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THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY: TOSHIHIKO IZUTSU'S SEMANTIC HERMENEUTICS OF THE QUR'ĀNIC *WELTANSCHAUUNG*

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Introduction

Toshihiko Izutsu introduces semantic structural analysis to study the structures of the Qur'ānic worldview. According to this theory of analysis, each language contains a peculiar *weltanschauung* which causes its speakers to view the world in a way different from the speakers of other languages. Thus by analytic study of the conceptual key-terms of a given language, it is possible to grasp the *weltanschauung* of the people who use that language as a tool of conceptualizing and interpreting the world in which they live. He employs this semantic theory to examine how the Qur'ānic key-terms and its particular linguistic categorization of nonlinguistic reality represent subjectively its *weltanschauung* and its vision of reality. Such semantic approach to the Qur'ān indicates that its Arabic language is internally coherent, a self-sufficient system of words into which all words have been integrated with an entirely new systemic interpretation; yet it is culturally and historically conditioned, from *Jāhili* (pre-Islamic) period to Qur'ānic era, and thus it is a subjective elaboration of reality. The focus of the present study is to examine critically from ethical and theological perspectives the semantic method Izutsu applies to the Qur'ānic key-concepts in his two works, *God and Man in the Qur'an* and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*.

Semantics as a discipline within linguistics or philosophy of language covers issues involving the meaning, significance, interpretation and understanding of language. It is the study of the meaning of word and its linguistic development by classifying and

examining changes in meaning and form. The primary objective of semantic theory is to provide an account of semantic structure of a language.¹ The type of semantic theory which Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) espoused in developing the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung* has its origin in Western linguistic discourse.

Born and nurtured against Japanese classical culture of Zen Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and Shintoism, Izutsu's research activities cover a wide range of world cultures, including Arabia, Europe, Persia, India, China and Japan. As Makino Shinya noted, Izutsu's basic interest is on the "relationship between philosophical thinking and mysticism" and his method of research has always been linguistically or semantically oriented, founded on Araya-consciousness of meaning and semantics.²

Izutsu is undoubtedly a leading scholar of Islamic thought in modern history. He is considered to be the first Japanese to write on Islam in a European language³ and greatest scholar of Islamic thought that Japan has ever produced.⁴ He wrote prolifically on the core disciplines of Islamic scholarship, ranging from Islamic philosophy and theology, to mysticism and to Qur'ānic studies. He produced three outstanding works on the Qur'ānic studies. The first work is the Japanese translation of the Qur'ān. Published in 1957 in three volumes, it was the fourth Qur'ānic translation into the Japanese language.⁵ In the second work, *God and Man in the Qur'an*,⁶ Izutsu applied semantic analysis to the

¹ William Ladusaw, "Semantic Theory," in *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey*, ed. Frederick J. Newmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol. 1, p. 89.

² Makino Shinya, "On the Originality of 'IZUTSU' Oriental Philosophy," in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, ed. by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 253-7.

³ W. Montgomery Watt, "Reviews," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1967), p. 156; Harry B. Partin, "Semantics of the Qur'ān: A Consideration of Izutsu's Studies," *History of Religions*, vol. 9, no. 4 (May 1970), p. 358.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Preface," in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, ed. by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. xii.

⁵ Takashi Iwami, "Bibliography of Toshihiko Izutsu's Writings," in *Consciousness and Reality: Studies in Memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, ed. by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 442; Bushra Anis, "The Emergence of Islam and the Status of Muslim Minority in Japan," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1998), p. 333. According to Abdul Karim Saitoh, this work was first printed at Kaizosha in 1945. See his "The Historical Journey of Islam Eastward and the Muslim Community in Japan Today," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 1, no.1 (1979), p. 123.

⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, reprint. 2008, 2002), first published as: *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Japan: Keio Institute of Cultural

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key conceptual terms of the Qur'ān or the major materials furnished by the Qur'ānic vocabulary with a view to arriving at the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung* as distinct from the predominant outlook of the *Jāhili* period. In the third work, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*,⁷ Izutsu gave an exposition of key concepts and structures of the Qur'ānic ethical terms based on semantic structural analysis.

Izutsu's purpose in applying semantic structural analysis to the Qur'ān is primarily methodological, not exegetical. As he states from the outset, the exposition is addressed to those who have already good ground on the theological, ethical and general teachings of the Qur'ān, and now interested in the conceptual problems that could be brought to light as a result of reading the Qur'ān semantically.⁸ Looked at from the major problems it intends to investigate, semantics of Qur'ān is an ontological exploration into the structure of the world of Being, its major constituents and internal relationship between them. It is "a concrete, living and dynamic ontology", as Izutsu describes it, that deals with concrete historical issues, rather than a kind of static systematic ontology stranded at a metaphysical abstraction.⁹

Izutsu is quite aware of the possible objection that this kind of literary approach to the Qur'ān may raise and the reception it may gain within the Muslim circle. To justify its legitimacy, he reminds us that the Qur'ān is rich in idea and vocabulary, capable of being approached philosophically, theologically, grammatically, sociologically, exegetically, etc. Semantics, according to him, is another method that could be used to approach the Qur'ān from another particular perspective, focusing on a particular aspect of the Qur'ān.¹⁰

Such a semantic approach, as Izutsu introduces it to the Qur'ānic study, raises a number of questions which are central to hermeneutics, construed as "the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in a past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation."¹¹ This includes the nature of

Studies, 1964).

