogue with China:

Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* is typically regarded as a classic in the 'Dialogue Among Civilisations' genre. Many believe that his strategy consisted of digesting Confucianism and then using its core values and concepts to disseminate Christianity in general and Jesuit teachings in particular. But recently at Harvard, a scholar from Sichuan, Zhang Qiong, working together with a medieval Latinist on the contents of Ricci's letters to the Vatican, con-

cluded that Ricci was actually trying to deconstruct Song-Ming neo-Confucianism (which basically envisaged a great connected chain of being from plants and rocks all the way to men and gods) and return Confucianism to its pre-Qin roots in the concept of *Tian* ('Heaven'), as this was the best way to prepare the ground for the arrival of the transcendental Christian God. Seen in this light, Ricci's approach is pure colonialism - the idea that we need to break you first before you will accept our version of things.

This all makes the work of Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi even more valuable. Wang was of Central Asian stock, and grew up in an Arabic-speaking environment (he only started studying classical Chinese at the age of 20), but he regarded the whole Song-Ming neo-Confucian tradition as part of his own inherited patrimony. He was creatively critical of Daoism and Buddhism, but he was hence willing to take aim at Confucianism too. Liu, meanwhile, also digested every morsel of Confucian learning available to him; his basic posture was not that he had to root out 'foreign' influences, but rather to accept the bits he liked and build on them.²⁴

Why care about these 17th- and 18-century figures today? First and foremost, Tu argues, they present a united Islamic-Confucian front -Huntington's essential nightmare- not against 'the West' as such, but against a materialist and materialistic 'Enlightenment mentality' which, for a hundred years or more on all six continents, has been intent on destroying the last vestiges not only of outmoded superstition, but also of spirituality and metaphys-

22 Ibid. 220.

23 See *ibid.* 220.

24 Tu, 'The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations', 221-222.

ics more generally in human society.²⁵ The reduction of both communist and capitalist politics to godless ‘social engineering’ leaves plenty of work to be done, but what exact form should such ‘work’ take, Tu asks, in a post-Cold War world?²⁶ Throwing the myriad babies -the individual freedoms, rights and dignities, large and small- out with the bathwater of the Enlightenment, as wholesale postmodern and New Leftist critics are sometimes wont to do, is not a viable alternative, but

if we look at the problem from an Islamic and/or Confucian perspective, then justice, sensitivity, refinement and responsibility have to be a part of the new package as well. [...] Ethical wisdom is not entirely subsumable under the instrumental rationality which typically measures IQ. Beyond all possible improvements in the material condition of our species, a spiritual civilisation must simultaneously be nurtured.²⁷

The sacrificial element -the idea that meaning is always bound up with some opportunity cost, some spurning of material advantage- morphs into hypermaterialism (a kind of spiritual anorexia) if it is overemphasised, but what the richest spiritual traditions achieve is a healthy simultaneous respect for both scientific and humanistic learning. This equilibrium is much harder to maintain in an individual spirit than either raw, get-rich-quick scientism or whack-job religious fervour; the temptations of materialist success on the one hand, and conspiracy-theory consolation for material failure on the other, may be the easy-reach, go-to options of the post-Cold War world, but what Tu is calling for is a more demanding (because dialogical rath-

25 See *ibid.* 222-223.

26 See *ibid.* 224.

27 *Ibid.* 224-225.

er than pharmaceutical) spirituality: at the end of ‘The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations’, he highlights the necessity -very real, no platitude- of achieving a ‘transnational vision’ in these matters.²⁸ Tu’s idea that one might simply ‘revive’ moribund medieval or ancient ‘academy’ formats for humanistic education in the age of the Internet is quaint, to say the least, but the sense of belonging to a tradition -in this case, a dialogical civilisation comprising voices from all times and places- must be built somewhere, and at the dawn of the 21st century, Islamic-Confucian dialogue seemed as good a place as any to start:

The rebirth of China is of course an economic phenomenon, a geopolitical event with potential military implications, but I dare to hope that it will breed deep cultural novelty as well, a new mine of resources for the peaceful reorganisation of the human community. The dialogue between Confucianism and Islam is a key part of this global spiritual endeavour.²⁹

Tu’s own approach has very much been to start with ‘Confucius and the Qur’an’, or at least to go back to seminal figures from bygone centuries such as Wang Daiyu; anything else, for a historian of ideas, risks seeming a bit superficial. In my own earlier work I have tried to juxtapose Tu with more modern figures -Naguib Mahfouz in my doctoral thesis,³⁰ and more recently the likes of Tang Junyi, Adonis, Yang Jiang and Muhammad Iqbal as

28 See Tu, ‘The Universal Import of Advances in Dialogue Among Civilisations’, 229.

29 *Ibid.* 229.

