Ren and Imán: A Comparative Approach to Confucian and Islamic Virtues

Kenan Cetinkaya
PhD Candidate
Religion Department, Temple University
Philadelphia, PA, 19122, USA.
E-mail: kenancetinkaya@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper questions the possible inclination of the two terms' dialogical perspective. These terms are: ren (humaneness) and imán (faith). By comparing the two significant concepts in Confucianism and Islam, it is showed that even though they symbolize and articulate different virtues in their cultural context, their impacts on the other external virtues such as practicing the rituals and being a trustworthy believer are very similar. Their equally remarkable power on the external virtues which lead the believer toward being a harmonious member of society can be conceptualized as an instrument for dialogue between the Confucians and the Muslims.

Key Words: *Ren, Imán, dialogue, Islam, Confucianism*

Introduction

Islam and Confucianism are two of the five greatest religions of the world. Although representing two totally different worldviews[1], it is mostly in the ethical characteristics of these religions that we can find noteworthy similarities, which provide strong potential for dialogue among followers of these traditions. Islam, as explicitly representing monotheistic characteristics, asks its followers to be steadfast and righteous in their actions in the world which are determined and governed by the ultimate power, God (Allah). On the other hand, Confucianism basically does not talk about God as a concept, but rather about Heaven, which is not a personal power; its followers must be righteous and steadfast in their life. This distinction between a personal or impersonal ultimate power which creates and governs the universe is the first and foremost distinction between the religions, and it will determine my approach to analyzing the ethical concepts in them. In this paper, I will analyze the concept of *ren*, which is one of the most important (and also elusive) concepts of Chinese thought, its place in *Analects*, and its historical evolution in the history of the Confucian tradition. After examining its historical development, I will conclude my first discussion of *ren* with its place in contemporary Confucianism.

In the second part of this essay, I will identify a concept within Islam which holds the potential for a meaningful comparison with *ren (humaneness, love, benevolence etc.)*: this term is *imán (faith, belief etc.)*. By comparing the two significant concepts in Confucianism and Islam, I will show the fact that even though they symbolize and articulate different virtues in their cultural context, their impacts on the other external virtues such as practicing the rituals and being a trustworthy believer are very similar. Their equally remarkable power on the external virtues which lead the believer toward being a harmonious member of society can be conceptualized as an instrument for dialogue between the Confucians and the Muslims. This paper questions the possible inclination of the two terms' dialogical perspective.

Ren (仁) before Confucius

Ren etymologically consist of two letters: *Ren* 人 or "person" and *er* 二 or "two."[2] Hall and Ames state that *ren* is variously translated into modern English such as "benevolence", "love", "agape", "altruism", "kindness", "charity", "compassion", "magnanimity", "perfect virtue", "goodness", "human-heartedness", and "humanity".[3] The very wide range of the translation of *ren* into English supports the fact that *ren*, itself, keeps very deep and complex connotations in Confucianism. *Ren* in its earliest form was used, whether as (人) or (仁), in order to demonstrate a certain kind of virtue which the rulers have towards their people. However, even in this form we cannot find many instances in the ancient Chinese classics[4],

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[1] On the one hand Islam represents Monotheistic characteristics; on the other hand Confucianism has non-theistic character.

[2] This fact shows us in its very etymological core the concept has a bearing on its connotations and usage within the Confucian tradition. See Kim-chong Chong, *Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments* (Chicago : Open Court, 2007*)*, 125

[3] David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 112

[4] Wing-Tsit Chan, *The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of Jen,* Philosophy East and West 4 (1955): 296. Also, Xinzhong Yao states that it appears earliest in the Book of History as the character of (人) person. See Xingzhong Yao, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study of Jen and Agape* (UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1996*),* 70

which demonstrates that the term was not popular before the Spring and Autumn period (770 BCE-476 BCE).[5] Instead of *ren*, the concept of *li* (ritual) was the most accepted and highest virtue in ancient China.[6] Although other traditions[7] which appeared around Confucius's time generally tended to have a negative attitude towards the concept of *li*, Confucius himself valued it positively. He put a new meaning on *li* and understood it as a complementary virtue of *ren*. I will discuss *ren* and its relationship with *li* and other Confucian concepts in the Analects.