⁷ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, reprint 2007, 2004), first published under the same title by McGill University Press, Montreal in 1966. This work is a revised edition of his early book under the title *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Qur'ān: A Study in Semantics* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1959).

⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ Carl Braaten, *History of Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 131.

language, its relation with culture and reality, and its role in meaning making and human understanding. In addressing these questions, Izutsu demonstrates the dynamic and necessary relationship between language and culture and the centrality of both language and culture to the worldview formation. His semantic hermeneutics is thus a method of understanding the Qur'ānic worldview through its key conceptual terms and of understanding the world through the Qur'ānic worldview.

The primary focus of the present study is to examine critically from ethical and theological perspectives the semantic method Izutsu applied to the Qur'ānic key-concepts in his two works, *God and Man in the Qur'an* and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. In the early parts of these works, he expounded the methodological framework underpinning his study of the Qur'ānic worldview and its ethico-religious concepts. This framework, he explained, is “a more fundamental theory of the linguistic or semantic world-view which underlies the entire analytic work and the methodological principles which regulate the analysis...”¹² While, on the whole, he managed to pursue an alternative track of studying Islam from non-Islamic and non-western perspectives,¹³ his semantic approach to the Qur'ānic worldview and to its ethico-religious concepts undoubtedly bears a distinctive Western mark or to use W. Montgomery Watt's phrase, “the writer has fallen deeply under the spell of certain linguistic theories.”¹⁴ Following a textual analysis, this study analyses this theory against its birthplace, its epistemological postulates and the implication such a theory could have on the theological and ethical queries of the Qur'ān.

Language and Reality

Within the philosophy of language and semantics there is a powerful theory that believes that each language contains a peculiar *weltanschauung*, which causes its speakers to view the world in a way different from the speakers of other languages. According to this theory, everything that exists is merely a linguistically constructed reality. The earliest formation of this theory, which later came to be known as ‘linguistic relativity hypothesis’ is usually attributed to

¹² Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. xii.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Preface,” p. xii.

¹⁴ W. Montgomery Watt, “Reviews,” p. 156.

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Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), but foreshadowing of it can be traced back to the writings of Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780), Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803).¹⁵

The main tenet of Humboldt's linguistic philosophy is that the worldview of one people significantly differs from that of another people due to the extreme difference in the 'internal structure' (*inner Sprachform*) of their respective languages.¹⁶ According to Humboldt, language does not express already known reality or truth; rather it discovers and structures it. From "formless thought a word pulls out a certain number of features." Each language draws a closed circle within or through which the people who speak it could see the world; it is possible for the individual to escape only by stepping out of that circle into a different one.¹⁷

Leo Weisgerber (1899-1985), the leading spokesman of the Neo-Humboldtians, compares the way the gestalts of the constellations are viewed by different cultures with the manner different languages classify reality. Then certain aspects of experience are extracted, generalized, or related according to specific cultural or linguistic categories. Based on his findings, language not only stabilizes the flux of impression for us, it is due to language that impressions have any meaning in the first place. In other words, an object is meaningless even if it is presented bodily before one's eyes unless it is completely incorporated in a psychic transformation through the linguistic categorization. According to him, any judgment which one is capable of making depends largely on the type of categories available in one's native language; yet language is capable of making value judgments for which there are no corresponding facts in nature. Because language is believed to mediate between the nature of reality and human understanding of it, and categorize reality for us, Weisgerber came to the conclusion that speakers of different languages live in different

¹⁵ Robert L. Miller, *The Linguistic Relativity Principle and Humboldtian Ethnolinguistics: A History and Appraisal* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 10.

¹⁶ Julia M. Penn, *Linguistic Relativity versus Innate Ideas: The Origin of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in German Thought* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), 19.

¹⁷ I. M. Schlesinger, "The Wax and Wan of Whorfian Views," in *The Influence of Language on Culture and Thought: Essays in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman's Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), p. 14; Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3.

‘linguistic intermediary worlds’ (*sprachliche Zwischenwelten*).¹⁸

The notion that language is the embodiment of a *weltanschauung* is reverberated in the United States within ethnolinguistics discipline typically known as ‘Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’. It is a view that “the grammatical categories of a language determine or at least influence greatly the general manner of conceiving the world of those who speak it.”¹⁹ To put it differently, the use of linguistic categories would call attention to different aspects of the environment in the one case than it would in the other.²⁰ Edward Sapir (1884-1936), who came to the United States from Germany, espouses this theory in anthropological terms as follows:

The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. ...Even comparatively simple acts of perception are very much more at the mercy of the social patterns called words than we might suppose... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.²¹

Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) has developed Sapir’s claim further and calls it “a new principle of relativity.”²² He maintains that:

The forms of a person’s thought are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language... And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.²³

Working within the same framework of Humboldt’s *Weltanschauung*

¹⁸ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 54-6.

¹⁹ Joseph Greenberg, “Language and Linguistics,” in Bernard Berelson, (ed.), *The Behavioral Sciences Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 138.

²⁰ Paul Henle (ed.), *Language, Thought and Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1958), p. 7.

²¹ E. Sapir, “The Status of Linguistics as a Science,” in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. by David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1949), p. 162; first published in *Language*, 5 (1929): 207-14.

²² Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, ed. By J. Carrol (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1956), p. 214.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 252

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hypothesis, Izutsu formulates his semantic hermeneutics. It is a hybrid of semantic theory called ‘sprachliche Weltanschauungslehre’ as developed by Weisgerber and ethnolinguistics originated by Sapir and Whorf. Against this backdrop, Izutsu defines semantics as:

an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them.²⁴

It is a cultural science which, through the analysis of the word-meaning, will enable a semanticist to reconstruct on the analytic level the whole structure of the culture as it really lived in the conception of the people.²⁵

Izutsu believes that each ethnolinguistic culture classifies the world of reality into totally different categories on entirely different principles.²⁶ In addressing the question of Being, Izutsu explains that any given aspect of reality, needless to say of the reality as a whole, is capable of being divided and subdivided into many different segments in many different ways and from many different angles. The reason, as he explains, is that the reality, before the linguistic articulation, is formless and meaningless objects in perpetual flux; our immediate experience of reality is too in itself an undifferentiated whole. The reality is presented to our ideation, not directly, but through the prism of symbols registered in our vocabulary which in itself is not a replica of the objective reality.²⁷

This creative interpretation of the world around us is a mental process of gathering, labeling and rearranging many different chaotic things in a formless state of undifferentiated whole into a unity. Through the medium of language, the human mind has subjectively drawn an infinite number of lines and segments and thus brought the order into the original chaos. This process is further historically and culturally conditioned.²⁸ This implies that there is no worldview that experiences or expresses the reality objectively.

While the reality is not explicitly denied *per se*, it is extremely

²⁴ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

²⁶ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

difficult to talk of it or even imagine how it could have been like before or without the linguistic articulation. It is only with language, as Whorf explains, that people of different cultures managed to “weave the web of Māyā or illusion, to make a provisional analysis of reality.”²⁹

Though described as ‘formless’ undifferentiated whole in the state of perpetual flux, reality should not be equated with void or nothingness. According to Izutsu, reality is ‘something’ that defies all descriptions; it makes sense and becomes meaningful only when it is articulated in words. It is probably upon this type of ‘naked’ reality that Izutsu established his ‘meta-historical dialogue’ project among the major philosophical and mystical thoughts of different traditions, a project which he believes will inevitably culminate in *philosophia perennis*.³⁰

How beneficial is the language in this act of reality construction? There is no doubt that language is a boon to human species. Through language, our understanding of the world, once constructed, is preserved and communicated from one person to another and bequeathed from generations to generations. Izutsu believes that the process of conceptualization, articulation and mental act of dividing the raw materials of immediate experiences into separate segments is so important that without it, the world would have been completely meaningless and absurd.³¹ However, language can become a hindrance to a proper understanding of the world even though the understanding cannot take place without it. The reason provided is that we do not have direct access to the real world, but only through the data provided by our senses. Senses are seen as imperfect; they provide incomplete information and thus do not adequately portray the true picture of the reality. To make sense of the sensory data, according to the linguistic construction of reality view, we invent explanations through the means of linguistic categories and theorize about the reality.³² As Izutsu explains, the words and concepts behave, not like a mere duplicate, but like intermediary screen between human mind and pre-conceptual reality which might be distorted by the particular articulation of the screen.³³

The questions that inevitably arise are: is any worldview the “correct” one, or more correct than others? Which language comes

²⁹ Benjamin Lee Whorf, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

³⁰ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 469.

³¹ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 12.

³² George W. Grace, *The Linguistic Construction of Reality* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 6.

³³ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 10.

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closer to the truth, or which one provides a better picture or vision of reality? Izutsu's response to such queries, which does not appeal to him in the first place and does not appear to be a valid question, would be in quantitative, not in qualitative manner. What is interested to him is the aspect of reality a given language has drawn attention to and in what ways. Still more important is that each people has carved out a different number of separate objects in its own way; "a rich vocabulary like that of Arabic indicates that the people who use the language have isolated more independent units out of the whole of reality than a people with a poor vocabulary."³⁴ In effect, the merit is attributed to the language (i.e., Arabic), and not to the nature or the content of the message (i.e., Islam).

Nature of Moral Discourse

Izutsu pays special attention to the nature of the Qur'ānic moral discourse. He believes that the semantic analysis he employs to other kinds of the Qur'ānic discourse equally applies to the Qur'ānic ethical terms. Thus, a moral code as long as it is articulated in a particular language, does not by necessity represent the good by itself, but it is a segment of the linguistically interpreted world seen from a particular culture.

Izutsu makes his point clear when comparing his semantic approach to the moral discourse to that of John Ladd whom he admittedly owed much on the nature of moral discourse. He agrees with Ladd that a moral code is always a culture's ideology that represents a culture's norm and worldview, but disagrees on whether that ideology can be transposed or translated into another culture of a different language.

According to Ladd, a sentence can be expressed in different languages to form the same statement. For example, 'The house is white', 'Das Haus ist weiss' and 'La maison est blanche' are expressed in English, Spanish and French respectively. When looked at from the words/languages of expression, they are different sentences, but when looked at from the meaning they make, they form the same statement. Thus different sentences, as long as they express the same meaning, can make the same statement.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

This process of expressing or communicating the same meaning in different languages seems to Izutsu unattainable because the ethico-religious terms of a given language are an integral part of linguistic construction of reality which differs from one culture to another. Izutsu cautions that “even when we are actually reading a text in the original we tend almost unconsciously to read into it our own concepts fostered by our mother tongue, and thus to transmute many, if not all, of its key-terms obtainable in our native language.”³⁶ According to him, it is quite unlikely that a sentence used to communicate a moral judgment in one language could be precisely duplicated in other languages. As he explains, when moral codes of one culture resemble those of another culture, it is possible only when moral codes are seen as abstract principles. At this ‘high level of abstraction’, Izutsu agrees that it is possible to have general rules, common to all human beings qua human the world over, such as requiting good with good. But the semantic content of ethical terms of a given worldview is not formed at this level; as a sequel, this is not interested to a semanticist. Rather, it is at the lower level of empirical facts and concrete, practical experience of human life that semantic structure of ethical code is formed. It is at this level that a worldview that embodied such ethical codes receives its distinct linguistic coloring.