30 See Chapters 2 and 4 of Jonathan Keir, ‘Warriors for Civilisation: Naguib Mahfouz, Andrei Tarkovsky, Tu Weiming and Their Western Counterparts’ (PhD Diss., University of Tübingen, 2014), <https://publikationen.uni-tuebingen.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10900/57853/wfc%20library2.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed May 15, 2021).

well³¹ -on the grounds that a creative harmony among disparate contemporary voices opens the galaxies of the past and the wormholes of the future just as well as, or perhaps even better than, lonelier and more distant stars in the pantheon. But these quite different approaches -Tu's long-game Axial historicism and my own fetishisation of 20th- and 21st-century World Literature- are really two parts of the same overall spiritual humanist project.

3. ADONIS'S *SUFISM AND SURREALISM*

The longest chapter in my *Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos? A Global Anthology of Learning for the Self* was devoted to Adonis's *Zaman al-Shi'r* (1971),³² the central thesis of which runs more or less as follows: the creativity inherent in poetry as a mode of embodied knowledge was gradually strangled -in the Islamic world in general and the Arab world in particular- by a fundamentalist theology which viewed the present as a pale reflection of inimitable perfection and evaluated poetry on the degree to which it evoked or rekindled these former glories. Like Tu, Adonis takes a view of cultural transmission which is longer, broader and more inherently dialogical: Arab poets must not forget their pre-Islamic and early Islamic roots, and must moreover remember that the entire heritage of the Arabic language and beyond is open to them; a 'loyal' contribution to tradition is original and critical by definition, a 'rupture'³³ with

31 See particular Chapters 1, 8, 10, 15, 19 and 20 of Keir, 'Spiritual Humanism as a World Ethos' in *Peking Eulogy*.

32 See Keir, *Peking Eulogy*, 213-265.

33 See Adonis, *Zaman al-Shi'r*, (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2005 (1971)), 145. For a related discussion of poetry as progress via 'rupture', see Adonis, 'I Was Born for Poetry' (interview), filmed November 2014, in Copenhagen, video, 37:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldLr4M1cP28&t=335s>.

what has gone before which is only made possible by knowledge of the 'heritage' in the first place. In an age of unprecedented globalisation, however, such a creative contribution will necessarily entail -as it always has, now only moreso- engagement with foreign sources as well as local ones. Just as Tu's beloved Song-Ming neo-Confucianism enriched itself via critical contact with Daoist and Buddhist sources (and his own 'New Confucianism' from a much wider web), so too can contemporary Arabic poetry benefit from engagement with newly available non-Arab and non-Islamic voices.

In *Sufism and Surrealism*³⁴, Adonis undertakes one such dialogical or 'spiritual humanist' adventure:

Sufism and Surrealism: our title may cause consternation, or at least opposition, not only among those who identify as surrealists, but Sufis as well. [...] The main reason for opposition to this juxtaposition of Sufism and surrealism would likely be that Sufism is a form of religiosity aimed at individual salvation, while surrealism is an atheist movement uninterested in any higher form of celestial deliverance. This may be true on the surface, but it in no way eliminates deeper possibilities of convergence. [...] Atheism does not necessarily entail a rejection of Sufism, just as Sufism in no way requires faith in traditional religion or traditionalist faith in religion. One clear advantage of this juxtaposition is that it forces us to reexamine and redefine Sufism as commonly understood, and to understand it in a new light.³⁵

34 Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism (al-Sūfiyya wa'l-Sūriyāliyya)*, (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 1992).

35 Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 9-10. Translations from the book are my own (an English translation of the book, *Sufism and Surrealism* was also published by Saqi in 2013).

