

# The Real Commentary on the True Teaching

## Self-Narrative

My ancestor was a native of Tianfang.<sup>1</sup> For various reasons he came to China as a tribute for Emperor Gao.<sup>2</sup> He edited fine and delicate affairs of astronomy and corrected mistakes and errors in the calculation of the calendar. He fathomed the height of the nine heavens and plumbed the depths of the nine seas. He surpassed the ancients, making not the slightest mistake. The Emperor's heart rejoiced and thought that if my ancestor had not received a real transmission of a true learning, he could not have reached this level. He finally conferred on him the official duty of the board of astronomy, solicited for him a dwelling place here [Nanjing], and granted him a remit for his labor in government service. So it remained throughout the dynasty. For three hundred years my ancestors became habituated to the customs of this land. I trace back the roots and investigate the origins so that I will not venture to forget about them.

I did not study the Confucian learning at a young age. By the time I became an adult, I could read the language only roughly, no more than for purposes of social intercourse and letter writing. When

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1. Tianfang 天房 means literally "heavenly house." Like the more common expression Tianfang 天方, "heavenly direction," it was used to designate the Kaabah specifically and the Islamic realm generally.

2. Gao 高 or Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 is the Hongwu Emperor 洪武帝 (1328–98), founder of the Ming dynasty. Muslim astronomy certainly played a role in his reign, but whether Wang Daiyu's remarks here represent anything more than a family legend is impossible to determine. See Benite, "The Marrano Emperor."

I reached the prime of life I was ashamed of my simple and rustic knowledge. I began to read the books on Nature and Principle and the histories, reading widely in the writings of the scholars of the various schools. When I penetrated a little into the general meaning of those books, I became aware that their arguments are strange and their ways different and mutually contradictory. If I measure them in terms of Islam,<sup>3</sup> the differences and distinctions are like those between heaven and earth. Regardless of my own ability, I dared use my words to clarify the utmost principle.

Sometimes I met with scholars face to face, and many discussions sprouted from that. They usually did not compete with me in my reasoning. The gentlemen who were gladly convinced all regretted that they had no ability to read the books of the true teaching.

Sometimes I was moved in the midst of the discussion and, on returning home, would select and record some of the discussions. Further, when I had spare time I wrote randomly. I gathered it all together over several years, and as a result consumed a great deal of paper and ink. After preserving the essentials and weeding out the vague, I was left with forty chapters. Within them the principles of the way are totally rooted in the Honorable Classic. I consulted with the canon and did not venture to follow my own feelings or to add or subtract even a little.

When I was among the various scholars, I was sometimes too extreme, but this is only because I also am human. I do not want to be seen as a bellicose man. What I mean is that belittling the illness of a sick person is not the same as giving medicine and applying acupuncture. But my conscience is unhappy, for compared to the classical canon of the midmost country Tianfang, what I have had access to in this country is only one ten-thousandth, or one one-hundred-thousandth. And what I have studied cannot be more than one one-hundredth or one one-thousandth of what I had access to. As for this book, it cannot be more than one tenth or one hundredth of what I have learned.

If I have put myself among the class of authors despite lacking qualifications, this is like a person who passes through the vast ocean, bringing back a single drop and considering it as the ocean. Will I not become the laughingstock of discerning men? But those among

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3. Throughout the text "Islam" translates *qingzhen* 清真, "pure and real."

my relatives and friends who are fond of me have forgotten that I am just a pebble. Actually they said that I am an unpolished, rare gem, and they conferred on me a wood engraving. I could not keep on refusing, so finally I placed myself among the class of authors. Alas!

Even though these arguments and writings are strictly matters of my own private person, the principles are the public affairs under heaven. If I were vainly to praise others in order to express my modesty, it would ruin the public principles under heaven and not allow them to be transmitted. Truly that is not my first intention.

Someone also said that the books of Islam are seldom seen by Confucians. My book is incomplete, so perhaps later scholars of noble aspiration will add to it, expanding on the teachings and going further. So I will probably be the opener of the field. Just as my ancestor gained the pleasure of the sage ruler by editing and correcting astronomy, perhaps I, though I lack in eloquence, may be able to open up and put forth the Ultimate Way. This may lead true and profound persons under heaven to neglect my scattered expressions and fully grasp the principles of the true teaching. Then I will not have betrayed my ancestor's purpose in coming from the West, nor will I have betrayed the continuation of the True Learning's virtues received from my grandfathers in successive generations, and thereby I will imitate my ancestors.

