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Preface

I am honored to be able to write a preface to this volume.

First I want to explain how this dialogue between Mr. Liang Shuming and me came about.

I became interested in Mr. Liang's life and career as a graduate student at Harvard University, and took it as the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation. I gathered materials in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as sought out and interviewed (many of) his old friends and acquaintances. Because of the Sino-American political situation at the time, I never had an opportunity to go to the Chinese mainland and meet personally the subject of my research, Mr. Liang. In the first part of 1973, I had my first opportunity to go to the Chinese mainland. For an American to be able to go to the Chinese mainland at that time was still extremely unusual. Why was I able to make the trip? After President Nixon visited China, several Chinese delegations visited the United States in succession, and I served as their interpreter, and so became a channel of communication between the two countries. So in 1973, my wife and I had this rare opportunity to visit the Chinese mainland. At the time, the first request I made of the Chinese was that I hoped I could meet with Mr. Liang. But because it was the time of the Cultural Revolution, and a very sensitive time, my wishes to pay my respects to Mr. Liang were not answered, so I could only return regretfully to America.

In 1979, at the same time as my study of Liang Shuming *The Last Confucian* was published, the Chinese political situation underwent a tremendous change. This current of reform and openness also changed Mr. Liang's life. He had originally been living with his wife in a small room, but then he was moved by his unit, the People's Political Consultative Conference, into Building Number 22, called the "Ministers' Mansion," where many celebrities such as the writer Ding Ling also lived. Having more comfortable quarters, Mr. Liang felt that it was more appropriate for receiving visitors, and immediately thought of ways of contacting me. One day I suddenly received a phone call from a stranger; it was from an octogenarian named Shi who had been Mr. Liang's student in the 1920s at Peking University. He had just come from Beijing and was delivering a verbal message to me at Mr. Liang's request. It was that Mr. Liang already knew of the publication of *The Last Confucian*, and hoped that he could meet me. A few months passed, and after class one day, a

Chinese student suddenly came to see me. She had just come recently from Beijing to join her father in the United States. She gave me Mr. Liang's address, and told me that she had been a neighbor of "Uncle Liang," and that he very much hoped to be able to see me, and to see the work on him that I had published. I immediately sent him a copy of the book. Before long I received an amicable reply from Mr. Liang, agreeing to my definitely going to Beijing to visit him the next year.

In 1980, the first day I arrived in Beijing, I immediately contacted Mr. Liang. He told me how he had moved to Building Number 22. The next morning, I went to Mr. Liang's residence to visit him formally. All of Mr. Liang's family members, who took my visit very seriously, were also there. Mr. Liang introduced me to his family. I then presented him with some Harvard University souvenirs (I was teaching at Harvard at the time). I also gave him works of his father's. After all of those years and experiencing diverse setbacks, I had finally got to meet Mr. Liang.

Sitting face to face, with only a small table between us, we began our chats. In the 2 weeks that followed, I went to the Liang's home every morning to ask questions of Mr. Liang. I put in order the recordings of our dialogues, and later (a part) was included in Mr. Liang's published collected works. Now it is published in a separate volume.

In our talks, through Mr. Liang I came to understand (more fully) the trait of traditional Chinese intellectuals. This is most worthy of mentioning. During the 2 weeks of intensive conversation, in the first few days Mr. Liang spoke to me a great deal about Buddhism, which perplexed me, and so I asked, "Didn't you abandon Buddhist thought a long time ago?" He answered that he didn't really abandon it. We talked about the title of my book *The Last Confucian*, which fixed him as a Confucian. He said that he could accept the title. Yet sometimes he would express to me that Marxist-Leninist science was very good. When we spoke about traditional Chinese culture, he also praised Daoism. Once, because he had organized the Democratic League, he met with George Marshall. He evaluated Marshall very highly, and thought that he was a good person because he was a pious Christian. At the time, I didn't quite understand. How could a person be both a Buddhist and a Confucian, and also identify with Marxist-Leninist thought and approve of Christianity? Later I finally grasped it. This ability to blend mutually contradictory thought is a special characteristic of typical traditional Chinese intellectuals.