To illustrate this point, Izutsu gives an example of the word *kufr*. The basic semantic meaning of *kufr* (or *kāfir*) refers to the ungrateful and unthankful attitude towards favors and benefits received. In this sense it is the opposite of *shukr* which means thankfulness. It is a descriptive term with a factual content and at the primary level of moral discourse. Because it appears very often in the Qur’ān in sharp contrast to the word *mu’min* (meaning one who considers something absolutely true’ or’ one who believes’ and to the word *muslim* (meaning ‘one who has completely surrender himself to the will of God) *kufr* came to acquire a secondary meaning of the attitude of ‘one who does not believe in God’. As a result of this frequent use and by virtue of the neighboring words, the semantic category of *kufr* has been strongly influenced and thus *kufr* acquires a noticeable semantic value.³⁷

Now coming to the possible equivalent words in English, which are misbeliever, disbeliever or unbeliever, we observe a fundamental difference in the word structures. *Kufr* is a single, independent unit that

³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 26-7.

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cannot be further subdivided into components. By contrast, its English equivalent is composed of two parts: first, an element designating a negative meaning (mis-, dis-, un-) and second, the part that represents the material side of the meaning, which is ‘belief’. This means that the semantic category of the English equivalent of *kufr* is fundamentally based on the concept of belief. Izutsu reiterates that the first and original semantic meaning of *kufr* remains ‘ingratitude’ and the second meaning is ‘unbelief’. This first meaning will be completely lost the moment we begin to interpret or translate *kufr* or *kāfir* in terms of ‘belief’.³⁸ Izutsu calls this attitude a ‘semantic discrepancy’ which reads into Arabic term a meaning not primarily intended.³⁹

This means that two different cultures of different languages would not hold onto the same moral code, except perhaps at the abstract level which has no practical implication and no influence on worldview formation. Because the nature of the moral value is inextricably drawn from the peculiarity of a language, different people of different cultures submit to different moral values based on the difference in their languages. Izutsu makes this idea clear:

On the topic of the interconnection between language and culture... I shall strongly incline to a pluralistic theory which holds that people’s views of what is good and bad, or right and wrong, differ from place to place and from time to time, and differ fundamentally, not as trivial details to be explained away as degrees in the scale of a unitary cultural development, but as more basic cultural divergences having their roots deep down in the language habits of each individual community.⁴⁰

There is no doubt that the translatability of an ethical term compromises the methodological principle of linguistic relativity on which Izutsu grounded his semantic method. However, on the philosophical and mystical planes, Izutsu made a number of comparative studies which apparently violates this principle. For example, he compared Heidegger’s philosophy of existentialism and Sabzawāri’s concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This he did by applying an elementary phenomenological procedure of *epoche* to both philosophical systems. Having removed what seem to be secondary factors and protective layers from the surface of both concepts, he believes that

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

existentialism and *wujūd* are very close to each other in the basic structure and the deepest stratum of the fundamental vision or experience of “existence”.⁴¹ Here the existential experience seems to override the linguistic barrier.

A similar comparison he made between Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Sufism and Chuang-tzū’s concept of *t’ien ni* and *t’ien chün* in Taoism. He believed that there could be a central concept common to two linguistically and culturally diverse systems of thought; and he did not find any difficulty in borrowing and applying the Sufi term of *wujūd* to Taoist *t’ien ni* and *t’ien chün* experience. He did this in search for a common philosophical ground on which to establish what he called “a meta-historical dialogue” (which I think should be called ‘a meta-linguistic dialogue’) between Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophical thought and those of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū. Even here Izutsu recognized the reality of “a state of non-linguistic fluidity or amorphousness” which precedes a linguistic labeling and could be experienced.⁴²

From *Jāhilī Weltanschauung* to Qur’ānic *Weltanschauung*

How does the Qur’ān come to mean as it has in the Arabic-speaking nations? What types of reality are envisioned in Qur’ānic Arabic which is not expressed in the Arabic of the pre-Islamic period? These questions of meaning making are central to semantics which Izutsu tackles in his analysis of the ‘semantic fields’ and word-meanings of the ‘key-words’ of the Qur’ānic vocabulary.

The ‘key-terms’ upon which the semantic *weltanschauung* of the Qur’ān are founded, as compared to ordinary words of the Qur’ān, are those words of the Qur’ānic vocabulary that presumably play a decisive role in the formation of the Qur’ānic basic conceptual structure of reality and its vision of the universe. The primary task of a semanticist, as Izutsu explains, is to identify these key-terms and isolate them from the bulk of Qur’ānic vocabulary. Among the outstanding key-terms he identifies are *Allāh*, *islām* (submission) *īmān* (belief/faith), *kāfir* (infidel), *nabī* (prophet) *rasūl* (messenger) and *waḥy*

⁴¹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), pp. 25-33.

⁴² Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, p. 472.