The concept of *ren* during the tenth through seventh centuries BCE gradually became important and its implication started to comprise a range of virtues such as loving others, filial piety to parents, and doing good to others.[8] In this shift, we see the crucial effect of the fall of the Shang Dynasty and later decline of the Zhou Dynasty. Seeing that rituals or the external expression of virtues were not enough to keep the state from decline, people tended to find inner virtues such as love and filial piety.[9] This shows us that at the time of Confucius there was a congenial environment for him to express his major thesis by stressing the inner virtue of *ren*. In this aspect, as Chan points out, Confucius can be seen as a transmitter of an earlier tradition, but also the creator of new a perspective.[10] What makes Confucius' treatment of the term stand out is that he made it the highest moral principle[11] and central theme of his conversations.[12] Confucius basically developed *ren* by taking it from its ancient environment and ascribing it other very well established ancient traditional ethical sources. By doing this he differentiates himself from other masters in his time because he remolded *ren* to incorporate other virtues within a humanistic spirit.[13] Therefore, *ren* in Confucius' perception becomes a virtue which can be applicable to all human beings. Chan points out this fact

> "Furthermore, instead of perpetuating the ancient understanding of *ren* as a particular virtue, he [Confucius] transformed it into general virtue."[14]

Ren in the Analects

In the Analects the term is used 105 times in 58 chapters out of 499 chapters,[15] which demonstrates that around ten percent of the Analects is devoted to a discussion of *ren*. Although *ren* is used that much in the Analects, it is very difficult to find a specific definition for the concept. Instead of talking directly about *ren*, Confucius mentions the person who has or does not have *ren*. Nevertheless, in many cases Confucius gives an answer to a question regarding the meaning of the term, but he is not consistent about giving a clear answer to questions from different disciples. That is why in order to make a comprehensible discussion of the concept and its historical development, we have to at least define what it is not. In addition, if we can explain *ren* in relation to other cardinal virtues valued by Confucius, we will have a much clearer idea about *ren.* This in turn will help us to compare it with the Islamic concept of *imán in* terms of its relationship to other cardinal virtues appreciated in the *Quran* and *Hadith*.

Even though Confucius neither presented an exact explanation nor a comprehensive definition, there are several instances when Confucius speaks directly about the meaning of *ren*. However, the answers that Confucius gives present a very wide range of meanings regarding *ren*. His different answers to the same question are understood by scholars as indicating the inclusiveness of the concept,[16] as the application of *ren* into different situations[17] and building a perception of *ren* as comprising a process of never-ending self cultivation.[18] Also, as it is seen in Islamic tradition regarding the sayings of Muhammad, the answers must have a certain relationship with the one who asks the question. Confucius may give different answers to different disciples in order to show them in what way they are weak in relation to the acquisition or possession of *ren*.

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[55] Hall and Ames, 111

[6] Liu Yuli, The *Unity Of Rule And Virtue : A Critique of a Supposed Parallel Between Confucian Ethics and Virtue* (Singapore : Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 113

[7] Daoism, Mohism and Legalism

[8] Yao,70

[9] Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy (*Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1963*)*, 3

[10] Chan, *ibid,* 17

[11] Zhang Danian, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy,* translated and edited by Edmund Ryden(New Haven, Conn. : Yale University Press, 2002), 287

[12] Chan, *The Evolution of the Chinese Concept Jen,* 296

[13] Yao, 70; Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 14-15

[14] Chan,16. However, in many instances of the Analects we can see that he uses *ren* as particular virtue (benevolence) also. See, for instance, Analects, 4:2, 6:21, 9:28.

[15] Chan, *The Evolution of the Confucian Concept Jen,* 296

[16] *Ibid*, 298

[17] *Ibid,* 303

[18] Chong, *Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments,*19

We can divide these characterizations of *ren* under two main categories: those that deal with an inner perspective and those that deal with a social perspective. Although the second category that I make gives the impression of being an external virtue, its starting place is with *ren* as an inner virtue. There can be external virtues, but these stem from *ren*. On the other hand, the one who has *ren* also possesses those other "external" virtues.[19] Although at the beginning it seems that some scholars such as Herbert Fingarette do not accept the *ren* as an inner virtue, we can understand their rejection when we elaborate their major points.