Although, during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, many schools of thought contended and debated with one another, the scholars of the time did not recognize themselves to be a specific school. For example, when we now discuss Mencius and Xunzi, we recognize them as Confucian, even though one said that human nature was good, and the other that human nature was evil. They were followers of Confucius, but at that time, even Confucius did not necessarily recognize himself to be "Confucian." The academic classifications we are used to today are the system Sima Qian invented for the various pre-Qin thinkers when he wrote about his father Sima Tan's "A Summary of the Six Schools" in his own "Autobiographical Afterword of the Grand Historian." I think that Chinese culture is actually an eclectic blend of many kinds of thought that seem to be incompatible, yet at the same time is a culture that likes to classify things. It is easily seen that

actually most Chinese intellectuals amalgamated various kinds of thought into one eclectic body. For example, although the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming are all Neo-Confucians who focus on the nature of the mind, there are differences among them. There are Buddhist elements in their thought. Although the late Qing Dynasty intellectuals such as Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan were at the two opposite extremes politically and on the New Text/Old Text controversy, they both amalgamated Buddhism, Western thought and Confucianism into their individual thought.

So this perhaps explains why I, having been trained in modern academic standards and categories, thought that it was impossible for someone to be simultaneously a believer in Marxism-Leninism and Confucianism. As far as Mr. Liang was concerned, though, this was not in the least a problem. Looked at in this way, Mr. Liang was still quite a traditional Chinese intellectual.

In my opinion, the various pre-Qin philosophers were each on different paths, but they all assumed the same cosmology, that the universe was an organic whole, with each element in that whole interconnected. So, in such a cosmology, there are no absolute dichotomies and contradictions, only relative ones. This worldview was the underlying bedrock of the thought of all Chinese intellectuals, and so various different elements of thought could coexist in an individual's thought without the currents conflicting.

The greater part of the content of our talks was Mr. Liang's responding to my questions about historical figures in the early twentieth century. Instead of asking him about his contacts and associations in the past, why didn't I just quietly listen to Mr. Liang expostulate his thinking? I study history, and naturally want to preserve much of the historical materials. As far as I know, Mr. Liang was the last person who had personally participated in those several decades of violent cultural change and who was still healthy and clear-headed, and who, moreover, knew and had contact with so many important intellectuals. His memories were of great value, so I went well beyond my role of interviewer in guiding the conversation in hopes that these unique experiences of his could be recorded for posterity.

This special case of the biographer finally meeting the biographee only after publication of the biography is unprecedented in modern Chinese history. After having had these talks with Mr. Liang, I added a final chapter to *The Last Confucian* to supplement and revise the original, especially the section on his suffering during the Cultural Revolution. Because I had not been able to contact him before the book was finished, and because there was no other relevant documentation available, I did not know the details, and so could not include them in the book. Only after we talked did I know the real situation and added it in this last chapter. On the whole, I did not revise the structure or content of the book after meeting Mr. Liang. After our talks I discovered Mr. Liang's "unity of inner feelings and outer action." His writings had honestly reflected his impressions. He never disguised his true feelings and thoughts in order to be in tune with the times or the situation, so the Mr. Liang that I had seen through his writings and the real-life Mr. Liang with whom I talked were identical. So although I was fated not to meet him before the book was completed, I was still able, through his writings, to know Mr. Liang's real personality and ways of thinking.

Contents

Introduction

Professor Guy Alitto of the University of Chicago is the author of *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*. In order to confirm the facts and make corrections to the parts of the book that are not fully accurate or complete, he visited specifically to have special interviews with Mr. Liang Shuming in August of 1980.[1] They had over ten long talks.

In these conversations they discussed the cultural characteristics of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and representative figures, involving many famous people in the cultural and political realms (Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Chiang Kai-shek, Kang Youwei, Zhang Taiyan, Hu Shi, Feng Youlan…), reviewed the important activities of Mr. Liang's life (teaching at Peking University, working in the Rural Reconstruction Movement, founding the Democratic League…). Because these conversations were so rich in content, they are important reference materials for understanding and studying Mr. Liang Shuming's thought and activities, as well as the social and historical events of Modern China.

[1] I researched and wrote the book long before American researchers could even visit China, let alone conduct individual interviews and primary research. In 1980, I received a hitherto unprecedented invitation to meet with and converse directly with Mr. Liang Shuming. This proved to be not only a chance to meet with this important personage of twentieth century China, but also a fortuitous opportunity to clarify and correct portions of the record that heretofore were incomplete or not quite accurate.

Chapter 1
August 12, 1980

Alitto: How did you learn about the publication of my book [referring to *The Last Confucian*]? Was it through a friend?

Liang: [We both know] someone surnamed Zhu, right?