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(revelation).⁴³ While Izutsu promises to remain thoroughly objective in dealing with objective fact,⁴⁴ he admits that a certain degree of arbitrariness in choosing the exact key-words of the Qur'ān is unavoidable. Nevertheless, he believes that all the key-words he has chosen are central to the Qur'ānic worldview. Whether other words deserve to be included or not is a question that can be debated.⁴⁵

Each of these 'key-terms' and concepts in the Qur'ān is not standing in isolation from others. Rather, they are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings and semantic structure precisely from the entire system of relations, forming an extremely complex network of conceptual associations. Such a tight-knit and complex association of concepts, embodied in the vocabulary of a culture at a particular historical context is what Izutsu refers to as '*weltanschauung*' or rather 'semantic *weltanschauung*'.⁴⁶

When these words are looked at from their multiple relationships among themselves and their overlapping sectors, they form what Izutsu calls a 'semantic field'. There are several important semantic fields in a vocabulary, i.e., Qur'ānic vocabulary, each representing a relatively independent conceptual sphere which is similar to the nature of vocabulary of which they are constituents. Thus a 'semantic field' is a subsystem, a system within a system and a particular part (semantic field) of a larger whole (vocabulary). Vocabulary is then a multi-strata structure, formed by groups of key-words otherwise known in its internal connectivity as a 'semantic field'. Still within a group of key-words there is a 'focus-word'. 'Focus-word' is the most important word in a 'semantic field' around which other key-words revolve and from which they derive their 'relational' meaning. It unifies other key-words within the same 'semantic field' and delimits a particular 'semantic field' from other 'semantic fields' of a vocabulary.⁴⁷

This categorization applies primarily to the Qur'ānic vocabulary and its subsystem (semantic field). It also looks at the Qur'ānic vocabulary in its entirety as a field or subsystem within a larger vocabulary of the Arabic language of that age.

To demonstrate these technicalities, *īmān* with its derivatives, for

⁴³ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, pp. 3, 18, 74.

⁴⁴ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-29.

example, is a focus-word. In its positive cluster, it comprises key-words such as *Allāh*, *shukr*, *islām*, *taṣḍīq*, and in its negative cluster it includes key-words like *kufr*, *takdhīb*, *‘iṣyān*, *nifāq*. Each of these words may not be confined to *īmān* field, but may appear as a key-word in other field or even stand as a focus-word forming its own field. Now *kufr*, which is simply a key-word of *īmān* ‘semantic field’ on the negative side, is a focus-word of a relatively independent semantic field. The semantic field of *kufr* comprises key-words like *fisq*, *ḍalāl*, *ẓulm*, *shirk*, *‘iṣyān*, *takdhīb*, having on its negative cluster the positive key-words of *īmān* (i.e. *Allāh*, *taṣḍīq*, etc.). The term ‘*Allāh*’ appearing in both *īmān* and *kufr* field as ordinary key-word, is, as Izutsu explains, the most important and highest focus-word in the Qur’ānic vocabulary, reigning over the entire domain as its field.

Izutsu points out that none of the key-terms that play a decisive role in the formation of the Qur’ānic worldview is unfamiliar to the Arabs of *Jāhiliyyah*. Almost all of them have appeared in one form or another in the literary discourse of the pre-Islamic era. As a result, Izutsu draws heavily on pre-Islamic or *Jāhili* poetry in elucidating the semantic structure of the Qur’ānic vocabulary.

To demonstrate the continuity and change (in the meaning values of individual words) between the semantic worldview of the pre-Islamic era and that of the Qur’ān, Izutsu introduces one major methodological concept of semantics concerning the ‘word-meaning’. He makes a technical distinction between the ‘basic’ meaning and ‘relational’ meaning of a word. The ‘basic meaning’ is the constant semantic element which remains attached to the word unchanged in whatever context the word is used even if the word is used in non-Qur’ānic context. This ‘basic meaning’ is a methodological, theoretic postulate which is very useful when analyzing the meaning of a word scientifically, though it has no abstract form in the world of reality.⁴⁸ As indicated above, all words of any language are social and cultural constructs, and no word finds its concrete meaning in the world of reality.

While the ‘basic meaning’ of a word is something inherent in the word itself and always remains with it, ‘relational meaning’ is something connotative that comes to be attached and added to the word by the word’s having taken a particular position in a particular field, standing in diverse relations to all other important words in that

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 11, 16.

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system. For example, the word *kitāb* means literally a ‘book’ or a set of (printed) pages that can be read. This ‘basic meaning’ remains unchanged irrespective of whether this word is used in or outside the Qur’ānic context or whether it is used as a key-word or not. However, when introduced into the Qur’ānic conceptual scheme in close relation to *wahy* (Divine revelation), *tanzīl* (sending down of Divine words) and *Allāh*, *kitāb* acquires new semantic elements. By virtue of this particular association, *kitāb* came to mean, besides its basic meaning, a sacred or heavenly book.⁴⁹

Based on this distinction, a word will retain its ‘basic meaning’, but its ‘relational meaning’ will differ from one era to another. For example, the word *malā’ikah* (angels), or, in its singular form, *malak*, retains its ‘basic meaning’ but acquired different, and perhaps contradictory, relational meanings between the Arabic vocabulary of *Jāhiliyyah* and the Qur’ānic vocabulary. In the Arabic vocabulary of *Jāhiliyyah* period, the word refers to an angel of supernatural being. This meaning was passed and fully incorporated into the Qur’ānic vocabulary. However, when the word appears in the semantic field of polytheism hierarchy of being in the pre-Islamic era where *Allāh* was assigned the highest position and jinn, demons and other gods regarded as intercessors or mediators between supreme God and humans, angels were construed as daughters of God, logically worthy of veneration, and thus they were conferred the status of deity and worshipped. But when introduced into the Qur’ānic monotheism appearing within *Allāh*, *shirk*, *rasūl* semantic field, *malā’ikah* could no longer retain or entertain such pre-Islamic polytheistic ‘relational meaning’. Rather it acquired a new ‘relational meaning’ and a definite place was assigned to it within the universal hierarchy of being.⁵⁰