As Ames and Hall simply summarize, Herbert Fingarette does not accept the inner perspective of *ren* in order to stress its social characteristic and to reject the general tendency among Confucian scholars toward psychologizing the term.[20] According to Fingarette, since *ren* is conceptualized as an inner personal dimension, reductionism of the term is unavoidable. This very core Confucian term which emphasizes the individual, the subjective, and the character is generally translated into the Western world in psychological notion. However, *ren* in the analects has no connection with the inner condition. He says:

> "The thing we must not do is to psychologize Confucius's terminology in the Analects. The first step in seeing that this is so is to recognize that *jen* and its associated virtues, and *li* too, are not connected in the original text with the language of will, emotion, and inner states. The move from *jen* as referring us to a person on to *jen* as "therefore" referring us to his inner mental or psychic condition or processes finds no parallel in the Analects. Certainly there is no systematic or even unsystematic elaboration of any such connections.[21]

What Fingarette rejects is that the wrong categorizations of the term oversimplify its wide range of usage in the Confucian tradition. He is right to stress the danger of the popularization of *ren's* usage in the western world into a psychological term. However, as Tu-Weiming discusses[22], instead of stressing its one side, we have to understand *ren* in both the inner and external condition without putting it into psychological categories.

Inner Perspective

Ren is seen as a virtue which can be attained only by personal work, and its source comes only from personal enactments; not from outside factors like the actions of one's masters.[23] In this regard, Confucius describes *ren* as "it is to overcome to self and turn to propriety (*li*)"[24] Because it totally depends on the inner situation of the person, Confucius does not mention very concretely how a person can reach *ren*. However, he usually describes the one who has it, as in the following:

> "Those with virtue will always have something to say, but those with things to say are not always virtuous. Those with *ren* are always brave, but those who do brave things are not always *ren*."

Social Perspective

In order to understand *ren* more clearly we have to articulate its relationship with other cardinal virtues which are valued by Confucius. In this discussion we will focus on three key concepts: *Li*, *shu*, and *chün tzu*. Our analysis of r*en* and its dynamic connection with these concepts will clarify its external/social perspective.

Ren and *Li*

One of the most important reflections of having *ren* is *li* (ritual propriety, courtesy). Confucius views *li* as very important when it is practiced with an attention to the inner meaning of the rite. One of his answers to the question regarding *ren* is that "it is to overcome to self and turn to propriety (*li*)."[25] In another instance, Confucius does not see one of his followers as having *ren,* because he turns away from the practice of mourning three years after his parent's death.[26] Thus, filial piety, which is a practice with pre-Confucian origins, is considered as one of the expressions of having *ren*.

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[19] For instance Confucius says in 14.5 "Those with *ren* are always brave, but those who do brave things are not always *ren*." Although he percepts courage as a valued virtue which can be seen as an expression of *ren*, he does not understand it identical with *ren*.
[20] Ames and Halls, 112
[21] Hebert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred,* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 43
[22] Below, I discussed in detail Tu-Weiming's perception of ren.
[23] Tu-Weiming equally emphasizes this perspective of ren in his discussion about ren and its relation with li, Tu-Weiming, "The Creative Tension Between *Jen* and *Li*," in *Humanity and Self Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thoughts*, (Berkeley : Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 9
[24] Analects, 12:1
[25] Analects, 12:1
[26] Anaclets 17:21

For this reason, although there are very strong critiques about *li* as having an opposite function, *ren* and *li* in the Analects are perceived as two side of the same coin by contemporary scholars.[27] Thus, *li* is a complementary virtue when it is practiced by its spirit, which is *ren*.   One of the very detailed answers to the question about *ren* is found in 17:6 as "one who can practice five everywhere under Heaven would be *ren*… He said, Respect, magnanimity, fidelity, diligence, kindness. If he is respectful, he will not be snubbed. If he is magnanimous, he will win the multitude. If he is faithful, others will do their duty for him. If he is diligent, he will have success. If he is kindly, he will be able to employ others." This reference from the Analects also strengthens the fact that ren has a social perspective. Without being in society and having a good relationship with the people, we cannot talk about a person who has *ren*.