As elsewhere in his work, Adonis wants to set up a clear opposition between traditionalist or literalist 'religion' -totalitarian and hostile to the very spirit of poetry- and a healthier, what we might call 'spiritual humanist' alternative, in which Sufism and surrealism, for all their differences, form a united front:

It is true that, from the perspective of traditionalist religion, 'God' is not present in surrealist experience, at least as André Breton defined it when he said that the sacred he believed in was not religious, or was beyond religion. But 'God' is not present, on the traditionalist account, in Sufi experience either; or we could say that His presence is not experienced as separate from earthly existence, as the traditionalist view insists, but rather as a bridge to existence as a union or unity [of physical and metaphysical dimensions]. 'God', from a Sufi point of view, [...] is the point at which what we call 'matter' and what we call 'spirit' unite, and where contradictions between the two recede to the background. 'God' is thus not the 'One' who creates existence from outside it and without any dialogue with it, but is rather existence itself in its very dynamism and infinitude. He is neither on Earth nor in Heaven, but is Heaven and Earth simultaneously, united. The journey towards Him does not require that we exit existence or ourselves, but rather, on the contrary, that we enter more and more deeply into our existence and our own spirits. Infinitude is not beyond matter, but inherent in matter: it is the human being herself and the material world itself. It is in a specific place, but also inside the concept of space. It is in a foreign country, but it is also around us and inside us.³⁶

36 Ibid. 10.

Consider Tu Weiming on this same spiritual terrain:

Everything (the sun, moon, stars, plants and animals, mountains and rivers) has *lingxing*, a spiritual nature, and has been formed by the same fate. Each of the myriad things under Heaven is a concrete manifestation of one cosmic impulse. We have something resembling blood ties to all of these things; meaning resides in the self-cultivation which allows us to develop and flourish by taking the realities of self, family, nation and all under Heaven and transforming them to the point that we become willing participants in, and concrete manifestations of, the destiny of the universe. This is an art form which involves the fashioning of extrinsic givens (ethnicity, gender, age, geography, social class, religious affiliations etc.) into tools for self-transformation. [...] Our true 'unity' emerges when each individual follows her own spiritual calling, one which is not extrinsic to self, family, nation and all under Heaven, but rather wedded to the idea that ultimate meaning resides in the truthfulness to existence of ordinary people. This path, however, is arduous in the extreme, as general inertia, physical limitations and our ever-present capacity for self-deception all threaten progress. [...] Heaven may be omnipresent and omniscient, but it cannot be omnipotent. [...] In order [positively] to transform the cosmos, the minimum condition is the cultivation of a critical self-consciousness, a sense of individual responsibility which is a precondition for any talk of a 'global community'.³⁷

37 Tu Weiming, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Core Values of Global Modernity' ('Dui Quanzhou Shequn zhi Hexin Jiazhi de Ruxue Toushi'), in *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, eds. Kong Xianglai and

The details of difference-between Confucianism and the Abrahamic religions at their best, let's say, or Sufism and surrealism- are important and mutually enriching, and need not dissolve -nay, *cannot* dissolve- into a single world religion or ideology. What matters most of all, however, to Adonis as to Tu and Mahfouz, is the spiritual humanist front against totalitarianism and 'traditionalist' superstition which Sufis, surrealists, Confucians and others of all stripes and cultural backgrounds can form without either abandoning their own heritages or turning their backs on foreign traditions:

First and foremost, when discussing Sufism, it behooves us to ignore the prevalent view of it, namely the view which comes to us from sectarian interpretations. In order to do so we must return to the root: the word 'Sufi' is tied to the hidden and metaphysical. The Sufi path is characterised by the failure of reason (and religious orthodoxy) to answer a whole series of profound questions that individual human beings continue to have -and which science will never answer. Even as rational, doctrinal and scientific questions are resolved, problems remain to haunt individual human beings. These unresolved (and unresolvable), unknown (and unknowable), unspoken (and unspeakable) echoes of experience lead people to Sufism. Surrealism was born from the same lack. [...] The final goal of Sufism, as of surrealism, is a form of dialogue with this Great Unseen, this Absolute. The identity of the Absolute is not the important thing here, rather the human movement towards it, the path which leads towards it, regardless of whether one conceives of it as Allah, Reason, Matter, Thought or Spirit. There is in any case a return to the

Chen Peiyu, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), 494.

