This book extends research I began with *The Tao of Islam* and continued, with the help of my two collaborators, in *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light*. In *The Tao of Islam*, I investigated basic Muslim concepts about ultimate reality, the cosmos, and the human soul in light of the correlative thinking that is typical of the Chinese intellectual tradition and especially the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). By “correlative thinking” (the term used by Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilization in China*),¹ I mean the tendency to see harmony and complementary relationships among all things, conceptualized in terms like yin and yang, heaven and earth, male and female, light and dark. Benjamin Schwartz calls this typical Chinese approach to reading the world “correlative cosmology,” although, he says, “correlative anthropocosmology” might be more accurate.² Tu Weiming has often written about “anthropocosmism” to designate this holistic, correlative vision of Heaven, Earth, and Man.³ Anthropologists have pointed to diverse examples of correlative thinking in primal societies, but few scholars have bothered to point out that much of Islamic thought takes the same approach. The general trend has been to interpret Islam as another version of Semitic monotheism and to conceptualize its thinking in terms of categories derived from the modern study of Judaism and Christianity. I wrote *The Tao of Islam* to
suggest that there are other, perhaps more plausible, ways to look at
Islamic thought, and that these can be especially helpful in finding
bridges to non-Western civilizations.

In 1995 I discovered sophisticated Chinese-language expressions
of Islamic thought that took full advantage of the traditions of cor-
relative thinking on both the Islamic and the Chinese sides. That led
to my collaboration with Tu Weiming in exploring some of these
works. My husband, William C. Chittick, was happy to join with us
in our discussions and research. The first fruit of that collaboration
was *Chinese Gleams*, in which we translated two short Chinese trea-
tises, one by Wang Daiyu 王岱輿 and the other by Liu Zhi 劉智.
There I summarized what I had learned about the unique blend of
Confucianism and Islam that made its appearance in China in the
seventeenth century, most notably with Wang’s major work, *Zheng-
jiao zhenquan* 正教真詮 (The real commentary on the true teaching).

Given the paucity of secondary sources at our disposal when we
were working on *Chinese Gleams*, we had no real idea of the extent
of the influence of this school on Chinese Muslim society and the
tight relationships that bound its authors together. The gaping hole in
the secondary literature has begun to be filled by Zvi Ben-Dor
Benite’s groundbreaking study, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural
History of Muslims in Late Imperial China*, which provides a wealth
of information on the scholarly network and social institutions that
allowed this school to flourish. Liu Zhi himself is the focus of a re-
cent Ph.D. dissertation by James D. Frankel, who summarizes his re-
lationship with the Muslim and Chinese contexts, looks closely at his
second major work, *Tianfang dianli* 天方典禮 (Rules and proprie-
ties of Islam), and provides a thoughtful analysis of its contents and
its significance for Chinese Islam. Studies of Liu have also appeared
recently in Chinese and Japanese.

Our own interest in the Han Kitab has less to do with historical
context than with the intellectual content of the works. Anyone inter-
ested in the significance of religious and philosophical thought for
the human condition has much to learn from these books. All three of
us have been working for many years on the contemporary religious
and philosophical relevance of our respective specialties (Islam on
one side, Confucianism on the other). At the same time, we have
often engaged with the teachings of other traditions, sometimes through undergraduate teaching or discussion with colleagues, sometimes through international conferences, and recently through seminars aimed at dialogue between Confucian and Islamic thought. What we have found in the book translated here, Liu Zhi’s *Tianfang xingli* 天方性理 (Nature and principle in Islam), is a deep interpenetration of the Confucian and Islamic traditions, without any of the syncretism (with its negative connotations) mentioned by some of the secondary literature. For Liu and others of the perspective, the “dialogue of civilizations” or the “ecumenical vision” is part of their own persons and perspective. In reading him, we have learned a great deal about the invisible harmonies that bind together two major worlds of thought.

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