According to Izutsu, what Islam has brought to the world, which struck the Makkan imagination and raised a fierce resistance, is not a new concept or code of ethics, but a creative reorientation of the word meaning and the general unfamiliar context in which the key familiar words were used. This is what Izutsu observes in the following:

...all the existent things and values were thereby subjected to a complete rearrangement and a new allotment. The elements of the universe came, without any single exception, to be uprooted from their old soil, and transplanted into a new field; each one of them was assigned a new place, and new relationships

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-10.

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were established between them. Concepts that had formerly been quite foreign to each other were now brought into close connections; contrariwise, concepts that had been closely related to each other in the old system came to be separated in the new one.⁵¹

This profound inner semantic transformation and reorientation of the concepts, together with the fundamental displacement and rearrangement of moral and religious values that ensued from it, is solely, according to Izutsu, what gives the Qur'ān its distinctive *weltanschauung*.⁵² However, Izutsu makes it very clear that the 'relational' meaning is "nothing other than a concrete manifestation, or crystallization, of the spirit of the culture, and a most faithful reflection of the general tendency, psychological and otherwise, of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary."⁵³

Semantics and Ethical and Theological Discourses

The role of language in human understanding of God's revelation in general and of the Qur'ān in particular has attracted the attention of the early Muslim theologians. The question was addressed within the discussions on *kalām* (speech) as a Divine Attribute, whether the Qur'ān is the created or uncreated Speech of God and inimitability of the Qur'ān (*I'jāz al-Qur'ān*).

Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415 H/1024 CE), a prominent Mu'tazilite theologian, explained that God's speech has to be intelligible to the people to whom it is primarily addressed. This requires the Speech be conveyed in a language agreed upon (*muwāḍa'ah*) prior to God's use of it in His *kalām*. Otherwise, God's speech would remain incomprehensible to its addressees.⁵⁴

In approaching the Qur'ān from a semantic analytical perspective, several questions come to mind. Could the Qur'ānic worldview be lived or grasped through a non-linguistic medium? In other words, could the conception of reality and the vision of the universe, as articulated in the Qur'ān, be known outside the constraint of its Arabic language? In the classical Islamic theological discourse, the Muslim

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 7. See also *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, pp. 83, 295-7.

⁵² Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, p. 5.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁴ Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa-al-'Adl* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub, 1960-1969), vol. 7, p. 182; Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qāḥir al-Jurjānī's Theory of Discourse* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995), p. 31.

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theologians, precisely the Asha'rites made a distinction between *al-kalām al-nafsī* (the inner, internal speech) and *al-kalām al-lafzī* (the outward linguistic expression, articulated speech). *Al-kalām al-nafsī* refers to the inner, eternal and uncreated Word of God that exists as an attribute in the divine Essence. *Al-kalām al-lafzī* is that which is read and recited in the Qur'ān, consisting of signs or symbols to that essential *al-kalām al-nafsī*,⁵⁵ which, without these signs, would remain entirely inaccessible to humans.⁵⁶

To entrench *al-kalām al-nafsī*, which was disputed by the Mu'tazilites, along with *al-kalām al-lafzī* on an intellectual and rhetorical grounds, al-Jurjānī (400-471 H./1010-1078 CE) provides an epistemological foundation for a comprehensive theory of discourse⁵⁷ in his celebrated work, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*.⁵⁸ Al-Jurjānī argues that we ought to start linguistic analysis first by investigating the network of semantic relationships and then examining grammatical relationships. As al-Jurjānī explains, the excellence in discourse, particularly the Qur'ānic discourse, derives not from words when taken individually and isolated from one another, but from *naẓm* (composition), the harmony of its meaning with that of its neighbors and the context in which it is used. Nevertheless, al-Jurjānī believes that the arrangement of words follows a trace in the mind. *Naẓm* is a matter of mentally conceived order of meaning which is primarily an operation of the mind. This is generally to give a priority to, or at least to establish the quiddity of *al-kalām al-nafsī*, which is prior to *al-kalām al-lafzī*, in linguistic discourse.⁵⁹

Dividing the Speech into *al-kalām al-lafzī* and *al-kalām al-nafsī* partly accounts for *kalām* as an eternal attribute in the divine Essence without compromising the conventionality of its linguistic expressions. It also aims to establish the integrity of *kalām* regardless of the diversity in the outward linguistic expression. On this second objective, al-Bāqillānī (338-403 H./950-1013 CE), an early prominent Ash'arī theologian, explains that the Speech of God is eternal and self-

⁵⁵ Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Inṣāf fī-mā Yajibu l'tiqāduh wa-lā Yajūzu al-Jahl bi-hi* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), p. 15.

⁵⁶ "Kalām", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), vol. 4, p. 470; Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning*, pp. 9, 68.

⁵⁷ Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning*, pp. 22-3.

⁵⁸ 'Abd Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz fī 'Ilm al-Ma'ānī*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'ah Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣubayḥ wa-Awlāduh, 1960).