Ren and *Shu*

In social relationship the Golden Rule plays a very important role. As we see this principle in many religious and ideological traditions,[28] according to common scholarship the earliest form that we have is recorded in the Analects.[29] Confucius regards the Golden Rule as a method of *ren*[30] and the character of the one who has *ren*.[31] The Golden Rule in the Analects is stated as *shu* (empathy). In this form in the Analects, we can find negative and positive patterns of the Golden Rule. For instance, in 14:34 and 6:28 it is mentioned positively while in 15:23 and 14:7 it is recorded in negative forms. Therefore, in personal relationship the person who has *ren* must make empathy in order to find the best way of communication with people. *Shu* and *ren* are, in this aspect, very closely related virtues in the Analects.

Ren and the *Chün tzu*

In the Analects, Confucius almost identifies *chün tzu* (gentleman) with *ren*. He praises the gentleman and shows *ren* as a potential characteristic of gentlemen. Gentleman, which was the concept shows the social statue before Confucius, gains a new meaning in Confucius' Analects. *chün tzu* the ideal human being who practices li and shows filial piety and work for getting *ren*. Thus, Confucius puts this ancient social concept in a very ethical position. Although *ren* and *chün tzu* has very strong relationship, *ren* is a much higher virtue than merely being a Gentleman, which opens up the possibility that one could be a gentleman without having *ren*. On the other hand, he expresses the impossibility of the *small person*[32] as possessing *ren*.[33]

Ren after Confucius

The evolution of *ren* from Confucius to contemporary scholarship is a very broad subject which exceeds the scope of our project. Hence, we will touch on three important figures after Confucius in order to overview *ren*'s historical development. Mencius, Zhu Xi and Tu-Weiming represent three different eras of Confucian philosophy. The basic tendency in the development of the term is that the very simple and action centered human virtue gradually becomes a universal reality which encompasses everything. We see this fact especially in the writings of the Neo-Confucian philosophers.

The concept of the *ren* which was introduced by Confucius to Chinese society is regarded as a foremost virtue and discussed by his followers, but Mencius was the one who made it a more universal and natural principle. As we see Confucius did not use *ren* as referring to an ultimate love towards others but conceptualizes love as one of its characteristics. Chong, in his book *Early Confucian Ethics,* expresses a similar assessment by rejecting the idea that Confucius established a universal principle on the concept of *ren*.[34] According to Chong, Confucius' main concern was the practice of *ren*. This approach supports our analysis of *ren* in the Analects. *Ren* becomes a philosophically elaborated and systemized virtue in the writings of Mencius. Mencius' main argument about *ren* depends on his philosophical approach to human nature, which according to him is intrinsically good. According to Shu-hsien Liu, Mencius was the first in the Confucian school to assert that human nature is good.[35]

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[27] Liu Yuli, 120, Chong, 19. Also, Mencius and Neo-Confucians understood *ren* and its connection with *li* with other cardinal virtues such as *yi* (righteousness) and *zhi* (wisdom). Therefore, *ren* and *li* are perceived in a strong relationship by the early Confucians also.

[28] Leonard Swidler, "Toward A Universal Declaration of A Global Ethic*"* in *For All Life: Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic,* ed. Leonard Swidler,(Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999), 31

[29] Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16. However, Leonard Swidler states that the oldest version of the Golden Rule might be the one in the Zoroaster texts dated to B.C.E 625-551. See, Swidler, 19.

[30] Analects 6:28

[31] Analects, 12:2

[32] The opposite personality of the *Chün tzu* was the Xiǎorén, small person, which is depicted as much materialistic, self-interested and superficial.

[33] Analects: 14:7: "The master said: A gentleman who was not also *ren*: such things have been. But there never was a little man who was *ren*."

[34] Chong, 26

[35] Shu-hsien Liu, *Understanding Confucian philosophy : Classical and Sung-Ming* (Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 1998), 34

The very well-known example that he gives sums up what he means by discussing that. He says:

> *"If people witness a child about to fall down a well, they would experience a feeling of fear and sorrow instantaneously without an exception. This feeling is generated not because they want to gain friendship with the child's parents, nor because they look for the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor because they don't like to hear the child's scream of seeking help."[36]*

Mencius' stress on the goodness of human nature also determines his perception of *ren*. Accordingly, *ren* naturally exists in every human being.[37] However, only the ones who struggle to reach it can attain it. By discussing its intrinsic feature similar to others,[38] especially to y*i* (righteousness), Mencius developed the idea that *ren* is the inherent in the mind of the man.[39] By doing this he gives a very metaphorical meaning to *ren* and brings it to a very high philosophical position.

Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE), who is accepted as one of the most effective Neo-Confucians,[40] is in agreement with many of his contemporaries by conceptualizing *ren* as the fundamental essence of the universe. The starting point of Xi's discussion, which he discusses very clearly in his essay named *"A Treatise on Ren,"* is that

> "The mind of heaven and earth is to produce things. In the production of living beings and things, they obtain the mind of heaven and earth as their mind. Therefore, with regard to the character of the mind, although it embraces and penetrates all fully and completely, it may be summed up in one word, namely, *ren* or humanity."[41]

Thus, Xi builds up his philosophy on the fact that the metaphysical mind of heaven and earth has certain connections with the human's mind. According to Xi, the four moral attributes of the mind of heaven and earth (*Yuan* (origin), *heng* (beauty), *li* (order), *zhen* (potentiality))[42] affect the four seasons and also man's four basic virtues (*ren, yi, li, zhi*) which had been discussed by early Confucians. These four virtues of man can appear in the social context as love (*ren*), respect (*yi*), appropriateness (*li*), and discrimination (zhi) between right and wrong. Moreover, according to Xi, *ren,* or love, encompasses all other virtues similar to the way the first virtue (*Yuan*) of the mind of heaven and earth which encompasses the other three virtues. Therefore, *ren* is the mind of the man and *yuan* is the mind of heaven and earth. Consequently, the mind of man and the mind of heaven and earth are identical. According to Xi, the mind of man, *ren*, is the principle of Love.[43] Xi's discussion about the metaphysical structure of the universe and its direct relationship with *ren* brings him to the conclusion that *ren* is the fundamental essence of all other virtues as well as the universe.[44]

Therefore, the highest basic human virtue according to Confucius, which is expressed generally by human actions, was developed into the highest principle of heaven and earth. This very metaphysical approach to *ren* takes its place in twentieth century scholars' viewpoints with *ren's* social and personal role as cultivating the personal morality and social ethic. The main reason for this tendency is to find answers from Confucianism to the social and personal moral collapse in the contemporary world which appeared basically because of materialism versus spirituality. According to this twentieth century reviving, Confucianism can be used as the new worldview which exceeds the borders of China and it can give answers to global problems.[45] One of the effective Confucian scholars Tu-Weiming represents this tendency in his works.

Tu-Weiming, as a contemporary Confucian scholar and philosopher, emphasizes *ren's* inwardness, its application to social life and to a person's self cultivation. According to him, *ren* must be understood with two facts: self-cultivation and proper behavior in society. *Ren*, which has been developed in different stages for more than two millenniums, maintains a very rich and deep meaning in terms of keeping a potential model for self-cultivation. *Ren* as described in the Analects is not something that man can obtain from outside, rather "it is a principle of inwardness".[46]

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[36] The Book of Mencius, 2A:6
[37] Cho-Yun Hsü, "The Unfolding of Early Confucianism: The Evolution from Confucius to Hsun-tzu" in *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition* ed. Irene Eber, (New York : Macmillan, 1986), 29
[38] These four virtues are ren, yi, li and zhi (wisdom), See: Shu-hsien Liu, 47-78
[39] Hsü, 29-30
[40] Siu-chi Huang, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of the Song and Ming Periods*(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press,1999), *159*
[41] Huang, 156
[42] *Ibid*, 156
[43] *Ibid*, 157
[44] *Ibid* 157
[45] John Berthrong, "Boston Confucianism: The third wave of Global Confucianism*," Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40/1-2 (2003): 39
[46] Tu-Weiming, 9

Tu-Weiming points out the fact that *ren* is about an inner effort toward the desires in order to fulfill them in a moral structure.[47] *Ren* is not shaped by *li* or the ritual performances, but it gives the spirit to rituals. Therefore, *ren* according to him is the highest-order concept in Confucianism. However, we have to understand *ren* with *li*, which implies its social role and its active perspective. By doing this, Tu-Weiming supports the idea that *ren's* social perspective must be stressed in order to perceive it in a proper way. He criticizes Neo-Confucians for being under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism because of their great focus on *ren's* metaphysical or inner perspective. He states that

> "A Confucianist may practice meditation, as so many Neo-Confucianists, probably under the influence of Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism, actually did, but in addition he has to actualize his inner strength, so to speak, in a given social condition."[48]

Li plays a very significant role in actualizing the *ren* into social context. By practicing *li* a Confucian "does not refrain from involvement in the world."[49] Therefore, we can say that Tu-Weiming basically focuses on *ren*'s role in self-cultivation by emphasizing its direct connection with the concept of *li*.