root of Creation, whatever that root is. This return implies a distinction between returner and root, but at the same time a dialogical relationship between the two. The root, in other words, remains itself, manifesting itself in its creations and their free movement towards it.³⁸

Adonis is reserving the right of poetry to a future here; 'Sufism' may describe a historical canon roughly circumscribed by time and space (and to which 'non-Sufis' around the world can also now enjoy access), but the future of Sufism, as of any other spiritual tradition worth the name, is also wide open to contact with, and enrichment from, non-Sufi sources. The specific 'case study' of the dialogue with surrealism, to which Adonis devotes nearly 300 Arabic pages, is of course interesting in its own right and worthy of separate attention elsewhere, but the broader spiritual humanist principle in play, and which we are endeavouring to establish here, is well summarised by Clive James: 'The humanism isn't only in the separate activities, but above all in the connection between them.'³⁹ Beyond the genetic or 'philological' history of ideas, in other words -what influenced what and when- there is creativity in raw juxtaposition; like surrealism (or Christianity or any other cultural movement), Sufism is a 'foreign' resource for some and a 'point of departure' for others. The results of such encounters in individual human beings will somehow be -or may at their best somehow be- greater than the sum of their parts. In this sense, 'Sufism' is not only a centuries-old and more or less hermetic intellectual and spiritual discourse; it is also a participant in, and source for, something, or indeed infinite different things, beyond itself.

38 Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 10-11.

39 See Clive James, 'Introduction', *Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time*, (UK: Macmillan Publishers, 2007).

In the final chapter of *Sufism and Surrealism*, ‘Rimbaud: Sufi Orientalist’, Adonis gives us a specific example of the sort of thing that is possible in this regard. Invited by Umberto Eco to take part in an initiative in Bologna in 1988 in which ‘European specialists presented their readings of Arab texts and vice versa’, Adonis explains the genesis of his enthusiasm for his favourite proto-surrealist prodigy:

I came upon Rimbaud’s poetry when I was absorbed by Sufism, particularly as expressed in [poetic] language. As I read him more deeply, I found myself saying to myself, ‘it’s as if Rimbaud -the Rimbaud of *Une saison en enfer* and *Les Illuminations*- was a direct descendant of mad Sufi forebears.’ I then had the crazy idea of translating him into Arabic. Although the inherent difficulty of the enterprise forced me to keep putting off my translation work, it nevertheless allowed me to deepen my understanding of his experience.⁴⁰

Once again, the details of this engagement interest us less here than the broader spiritual humanist principle: the result of ‘Rimbaud plus Sufism’ has the potential to become greater than the sum of its parts in the creative furnace of Adonis’s mind. Translation is one possible avenue or laboratory for this -Adonis may create things in his Arabic translations that are an ‘improvement’ on Rimbaud’s original or anything in existing ‘Sufi’ tradition-but it by no means exhausts the list of channels, conscious and unconscious, of creative influence that ‘Rimbaud plus Sufism’ can and did exercise on Adonis, and which may then reach us via his work. Adonis’s poetry is, or at least is felt by him to be, better for his engagement with both Sufism *and* surrealism, much as Tu Weiming argued that his own Confucian thought was improved -to offer but

40 Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 231.

one concrete example- by contact with New England Christianity.⁴¹ The common enemy of such spiritual humanists is the ‘ignorant and arrogant’ fundamentalist idea that only one’s ‘own’ prior-approved tradition -however defined- should be mined or aped, and that all else is inferior or irrelevant to one’s own private spiritual development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A CALL TO CREATIVITY IN SUFI STUDIES

It will come as no surprise that these words have been written by a relative outsider to the ‘Sufi Studies’ community. What I hope to have shown, however, is that the ‘borders’ of this discipline, as with all fields of truly humanistic endeavour, are porous to the point of non-existence: *everything* can potentially enrich recognised ‘Sufi’ discourse, however tightly or loosely defined, and ‘Sufism’ can potentially enrich *everyone* regardless of civilisational affiliation or cultural background.