Alitto: Yes, that's right. She was a student of mine [at a university in the U.S. state of Ohio]. She told me that you knew about the book. So, how did you find out about my book? Was the book in China or abroad…?[1]

Liang: A friend of mine in the U.S. sent me a copy.

Alitto: Sent from the U.S.

Liang: Yes. One surnamed Hu. His name is Hu Shiru.[2]

Alitto: Oh! Hu Shiru! He also contacted me. Was he a student of yours in the 1920s at Peking University, or…?

Liang: I don't remember him very well, although he is well acquainted with me.

Alitto: About three months ago I saw your picture in the newspaper alongside an article about your move to this house. I believe the newspaper was *Dagongbao*, published in Hong Kong. Did reporters visit you in person for that article or…?

Liang: Yes, three reporters came from the China News Service.

[1] One of my students approached me after class and said that "Liang Bobo" [Uncle Liang] knew about the book and hoped that I would visit him. She had just arrived from China, and had lived in the same neighborhood as Liang. It was an extraordinary coincidence that such a person would end up in my classroom at a public university in a small American city.

[2] This man, an engineer who had lived in the U.S. for many decades, was one of Liang's students at Peking University in the early 1920s. He had gone to China right after Mr. Liang had moved into a suitable, gracious residence and so was able to receive foreigners. During the Cultural Revolution, Liang and his wife were thrown into one small room with almost all of the room taken up by the bed. Obviously it was not suitable for receiving visitors from abroad. Hu phoned me right after he returned to the U.S. Once again, this was quite an extraordinary coincidence that one of the first foreign visitors who had seen Liang was able to contact me. Hu phoned me shortly after Ms. Zhu had spoken with me after class.

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Alitto: Well, I'm not a reporter. If I write an article in the future, I will first send you a copy.

Liang: That's good. Doing it that way is good.

Alitto: I am still not sure which kind of newspaper or magazine will carry my article. It also depends on the editor's interest in the story.

Liang: Right.

Alitto: When I was doing research for your biography, I met many students of yours from the old days along with people who worked with you in Zouping. Have any of your students been in contact with you lately? For instance, I met a man in Hong Kong surnamed Hu [who I interviewed several times].

Liang: Do you mean Hu Shisan? His original name is Hu Yinghan, and his sobriquet is Shisan.[3]

Alitto: Yes, that's him. I visited him ten years ago when I was in Hong Kong and started my research. He provided me with a lot of very valuable materials. I also met a man named Wang Shaoshang. It seemed that he was a student of yours at the First Middle School, in Guangzhou. (Liang: Right.) I also met Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan in Hong Kong. They are also your acquaintances. (Liang: Right.) In the U.S. I met another person surnamed Zhang who worked in rural reconstruction in Ding County, Hebei Province, during the old days. In any case, he was at a university in the U.S….[4] In the past several years, I haven't been in touch with him. In Taiwan, I became acquainted with a man named Zhou Shaoxian.[5] He admires you greatly and has published a number of essays about you. Recently a Taiwan newspaper translated and published

[3] This Mr. Hu was one of Liang's most loyal students. In Hong Kong in the 1950s he had publicly defended Liang during the criticisms of him. Mr. Hu was originally one of the Research Department's students in Zouping in the 1930s. He still had contact with Mr. Liang in the late 1940s. I spent over a week talking to Mr. Hu in 1970. After I met Mr. Liang, I realized that Mr. Hu had modeled his dress, demeaned behavior, and manner of speech after Liang. Of course, Mr. Hu's own view of the world, his personal philosophy and his ideas in general were closely modeled on Liang's as well.

[4] I conflated two men surnamed Zhang into one. One was an old rural reconstruction worker who I discovered at Berea College, in Kentucky, U.S.A. He told me about his experiences, and shared with me his impressions of Mr. Liang. It was this Mr. Zhang who had worked in Ding County, Hebei, with Mr. Yan Yangchu. Another Mr. Zhang was Zhang Hongjun (张鸿钧) whom I found at Donghai University in Taiwan. Both he and his wife were Sociologists who had both been involved with rural work. I interviewed them at some length twice. Mr. Zhang had had considerable contact with Mr. Liang. I remember very clearly the only "disagreement" between husband and wife when they were telling me of their experiences and contact with Mr. Liang. Mr. Zhang described Mr. Liang to me as "very handsome," and his wife disagreed, saying that she didn't find Liang so attractive.