Islamic Virtue

In order to make an appropriate analysis and comparison of Islamic analogues to *ren*, we have to draw out some of the essential characteristics of Islamic theology on human nature, which show very different perspectives on humanity, divinity and ethics. Islam, in contrast to Confucianism, shows its monotheistic character in all of its principles. Unlike Confucianism, the personal Ultimate Reality, Allah, has the exclusive authority over every creature.[50] Existence, knowledge, ethics, good and evil, etc. all comes from God.[51] In his creation, there is infinite wisdom and goodness. He is omnipresent and omniscient with his ultimate power, and the ultimate reason behind everything. The reason he created humanity is to let them know him; hence, love and worship him.[52] That is why he creates human beings at their best, as the perfect pattern of creation;[53] then when they did evil deeds God reduced them to the lowest of the low.[54] The exception lies in those who believe and who act righteously.[55] Therefore, it can be said that the Islamic perspective of human beings is that they depend totally on God's creation and his will. Seeing life as a testing area, Muslims are asked to follow the instructions given by the prophets who have been chosen in their community by God.

There are basically five common characteristics of prophets:[56] trustworthiness, infallibility, communication of God's message, righteousness, and intelligence. Being protected by Allah from any kind of sin, they are perfect human beings and the highest example for their communities as well as humanity as large. The Quran states this fact in Chapter 12:111: "There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding." The ones who follow the prophets and their teachings are on the right path and will be rewarded by God in the hereafter. Therefore, the individual is responsible in his/her actions to God and will be rewarded by God in the hereafter. In this aspect, the highest virtue in the universe is *imán* , or faith (belief) in God and the acknowledgment of his authority. Therefore, *shirq* (worshipping anything other than God) is an unforgivable sin in the Quran.[57] Can we compare faith with *ren*? In what aspects might they be parallel?

Imán in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*[58]

Imán, which is usually translated into English as belief or to believe, in the Arabic language consists of the ن- ا -م letters which means "to be peace in oneself, to be safe, to feel no tribulation in oneself."[59] *Imán* , according to Fazlur Rahman, "is an act of the heart, a decisive giving oneself up to God and His Message and gaining peace and security and fortification against tribulation."[60]

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[47] *Ibid*, 6
[48] *Ibid*, 11
[49] *Ibid*, 12
[50] Quran 78:37
[51] Quran 9 *Kitabu'l- Imán*:51
[52] Quran 51:56
[53] Quran 95:4
[54] Quran 95:5
[55] Quran 95:6,
[56] Fethullah Gulen, *Essentials of the Islamic Faith,* (Fairfax, Va. : The Fountain, 2000), 205
[57] Quran 4:48
[58] Hadith is the sayings of Muhammad other than Quran.
[59] Fazlur Rahman, "Some Key Ethical Concepts in the Quran", *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 11/2 (1983): 170-1
[60] Rahman, 171

Fazlur Rahman states that in the Quran, *imán* appears in different forms such as being safe from danger, peace and safety, to follow someone, to have faith and trust in something.[61] *Imán* comes from knowledge but also more than a matter of knowledge. The function of the heart in terms of belief (faith) is stressed in the Quran and the Hadith, which is always under the guidance of God. In the very well known saying of Muhammad, he explains *imán* as "'that you affirm Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day."[62] *Imán* is mostly stated with *amel* (action, ritual) in the Quran in the forms of "those who believe and do righteous deeds."[63] This fact shows that belief and action are regarded equally in the Quran. Similar to Quranic statements, Prophet Muhammad himself expresses the importance of *imán* and *amel* in his many sayings. For instance, in terms of the relationship of *imán* and *amel* he states that "Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the nights."[64]

According to this *hadith*, it is obvious that by worshiping very often Muslims can strengthen their faith. Thus, we can conclude that in the Quran and Hadith, *imán* is understood as a matter of mind and heart. It has a direct connection with man's actions also. Unlike *ren* in the Analects, *imán* in the Quran has much clearer implications. However, the perception of the one who has the *imán* in the Quran and the Hadith is very obscure as the one who has *ren* in the Analects. For instance, Muhammad became so angry to one of his followers, because he harmed an unbeliever even after his confession of faith. The companion's answer was that he was afraid and therefore converted into Islam. Muhammad's answer was very clear: "Did you open his heart?" He asked this question three times.[65] This *hadith* is understood as an arbiter of Muslims' relationship with other Muslims. Nobody can know whether a person has faith or not, and *imán* is a matter between only a person and God.