⁵⁹ Al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, pp. 44-49; Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning*, pp. 22-3, 49-50.

existing in His Divine Essence, from which emanated the heavenly books. This eternal, inner speech of God is made known to humans through the languages they have conventionally and mutually agreed upon as their medium of expression and communication. When it is expressed in Hebrew, it is known as Torah, when it is communicated in Syriac/Aramaic it is known as the Gospel and when it is revealed in Arabic it is known as the Qur'ān. Despite their outward linguistic diversity, these books signify the same eternal, inner speech of God.⁶⁰

While Izutsu emphasizes on structural semantic analysis of the keywords, he exclusively relies on the Qur'ān as articulated in the Arabic language or what is called *al-kalām al-lafzī*. According to him, pre-linguistic concepts' or *al-kalām al-naḥsī*, if they do exist, fall outside the scope of semantic scientific inquiry.⁶¹

Whether one agrees with this division of *kalām* or not, the integrity and indivisibility of the Speech of God is thoroughly maintained in the Qur'ān itself. If the Qur'ān is truly our point of departure, not from a particular linguistic theory, we can see very vividly how much commonalities a given people has with other peoples of different linguistic cultures.

We may take *wahy* as an example, not because it is one out of many other keywords, but because other keywords were its constituent parts and they were known to us through *wahy*. The Qur'ān explains that the concept or the phenomenon of *wahy*, of God revealing His message to messengers to be conveyed to their respective nations, is not something unknown to the bygone nations. Quite the contrary, *wahy* is presented to be present from time immemorial, revealed to humans at regular intervals in history. Human experience or the messengers' response to God's revelation are also said to be similar (3: 79-83) It is stated in the Qur'ān (4:163-165) that just as God revealed His message to Prophet Muhammad, He has revealed it to earlier prophets of God, such as Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Ismā'īl, Ishāq, Ya'qūb, Mūsā, 'Īsā and many others irrespective of whether their account is given in the Qur'ān or not. While the term *wahy* might be unique to the Arabic vocabulary, the concept it carries and the phenomenon it portrays is presented in the Qur'ān to be common to chosen messengers in history. *Wahy* simply characterizes the Qur'ānic version of the same vision of reality. What is said about *wahy* equally applies to other

⁶⁰ Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁶¹ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, pp. 27-8.

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keywords of the Qur'ān such as *kufr*, *īmām*, *islām*, *Allāh*, *shirk*, etc.

Such continuity equally applies to major moral concepts. To be just, faithful, steadfast, righteous, to do good to others and to give alms to the needy, to respect one's parents, to refrain from killing an innocent soul, cheating, lying, stealing, or spreading mischief on earth are among the primordial ethical virtues common to different linguistic cultures. Prophet Muhammad considers his message as compared to those of the early messengers, as a missing, last brick in a well-decorated mansion and that he came to fill up the vacuum:

My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: 'Would that this brick be put in its place!' So I am that brick (with which you give the finishing touch to the building), and I am the last of the Prophets."⁶²

In another *ḥadīth* Prophet Muhammad sums up the main objective of his message: "I have been sent only for the purpose of completing the good morals."⁶³ Based on this common heritage, the Qur'ān assigns to itself, in its relation to the earlier revealed books, the double task of *muṣaddiqan* (confirmation) — by preserving those well-established fundamentals, and *muhayminan* (preponderance) — by correcting and restoring those corrupted principles back to their natural order (5:48).⁶⁴

Izutsu does recognize the link and a type of continuity between the Qur'ānic ethics and pre-Islamic ethics. He clearly states that "in spite of the bitter attacks on the pagans and their idolatrous customs, the Qur'ān adopted and revived, in a new form suited to the needs of monotheism, many of the outstanding virtues of paganism."⁶⁵ But that is true only because of the common language (Arabic) that the Qur'ān shares with the pagans of the pre-Islamic era. As for other people of different linguistic cultures, Izutsu does not believe they could be similar in their moral outlook as we have seen earlier.

⁶² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Manāqib, vol. 4, Book 56, no. 735; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, kitāb al-Faḍā'il, chapter 7, Book 30, no. 5673.

⁶³ Abū Bark al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Bayhaqī al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Makkah: Maktabat Dār al-Bāz, 1994), 10:191; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Bardūnī (Cairo: Dār al-Sha'ab, 1373AH), 14:197.

⁶⁴ Abdul Kabir Hussian Solihu, "Understanding the Qur'ān in the Light of Historical Change," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2003), pp. 399-400.

⁶⁵ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, p. 82.

Izutsu explains *wahy* in contact with *kalām* (speech/parole), *qawl* and *tanzīl*, and other negative words such as *waswasah*, *kāhin*, *shā'ir*, jinn of the same semantic field. He demonstrates how the true and divine based sense of *wahy* made its way out of pseudo and jinn based sense of revelation. But according to the Qur'ān this is not unique to the Qur'ān-Prophet experience. It is a common human characteristic that when a prophet was sent to them they would hastily accuse him of sorcery, hallucination or possession. This has been a common response across generations and cultures and so parallel that it seems as if there was a consensus of opinion among them despite their cultural and linguistic diversities and geographical and generation gap. On such parallel inclinations, the Qur'ān remarks: "Similarly, no messenger came to the Peoples before them, but they said (of him) in like manner, "A sorcerer, or one possessed"! Is this the legacy they have transmitted, one to another?" (51:52-53). A closer look at the Qur'ān will reveal that these key-words, *wahy*, *kufṛ*, *īmām*, *islām*, *Allāh*, *shirk*, etc., form a single bloc within every community's religious psychics. Whenever a focus-word, *wahy* for example, is introduced into the scene, other constituents of the bloc will be instigated.