[5] Mr. Zhou was an extraordinary elder gentleman. He had been a student at the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute. After the war started, he was part of a guerilla unit in his home county of Laiyang, Shandong. Although he was an academic, he was clearly a man of action as well. Mr. Zhou, like all of Liang's students that I met, was extremely loyal to Liang, and often publicly defended him. In Taiwan at that time, Liang's books could not be republished. Mr. Zhou often railed against the Guomindang (KMT) for being hostile to Liang.

an essay of mine. They only selected some parts of it for translation, so it was not very systematic, and Mr. Zhou wrote an essay criticizing it.

Liang: What publication was this in?

Alitto: In the *China Times*. In recent months, Hong Kong newspapers have also published some articles about you, for two or three times.

Liang: Yes, they came to interview me.

Alitto: In the past several decades I know that you have been a part of the People's Political Consultative Conference.

Liang: Yes, I have been a member of this body from its founding to the present without interruption.

Alitto: Do you still write or…?

Liang: I have been writing in the past few years, but most recently I have written very little. A few years ago my most important project was writing a very long book, titled *The Human Heart/Mind and Human Life*.

Alitto: You began to write it a very long time ago.

Liang: Yes. This is a very long piece. It is bound into three volumes. There is also a shorter book I finished which discusses Laozi, Confucius and Indian Buddhism. It discusses these three schools of thought. It is not as long as *The Human Heart/Mind and Human Life*. It is a comparatively condensed treatment.

Alitto: None of these have been published yet, right?

Liang: None of them have been published. In the past, … it is better now, but in the past, the government controlled thought, and one could not publish freely.[6]

Alitto: Was this because of the Gang of Four's…?

Liang: It was not entirely because of the Gang of Four. It was this way for many years. It is better now, comparatively. Restrictions on publishing are now a bit more relaxed. To obtain approval to get my books published, I presented a short essay to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The essay, about twelve thousand words, was entitled something like "How Should We Evaluate Confucius Now?" I gave it to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. My purpose was to represent my thoughts. I gave them this short essay, rather than my three-volume work, to make it convenient for them. Reading the longer book would take too much time. So I gave them this short essay. My intention was to ask them to examine it. The Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at that time was Deng Xiaoping. But of course he was too busy. He gave it to his Deputy Secretary General to read for him. The Deputy Secretary General told me himself that the essay had been given to him to read. He said that he had read it, attached comments, and sent it to Deng Xiaoping. But it had not yet been handed down.

Alitto: So you are still waiting…

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[6] Although Deng Xiaoping's reforms were only just starting in mid-1980s, they had an immediate effect on the intellectual atmosphere, which I found completely different from my earlier 1973 visit to China.

Liang: The efficiency of this bureaucracy is not very high.
Alitto: Yes. So is the case in the U.S.
Liang: So I pressed the issue and asked for my essay back. The Deputy Secretary General [of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference] told me that I shouldn't be anxious about it because the essay was quite long, and so on. Then he couldn't find it! He had great piles of documents, through which he searched and searched, but couldn't find it.
Alitto: Did you have a copy of that?
Liang: I had a copy, of course.
Alitto: Does China have photo reproduction equipment now?
Liang: Yes.
Alitto: I'm afraid it's not so common.
Liang: That's true.
Alitto: Too bad. If there were [more] photo reproduction equipment…
Liang: It would be much better.
Alitto: I represent the American academic world in eagerly looking forward to having an opportunity to read your latest work. I hope in the near future to have the opportunity. My former colleague, a native Chinese [currently teaching at] at the University of California, Berkeley, Tu Wei-ming, studies Confucianism in the U.S.
Liang: He came to see me.
Alitto: Did he? Before he went back to China, he told me that he planned to see you. Did he mention me? Just before he left he had a problem with his sponsoring unit. I also didn't know what to do [about securing a visa to visit China and you]. He [Tu] said that probably Beijing Normal University would sponsor me, but since they didn't contact me I thought that there was no way to come. Only then did I trouble you to contact the People's Political Consultative Conference on my behalf.
Liang: It was still better to go through the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.[7] [When the] man from Berkeley, Tu Wei-ming, came to see me, he left me some of his writings, all in Chinese, on the philosophy of Wang Yangming. He has now gone to the Dunhuang caves?
Alitto: Oh, he went to Dunhuang. I didn't know.
Liang: He went to Dunhuang to see the ancient…
Alitto: He has been researching Zhu Xi for the past several years. I have known him for more than a decade, because we are both Harvard University Ph.D.s. He was there earlier than I. Have you had the opportunity to see Western publications about Chinese philosophy?
Liang: It's very difficult for me to read Western languages, so I have a friend read them for me.