Tu Weiming devoted significant attention to questions of humanities education in the post-Enlightenment world in general and the modern research university in particular;⁴² as early as the 1960s, he was busy establishing ‘Religious Studies’ as an academic discipline in the United States and lobbying for reform of humanities education in his native China.⁴³ ‘Sufi Studies’ is one central branch or chapter in this broader ‘Religious Studies’ story;

41 See Tu Weiming, ‘Dialogical Civilisation and Qiu-tongcunyi in a New Axial Age’, 257-258.

42 See, for instance, Tu Weiming, ‘The Humanities and Higher Education’ (‘Renwenxue yu Gaodeng Jiaoyu’), in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, ed. Li Ruohong, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), 310-336.

43 See Tu Weiming, ‘Religious Studies: From Divinity Dogma to Humanistic Learning’ (‘Zongjiaoxue: Cong Shenxue dao Renwenxue’), in *Tu Weiming Sixiang Xuejie Wenxuan*, eds. Kong Xianglei and Chen Peiyu, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2014), 442-448.

Tu's Spiritual Humanism could be defined as the connection, or infinite possible connections, *between* this 800-plus-year journey of Sufism and the myriad other individual journeys which have comprised, and will continue to comprise, human spiritual experience. It should go without saying that an important part of 'Sufi Studies' will remain the unearthing and philological analysis of identifiably 'Sufi' historical texts, for which years of specialist training will ideally be required. Nevertheless, like all other humanistic disciplines, Sufi Studies distinguishes itself from microbiology and even the sociology of religion -i.e. the natural and social sciences in general- insofar as its social utility cannot, as Thomas Nagel reminds us, be justified solely in terms of elite exchanges in specialist academic journals: 'Moral and political progress is inevitably more difficult than scientific progress, since it cannot occur in the minds of a few experts but must be realized in the collective lives of millions; but it does happen.'⁴⁴

Understanding Sufi Studies as a contributor to this global spiritual humanist fund requires a break with a certain scientific understanding of humanistic inquiry arising from the very success of scientific specialisation in the post-Enlightenment world. Such cantonisation of the humanities is a prime example of the worst of the 'Enlightenment mentality' that Tu has spent a lifetime trying to overcome; the temptation to ape the 'methodologies' of the natural and social sciences in order to compete with them for funding and general prestige has been clear to Tu for more than half a century:

I have discovered that the humanities as a whole, including Confucian Studies, are

⁴⁴ Thomas Nagel, 'Pecking Order: John Gray's *The Silence of Animals*', *New York Times*, July 5, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/books/review/john-grays-silence-of-animals.html>, (accessed May 16, 2021).

losing a tremendous amount of internal heat. This is not a law of nature. There are many reasons for this waste of energy: one is the general marginalisation of intellectuals and humanistic inquiry, which translates as a measurable lack of money; as resources dwindle, funds that remain are ever more greedily coveted. The humanities have not been strong enough; they have been unable to maintain a dialogue *inter pares* in the face of an onslaught from the natural sciences, economics and management studies, which now suck up the lion's share of collective gold. Internally, moreover, the humanities are hopelessly divided -a scenario unlikely to improve without a more generous share of resources.⁴⁵

Adonis may not qualify as part of the narrow Sufi Studies canon (and as a card-carrying Confucian, Tu Weiming is even less likely to feature), but each represents, in his own way and in his own distinctive voice, an important point of contact between the Sufi Studies community and the wide world beyond, of which Sufi Studies is, or should always aspire to be, an organic part. Prominent figures in Sufi Studies like Hossein Nasr, Gholamreza Aavani, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata and others have accepted Tu's various invitations to Islamic-Confucian dialogue over several decades,⁴⁶ but his wider embrace of Spiritual Humanism as a world ethos challenges the Sufi Studies community to broaden its sources of foreign nourishment well beyond Confucianism: the names Cervantes,

⁴⁵ Tu Weiming, 'The "Original Way": Cultural Conservatism and the Confucian Spirit' ("Yuandao": Ruxue yu Wenhua Baoshouzhuyi'), in Tu Weiming, *Wenming Duihua zhong de Rujia*, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), 133.

⁴⁶ The Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University is preparing to release two volumes of Tu's dialogues since 2000 with full transcripts of various conversations with leading philosophers and religious scholars from around the world.

Rimbaud and countless other individual voices from the history of European and World Literature all fall within the eventual purview of ‘Sufi Studies’ so understood, along with myriad other philosophical, religious, musical and miscellaneous humanistic sources.

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