Thus have I stated at the beginning of this account the circumstances of my writing the book.

An old man of the Real Hui.  
Thoughtfully recorded by himself.

### Record of Questions and Answers

Once I had completed this book, a reader said: Your book will clarify the way. To talk about the way of Islam, however, is to make known clearly what is true and what is false. People can discriminate by themselves. What need is there to quote from other scholars and to argue with them? Is this not to make many enemies? If so, in the end no one will bear in mind your painstaking effort.

You should know that the teachings and the way of Islam serve to point the deluded back to the truth, to encourage people to do good, and to stop people from doing wrong. This is what the human

way should be. Without these actions, the human way will be defective. I have already acquired the real knowledge of the true learning, but if I do not talk about it, that will be concealing the way. Hence I wrote the book and talked about the learning. If I could not be completely sincere and earnest in doing so, I would not talk about anything.

In a similar manner, if a physician prescribes medicine without clearly informing the patient about the cause of the sickness and the location of the distress and suffering, the patient will certainly have doubts about the physician, thinking that he does not grasp the sickness and is giving medicine blindly. Even if he gives him cinnabar, he will dismiss it as trash. So also, when you see people sharing a house and fighting, unless you are simply wood and stone or a wicked and obstinate man, you will urgently wish to separate them.<sup>1</sup> Though I am a worthless man, how could I not wish that?

Someone else said: If we leave the schools of Buddhism and Daoism aside, the way of Confucianism is extensively broad and deeply subtle. The worthies of the Song Dynasty offered refined and purified views about Nature and Principle. You have quoted only superficial and extraneous arguments. You have certainly not sought deeply after their subtlety.

I answered: Even though affairs under heaven are not alike, there are not two principles. I do not take other scholars into account. I discuss only sameness and difference. A country has a ruler, a prefecture has a prefect, a state has a magistrate, a household has an elder, and the world has a Lord. The way is one. One after another the Confucian scholars have focused entirely on two issues: principle and vital-energy. On their account, countries and families could be governed without rulers and elders.

I discuss only what is different from our way. I have no leisure time to take into account shallowness and depth. If there is a difference on the shallow level, then the deeper one goes, the more will be the difference. The way of Confucius and Mencius for cultivating the body, regulating the family, and governing the country is the same as our way, so why would I presumptuously venture to discuss where it is right and wrong?

Someone else said: You have discussed the two doctrines [Buddhism and Daoism] deeply, and you have quoted many sayings from

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1. The sentence refers to Mencius 4.2.29.6.

them in your book. You have almost entered the school and the mystery. Why?

I said: There is nothing lacking in the classical canon of Islam, but there is no one outside the teaching who knows this. This is because our languages are different. I wrote and discussed using their expressions precisely to make our teachings comprehensive. All the borrowed expressions I used were because of my concern to show how the principles work. The expressions do not carry the same meaning, but if I had not borrowed them, how could I make clear that these two doctrines are different from ours?

Nonetheless, I am deeply ashamed that my learning is shallow and superficial, my words and expressions rustic and unpolished, and my chapters not in order. I tried as best I could, but I was not able to do any better. I could not reject arguing about the gist of the matter because I am afraid that the way has not been clarified. Hence I wanted to exhaust my heart in doing so. Can I not hope that people will have full faith and follow it?

Moreover, even Confucius talked about “making men know me and making men condemn me.”<sup>2</sup> Who am I? I do not presume to know their knowing and condemning. Even if I have some knowledge of it, it is impossible to examine it fully.

Thus I recorded the questions and answers so that those in this society who look kindly at my book will be informed about them.

Also thoughtfully recorded by Wang Daiyu.

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2. The quote is from Mencius (3.2.9.8), who says that after Confucius composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*chunqiu* 春秋), he said, “Yes, it is the Spring and Autumn [Annals] that will make men know me, and it is the Spring and Autumn that will make men condemn me.”