This means that understanding *wahy* in the context of other similar (positive or negative) terms in Arabic does not mark the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung* off from other worldviews as long as the Qur'ānic language has firmly entrenched its concepts in the similar concepts experienced by the early nations in different languages. We need to study not only how and in what language the Qur'ān is making its point but more importantly the very point it is trying to make. At some point, when Izutsu is comparing the stylistic genre of the Qur'ān and *saj'* (rhythmic) style of the *kāhin* (soothsayer), he does acknowledge that the Qur'ān look more at the content than the language of expression, "but what is far more important from the Qur'ānic point of view is the content itself of the message conveyed, and not the form of expression which conveys the message."⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Izutsu considers language a substructure of the worldview structures.

The problem here is that the Qur'ānic concepts, though couched in Arabic, have internalized similar concepts articulated in different languages and made them as a whole an integral part of its own vision of reality. Thus the problem cannot be solved at a semantic level, if

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

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semantics is confined to the analytic study of terms without a reference to the history of the concept or experience expressed in different terms.

Conclusion

It is acceptable almost in all major approaches to the Qur'ān that the first step and the best way to interpret the Qur'ān is to let the Qur'ān interpret itself. This axiom is taken in a 'special way' in the structural semantics as espoused by Izutsu. By focusing on 'semantic field' of the Qur'ānic vocabulary, Izutsu is determined to take the Qur'ān on its own terms and let it interpret its own concepts and speak for itself. To some extent, this has shown practically that the Qur'ān is internally coherent. Such a conclusion is perhaps the most that can be expected from a critical analytical study of a scripture by an outsider.

Synchronic semantic analysis of the Qur'ān demonstrates very vividly the historicity of the Qur'ānic events. It indicates that the Qur'ān was revealed not in historical vacuum, abstraction or speculation, but in the full light of concrete historical predicaments. By the analysis of 'basic' and 'relational' meanings, Izutsu shows how the Qur'ān has adopted and assimilated many of the outstanding pre-Islamic *Jāhili* virtues but let their energy flow in a different direction, suited to the emerging Islamic values. While Izutsu considers this semantic transformation of meaning the major characteristics of the Qur'ān *weltanschauung*, he reiterates in the same breath that the 'relational' meaning is nothing but concrete manifestation of the spirit of the culture and the most faithful reflection of the general tendency of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary. The net conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the meaningfulness of the world lies in the worldliness of meaning.

There is no doubt that language makes possible the smooth flow of ideas, meanings, communications and mutual understandings. This fact is well recognized in the Qur'ān (14:4), and the diversity of human language is considered as part of God's *āyāt* or signs (30:22). It is also stated that humans are made in different cultures and tribes in order to get to know one another. According to the Qur'ānic outlook, the real yardstick is not on the peculiarity of language, culture, or race, but on a shared value, something equally available or knowable to all cultures and languages so that the competition might be fair. This shared value, transcending cultural peculiarity and linguistic barrier, is what the Qur'ān terms as *taqwā* (literally means God's consciousness, piety) which is

central to the Qur'ānic ethico-religious concepts.

No one can deny the force of language in channeling ideas and meanings among the people who speak it. Because of this frequent association and heavy dependence on language in meaning making, it is possible that in a given language there might be, indeed there have been, a number of concepts that have been colored by their language and thus do not properly find their connotations in the linguistic apparatus of another language. However, the very fact that we can identify these concepts and articulate their peculiarities and unique properties perhaps through paraphrasing has, at least partially, solved the problem. The possibility to decode a complex idea in a relatively roundabout way or to encode a loose, paraphrased idea in a more precise and concise word, makes it attainable to bypass the constraint that might be imposed by the peculiarities of a given language.

Unless we find alternative ways of expressing the same meaning in different languages, the semantic theory as applied to the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung* will be self-defeating and self-contradictory. Here is a scenario in which a speaker of *Language A* can comprehend only what can be conveyed in *Language A*, and to the extent that if *Language B* structures reality in a different way, it must remain incomprehensible to the speaker of *Language A*. The scenario becomes more complex when a speaker of *Language C* enters the equation, attempting to expound *Language A* peculiarities in *Language B* as a medium of explanation. If it is true that speakers of different languages experience and express reality in their respective distinct ways and live in different mental worlds, then any attempt to channel a mutual understanding is doomed to failure. This too undermines the credibility of Izutsu's study of the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung*. Here is the Qur'ān revealed in Arabic (*Language A*), the meaning or explanation of which is written in English (*Language B*) by a Japanese scholar (*Language C*). The more credible this semantic theory is, the less credible Izutsu's semantic analytical study of the Qur'ānic conceptual key-terms would be.

Other than the current issues which required an immediate response, the Qur'ān aligns itself in making and authenticating its point with a broader historical context of God's message and messengers in history more than the immediate history prior to the emergence of Islam. I believe such a historical perspective is so central to the Qur'ānic worldview that if that part is removed or suspended from Qur'ānic accounts, the whole fabric of the Qur'ānic foundations

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would crumble and fall apart. Most of the key-words forming the structure of the Qur'ānic worldview, as Izutsu has presented them, can be studied from this comparative extended historical perspective. Otherwise, a synchronic reading of a book that takes history very seriously or reducing the history of its concepts to the immediate history of the Arabs will highlight, at best, a Qur'ānic worldview in transition and how the Qur'ān was first received, not necessarily how it wants itself to be conceived. It tells us more about the immediate context of the Arabian Peninsula than the main import or broader contexts of the Qur'ān.

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