[7] Mr. Liang had asked his unit, the People's Political Consultative Conference, to be my official sponsor. This was just a formality, as it never had any contact with me, but having a sponsoring unit was necessary for any foreigner to visit China in those days. Professor Tu's sponsoring unit was Beijing Normal University, which is why he suggested that I contact that institution.

Alitto: There are several books that are not easily translated.

Liang: When he has finished reading, he tells me about [the content].

Alitto: My Chinese friend said that possibly it [*The Last Confucian*] would be translated into Chinese. I don't think it will be easy. Westerners find it easy, clear and lively, but translating it into Chinese would be very difficult. It isn't easy to convey the subtle connotations. I am already acquainted with this problem. In an article Zhou Shaoxian published, he disagreed with some of my most fundamental concepts about you. I think that it is because there is a difference in methods employed by Westerners studying China, and those used by Chinese themselves. Mr. Zhou was your student, and so his standpoint is different. If I had a hint of criticism [of you], Mr. Zhou would definitely [disagree]. Chinese find Westerners' analytical methods relatively strange and unfamiliar. Mr. Liang, you have done a comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures; probably you recognize that the methods and analytical styles used by Eastern and Western scholarly circles are different. … I don't know, you mean your friend has orally translated several parts of several books for you?

Liang: He tells me about them orally.

Alitto: I couldn't guarantee that they translated very well; perhaps they misunderstood some things. But, by and large, do you have a response [to the books]?

Liang: No, not at all. (Alitto: No?) I mean, in talking with you, I hope that you will understand the sources of my thought. The basis of my thought is Confucianism and Buddhism. This is the most important thing. That is more important than understanding my past. I hope you can know more about Confucianism and Buddhism. I want to tell you all about my Confucianism and Buddhism. I mean, I will put the emphasis in our conversations on this, rather than on my personal affairs or my opinions. Because Confucianism and Buddhism are my basis, if you can understand the basis, that would be best of all, the most important thing. Not only do I hope this for you but also I hope that Europeans and Americans can better understand these two schools of thought: Confucianism and Buddhism.

Alitto: Mr. Liang, has your interest in Buddhism and Buddhist studies been rekindled, or increased, as you have grown older? At the time of the May Fourth Movement, you publicly abandoned Buddhism and converted to Confucianism.

Liang: That is not relevant. You may say I abandoned Buddhism, but I really didn't abandon it. Originally I did want to leave the secular world and become a monk. What I abandoned was my plan for leaving the secular world and becoming a monk. But in my thought, on the philosophical level, I did not abandon Buddhism.

Alitto: Oh, I now understand a bit better. Actually, I also wrote about the same thing in the book, that is, you hadn't completely abandoned Buddhism, but you felt that the problems of the time didn't need Buddhism as much as Confucianism. So because of this, you began to study Confucianism.

Liang: Let me explain myself. When I was young, around sixteen or seventeen, I wanted to become a monk.

Alitto: I got that wrong. You actually wanted to become a monk, and not just a Buddhist layman.[8]

Liang: Right. I did want to leave the secular world and become a monk. I didn't give up this ambition until I reached the age of twenty-nine. But if I wanted to become a monk, I could not get married. But a person is not only composed of a brain. He is more than just thought. He cannot leave his corporal body. If I had really followed my ambition early on and had gone to a monastery, there probably would have been no problem, and [my life] would probably have been most congenial, and I would have lived out my life quietly.

But before I could leave the secular world and enter a monastery, I was drawn into Peking University to teach philosophy by Mr. Cai Yuanpei. Because of this, my life underwent a change. What change was this? I didn't go off to a monastery, but instead I scurried off into the world of learning and the company of intellectuals. It is difficult to avoid having a spirit of competition. This desire to excel over others arises from the corporeal. If it had been as I first wanted, very early leaving secular life for a monastery, that could have been peaceful and stable, walking a calm path. But when I got to the university and into the company of a lot of intellectuals, debates developed easily, and created a desire to excel over others. This desire to excel over others arises from the corporeal. The problem of sex easily arises from the corporeal. A monk does not need to get married; he is able to live in a monastery and can completely forget [sex], and can completely want no part of taking a wife. But when I got to the university, and was together with intellectuals, often I had this desire to excel over others. This was a corporeal problem. Once it arose, I also wanted to marry.