Imán after Muhammad

Imán after the death of Muhammad and in later traditions is understood in different ways. These theological discussions were made by early Muslim theologians very harshly and widely all around the Muslim lands until the thirteenth century. A summary of the general definitions made by Muslim theologians is:
-According to early Sunni theologians it is the confirmation of the heart.
-The knowledge that the heart has about God, the messenger and Islam.
-Confession is through speaking.
For other Islamic denominations affirmation is by the heart and acting accordingly.[66]

After the end of the theological school's discussion around the thirteenth century, the discussion of *imán* became an object for Sufi masters.[67] Their general discussions were about the concept of *insan al-kamil* (Perfect Human) and its relationship with God. The question why does God create humanity? is one of the crucial questions that they were trying to find a satisfactory answer to. The short answer we get from the Quran is because he wants people to know him and worship him. Moreover, the strong tradition reports that Muhammad says that "The All Merciful created Adam in his image,"[68] which has parallels in the Bible. Muslim scholars usually understand this saying in terms of God's attributes.[69] Said Nursi, a contemporary Muslim scholar, states that God created human beings as the highest level of creation, because human beings embody more of God's attributes than other creatures. He states his views in a very interesting language:

> "...man is such an antique work of art of Almighty God. He is a most subtle and graceful miracle of His power whom He created to manifest all his Names and their inscriptions, in the form of a miniature specimen of the universe. If the light of belief enters his being, all the meaningful inscriptions on him may be read. As one who believes, he reads them consciously, and through that relation, he causes others to read them.

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[61] Rahman, 170-1
[62] Sahih al-Bukharî, *Kitabu'l- Imán* , 37
[63] For instance see Quran 25:70;26:277;103:1-3; 5:93
[64] Sahih al-Bukharî, *Kitabu'l- Imán*, 29
[65] Sahih al-Muslim, *Imán* , 237
[66] Elmalili Hamdi Yazir, *Hak Dini Kuran Dili*, vol. l, (Istanbul: Eser Nesriyat ve Dagitim, III. Edition, 1979) 181-186
[67] Jamal Elias, "God", in the *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* ed. Jamal Elias (Oxford : Oneworld, 2010), 165
[68] Bukharî, Isti'zân, 1
[69] Or God's ninety nine names in the hadith, the most beautiful names in the Quran. Jamal Elieas articulates this when he says: "There are many variant of Sufi model, but all they draw a distinction between God's essence (dhat, zat) and attributes (sifat). God's essence definitionally unknowable, existing beyond description and dimension. God is made know through his attributes, which render him comprehensible, and although Sufi thinkers maintain that God is, in fact, a combination of essence and attributes, at face value most writings treat the divine essence as the "identity" of God." Elias, Jamal, 167

> That is to say, the dominical art in man becomes apparent through meanings like, "I am the creature and artifact of the All-Glorious Maker. I manifest His mercy and munificence." That is, belief, which consists of being connected to the Maker, makes apparent all the works of art in man. Man's value is in accordance with that Dominical art, and by virtue of being a mirror to the Eternally Besought One."[70]

Rejection of God's existence and therefore being his vicegerent on the earth destroys man's role as the highest mirror of God in the universe. Nursi says:

> "But unbelief dismisses them from their rank of being mirrors, officials changed with duties, and bearing meanings, and reduces them to the level of futility and being the play-things of chance."[71]

That is why humans are depicted as the vicegerents of God on earth. The more one keeps God's attributes, the more one becomes perfect. What is essential for humanity to obtain these attributes depends on perfect faith in God. Therefore, faith is the first and foremost virtue that a person must have. Elias points out the importance of the *iman* in the Sufi tradition

> "Believing in the concept of *tawhid,* which Muslims are suppose to do as cardinal doctrine, can be understood to constitute the affirmation of God's unity, making the individual Muslim an active participant in God's ongoing uniqueness rather than a passive believer in an existing fact. In so doing, the individual believer, as God's representative in creation, helps assure that God continues to be known as an enigma that is simultaneously beyond all need and intimately mindful of his creation, immanent as well as transcendent."[72]