Originally, I didn't want to marry. When my mother was still alive, when I was in my teens she wanted to arrange an engagement according to Chinese custom. I refused. After I got to Peking University, in the company of intellectuals, I had a desire to excel. The forces of the corporeal arose, and I wanted to get married. So only after I reached age 29 did I abandon my plan to leave the secular world.

…

Liang: I lectured in Jinan during the summer of 1921. There was something called the summer session lecture series, and they invited me to be the lecturer for

[8] One valuable aspect of these interviews is that Mr. Liang explains his subjective state at any given time. In this case, for example, none of the published documents or interviews I had with those who knew Liang suggested that he was still a completely committed Buddhist, so without his own statements in these interviews, there was no way of knowing. Many similar situations occurred during these interviews: that the "outer" published or remembered record and Liang's "inner" record were different. Of course, Mr. Liang could not be explaining his subjective state at that point 70 years ago; he was telling what he remembered 70 years later as his subjective state at that time.

this session. I lectured in Jinan for forty days. I lectured every morning for half a day. After forty days of lecturing I returned to Beijing. There were two friends of mine who took notes—they transcribed the lectures. But they were not able to keep up with my lecturing. In the end, they had some other engagement and failed to take notes for the last chapter of *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, so I wrote it myself.

Alitto: Is that so? It really is a shame that I did not have the opportunity to meet you and ask your advice face to face [before writing your biography]. Obviously this is important.

Liang: All of this is about me as an individual, my personal affairs. As I said, my greatest hope is that you understand Confucianism and Buddhism.[9] I'm talking to you in hopes that you have a real understanding of things Eastern, at least those Eastern things most valuable. Of course I'm not quite familiar with the academia in Europe and America, but I'm afraid that very few people can truly understand Confucianism and Buddhism. So I keenly hope that you can understand Confucianism and Buddhism. I'll tell you what I understand, and very much hope that this will be the major task in our conversations. We can talk slowly and gradually and meet several times. (Alitto: That would be great.) If you can stay more in Beijing, we can talk more. While I am talking about Buddhism and Confucianism, I hope that you will ask questions. You must first settle the questions in your own mind, and only then can you understand. If you have not settled the problems and questions in your own thought, it amounts to not having heard anything.

Alitto: Yes, the book is primarily about your thought. Naturally it should be this way, but sometimes your thought is connected to your life. Probably in the future, before it quickly comes out in paperback, I can change some of these factual errors. (Liang: Revise it.)[10] I'll revise it. Naturally I agree that thought is the most important topic, but a person's thought cannot be divorced from his individual life.

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[9] This was a tension between us during these interviews. Mr. Liang wanted to explain his understanding of Confucianism and Buddhism, while I, as a historian, wanted him to talk about his own life, observations, experiences and views on historical events and personages. This is called "oral history." As Mr. Liang was a historical figure himself, I wanted to make a record of what he remembered of "history" while his mind was clear and he was in good health. Mr. Liang's greatest interest was explaining Confucianism and Buddhism to a foreigner. I had a second series of interviews with Mr. Liang some years later. In those interviews, he no longer stressed explaining Chinese thought to me, but rather, he resigned himself (for my benefit?) to recounting his experiences and telling his views. Mr. Liang is perhaps one of the best subjects in all of China for an oral history. First, he was utterly honest and forthright, and did not shape his narratives to make himself look good. Second, his life wove in, through and around every important historical event and person in twentieth century China. I hope to publish the second set of interviews later.

[10] Although I did later publish a second edition of the book, the University of California Press advised me that completely revising the text would be prohibitively expensive, so I was limited to adding a chapter at the end, which incorporated some of the information from the interviews. I now plan to publish a completely revised edition that would incorporate all of the information from both sets of interviews.

Liang: Right, it absolutely cannot be separated from life. When it comes to this kind of situation I can say something. We were just talking about my desire, when I was young, to become a monk, so I can be considered a Buddhist in certain respects. But a Buddhist must be viewed from two aspects and, you could say, must be discussed in two parts. Primitive Buddhism, which we can call Hinayana, emphasized leaving the secular world. What does "leaving the secular world" mean? To "leave the secular world" means to leave "Production and Annihilation" (or Birth and Death; *utpàdanirodha*).[11] What do we mean by the "world" (the finite, impermanent world)? That is, the endless cycle of birth and death. In Buddhist terminology this is called the "Wheel of Transmigration" (*samsara*), meaning that this life is all similar and continuous (*xiangsixiangxu*). "Similar" means that all life is almost the same. Life is like this. There is no such thing as the me of today that is still the me of yesterday. It is merely that they resemble each other. The me of today and the me of yesterday are similar. It is impermanent and unceasing. It never ceases; it cannot cease. Because it appears continuous, nothing ever stops. Life has no end. Some people think that death means the end of life, but there is no such thing as an end in Buddhism. It is not discontinuous, but not constant either, not the same eternally. As we just mentioned, the me of today is not the me of yesterday. There's no such thing. It has already changed. The "me" changes from morning to evening, from instant to instant. That's why life is continuous and impermanent (*feiduanfeichang*). This is the Buddhist attitude toward life.

Now, I just mentioned Primitive Buddhism, which is commonly called Hinayana. The Hinayana school laid down three conditions. The first condition is all phenomena (*sarva dharma*) are impermanent (*anitya*). That is, there are no permanent, constant things. Everything is in constant flux. The second point is that all dharmas are non-self; they have no ego. All phenomena and all dharmas are different. The first point is—"Whatever is phenomenal is impermanent." All are flowing, in flux. That is, the cycle of life is like flowing water, in continuous flux. So, they say, "Whatever is phenomenal is impermanent." The second is that no dharma has an ego. There are two kinds of dharma. One is effective or phenomenal dharma (*Samskrta Dharma*). The other is dharma not subject to causation, condition or dependence (*Asamskrta Dharma*). The first is the dharma of birth and death (*utpàdanirodha*). The second is the eternal, supramundane dharma, "immortal—neither dying nor being reborn" (*anirodhānupāda*). Some people ask, "Can the finite impermanent world have something permanent and eternal in it?" The Buddhist answer is that if there are both the birth/death cycle there would be something that neither is born nor dies. Birth-Death and No-Birth No-Death are a

[11] I have added the Sanskrit equivalents of Chinese terms to the text. Of course, Mr. Liang used only Chinese when speaking.

single thing, not two separate entities. That is to say, the dharma of birth and death and the dharma of the eternal are reducible to each other. No matter which of the two is concerned, there is no ego.

Man is one of "all living beings" (*sattva*). From the lowest organism, the most primitive amoeba, to man—all develop from having "egos." All must eat. All must take from the environment. All organisms, from the most primitive right up to man (as the highest), all share something. What is it? They all seek satisfaction from the external, from the environment. In the Buddhist view, this is a mistake, a loss of their basic nature. What is the basic nature? That is "satisfied and content with their own nature, with no dissatisfactions." This is Buddha. Don't regard Buddha as a god or a ruler. It's not like that. So what is Buddha? Buddha is the thing-in-itself of the universe. The nomenon of the universe can be said to have all inside. All things are inside. The phenomena are all inclusive. Since everything is inside, it has nothing. Nothingness. According to Buddhist doctrines, there are two aspects. One is embracing all phenomena in the cosmos; but all the same it is ultimate nothingness. These are two aspects of the same thing. The Buddha is to leave the world. The mundane world is an endless cycle of birth and death, and this, together with the eternal, perpetual aspect of the world, although seemingly two entities, in reality is the same thing. Didn't I just mention the Hinayana Primitive Buddhist doctrine, the doctrine that "all phenomena are impermanent" and that "nothing has an ego"? The third doctrine is Nirvana—calm and quiet, free from temptation and distress. This is Hinayana. The three Hinayana principles are the only complete Buddhadharma (the law preached by the Buddha).

The Hinayana is the Way of the Arhat (the perfect man of Hinayana). The Mahayana school, building on the foundation of the Hinayana, had a great reversal, a major revision. The Mahayana does not escape from the mundane world. The Mahayana doctrine are these two principles: "non-abandonment of sentient beings" and "non-residence in Nirvana." What does this call for? The doctrine is that the Buddha will return to the mundane world. The Hinayana wants to avoid the trouble of endless cycle of birth and death. The Mahayana has already transcended the endless cycle of birth and death, and so could enter the eternal realm. But that seems, to quote a Confucian saying, "to attend to one's own virtue in solitude—to protect oneself, but alone." The Bodhisattva and the Arhat are different. The Arhat solves the problem for himself, and strives for purity and salvation for himself. The Bodhisattva does not abandon the rest of living things. The Bodhisattva wants to return to the mundane world and already has the possibility of not being born nor dying. But the Bodhisattva still wants to return to the world. Why? Because of non-abandonment of living things. Let's end our talk here for today.