Moreover, especially in the Sufi tradition of Islam we can find the concept of cleanliness of heart, which is very essential and required for reaching perfection at the human level. Cleanliness of heart means devoting one's feelings, thoughts and life for the sake of God and not having any love other than God.[73]

In an analogy to the Confucian tradition, *ren* and faith become identical in terms of representing the inner statue of man and the basic reason of the existence of man and the universe. Also, gentleman and perfect human become identical in terms of representing the virtue's external character and embodying the one who has the virtue. The evolution of *ren* and *imán* in Confucianism and Islam shows some important parallels: both at the core text are expressed as a human virtue. Later, they become a universal law for the existence of the humans in particular and the universe in general. In addition, both virtues have a strong connection with the universe/nature itself.

Faith requires good deeds in life, which entails believers to do good deeds on earth. Without perfect faith, rituals or relationships with others do nothing to help one become a perfect human. Thus, it can be said that the one who have *imán* acts in good ways in relation to others, but one who acts in a good way might not have *imán*. *Imán* similar to *ren's* role in later Neo-Confucian's discussions was perceived by the Sufis as the highest virtue in the universe and it is an open-ended principle because God is infinite. Because faith is a matter of the heart, there is no certain form which the believer must act. Therefore, *imán* requires from its possessor to act according to whatever situation he/she faces. Therefore, when companions of Muhammad asked him about who is the best among the people, he answered differently to each questioner. In one instance he said that it is the one who obeys his/her parents, while in another instance he said that it is the one who maintains consistency in his/her prayers, and so on.[74] This fact, similar to *ren's* multiple applications, indicates faith's broad range and its multiple applications to different situations.

Conclusion (*Ren* and *Imán*)

Ren and *Imán* basically have two different dimensions: inner and social. In terms of inner dimensions, there are very clear distinctions between the terms. On the one hand, *ren* is the ultimate virtue of Confucianism which can be reached by personal enactment and does not contain any personal godly power to lead its possessor towards a good life. On the other hand, *imán* is an essential virtue which is given to the believer by God in order to let him understand and love God.

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[70] Said Nursi, *Words,* trans. by Sukran Vahide, http://www.risaleinur.us/read/?art=2879&t=The+Twenty-Third+Word (accessed in April 25, 2010)

[71] Nursi, *ibid*

[72] Elias, 181

[73] 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani, *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms*, 24

[74] For instance, the one who learn and teach Quran is the best among people, Bukharî, *Fadhail-ul Quran,* 21; the one who has politeness is the best among people Bukharî, *Adab*, 38; the one who has good attitudes toward people is the best among people, Tirmidhi, *Menaqib*, 85.

Although *imán* is about one's heart and inner virtue, which cannot be interfered with by outsiders, it is God who bestows it on his servants. *Ren*, in contrast, is a virtue gained only by personal work and enactment. Although *Heaven* is the ultimate source of all virtues it is passive in terms of giving it to man.   There are strong similarities in the inner aspect of *ren* and *imán*. First, both are part of a never-ending process. Because God is infinite, the belief that a person can deepen him/herself to an infinite degree by *imán* depends on a personal relationship with God. Likewise, *ren* is an open-ended process, which depends on a person's own development. From the social perspective, we find many strong similarities.

First, both virtues require action on the part of their possessors. *Li*, righteousness, filial piety, etc. are virtues which are compatible with *ren's* external dimension. If someone has *ren* then it is clear that he is righteous, he honors people, and practices *li*. Without <u>ren</u> embodied in *li*, other virtues remain lacking. Therefore, <u>ren</u> is the complementary spirit of ritual actions and interpersonal relations. Equally, *Imán* requires believers to act in a good way and have a strong relationship with people. Because of this reason, in many places *imán* is spoken of together with action, which shows us how *imán* and action (its external dimension) are so deeply linked. To conclude, we can say that although *ren* and *imán* represent different religious traditions, their external dimensions have many parallels. This correspondence is an important instrument in order to construct positive bridges between Muslims and Confucians. The external dimensions of the central virtues of these traditions can lead members of these two communities to live together peacefully.

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