Alitto: OK. Thank you. May I ask a question? I came to the conclusion from studying the materials [that is, your works] that you yourself considered the Buddhist concept of Bodhisattva and the Confucian concept of Sage-to-be to be the same (one can't say fundamentally, but perhaps in some aspects); it

seems that it was a similar role. Perhaps I'm not speaking clearly.[12] My Chinese level is inadequate, but perhaps you understand my meaning, that a Sage and a Bodhisattva are similar in some respects. So when studying your writings, I felt that you were being like this, being both Bodhisattva and Sage. What do you think of this?

Liang: Yes, definitely almost the same. It is this way, but I would add an aspect. Confucians take the human standpoint; anyway, Confucian discourse never loses its focus on humanity. Confucians never depart from the human. They don't even talk much about supernatural beings. Wasn't it Zilu who asked Confucius about death? He replied, "While you do not know life, how can you know death?" "While you aren't able to serve men, how can you serve spirits?" Matters after death, matters of supernatural beings…

[12] As is obvious from this transcript, my command of Chinese had weakened considerably from its high point in 1972–1973, when I undertook a "sideline" occupation as Chinese-English interpreter. From 1973 to 1980, I had few opportunities to use spoken Chinese. Consequently, I unfortunately often ended up speaking "broken" Chinese during these interviews.

Chapter 2
August 13, 1980

Alitto: Please don't feel obliged to answer any questions that you think are awkward or difficult, Okay? For example, what do you think of contemporary Confucian thought, tradition and academic theory? Or, can we ask if present Chinese society can be considered Confucian?

Liang: In the last few decades, especially after Mao Zedong founded a new regime in Beijing, naturally everything changed. Although he could not escape the old influences of China, but it seems that Mao despised Confucius, so wasn't there a "Criticize Confucius" Campaign?

Alitto: The Criticize Confucius Campaign[1] seemed to have little to do with Confucius himself. The way we have understood it in the U.S. is that the Gang of Four used "Criticize Lin Biao Criticize Confucius" to criticize their political rivals. At least that is how we understood the situation in the West.

Liang: But the words "Criticize Confucius" were used. Mao was a person of genius, so he had contempt for everything. He lacked respect for the old culture and the old learning. Actually he himself was unable to break out of this old culture.

Alitto: That is to say that present Chinese society is considered to be a kind of Confucian society. So, what Confucian thought still remains in the hearts and minds of Chinese?

Liang: I think that nothing has been retained. Current society does not use that kind of old language, and does not follow those old moral lessons. In fact, Chinese family ethics have been changed considerably, quite different from those of the old society. This difference can be illustrated by two facts. The first is that women have risen. Before, women were mostly in the

[1] The common understanding of this movement in the West was that it was aimed at Zhou Enlai, for whom Confucius was a stand-in. The name "Duke of Zhou" (周公) was also part of the campaign, and, of course, the name can also mean "the honorable Zhou (Enlai)."

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home, and very seldom worked outside the home, and even more seldom did they involve themselves in politics. Now, women have political positions. This is the first change. The second is that the extended family no longer exists. In the old days, while the father was still living, the sons and daughters-in-law would stay together with him. Even while the grandfather was still alive, the family would not split up, and the family property was not divided. Three generations would live together and the family property was still together. If the family did divide the property, people would laugh at and criticize them. There is no such [extended family] practice in foreign countries. Now there is none in China either. The nuclear family is the rule now. There are no extended families living together with communal property. There are no longer such things. So, this too is a great change. The greatest of these changes are the transfer of women from the home into society, and their participation in government and politics.

Alitto: Let us put these issues aside for now. Does the essence of Chinese culture, its core substance, still exist?

Liang: There are still some remnants of Confucian culture. It is, of course, not possible to sweep away all traditional cultural lock, stock and barrel. Something still remains.

Alitto: So, there remains some…

Liang: What does still remain is in the area of family ethics.

Alitto: In your book *The Essence of Chinese Culture*, you mention a definition of the essence of Chinese culture; you defined it as that which makes humans human. The early Chinese sages discovered what made humans human prematurely, before the minimal primal material demands of humans were met. Do you still think that what makes humans human is the most important in Chinese culture?

Liang: What, in my view, to my knowledge, is the difference between Chinese culture and Western culture, and Indian culture? It is that Chinese culture knows of human "rationality."[2] Chinese culture believes in the human; it does not believe in God, as with Western culture or in Allah as in Islamic culture. Chinese culture is built upon and trusts the human. The distinguishing characteristic of Confucianism is that it relies on, and is built upon, humans, not some other being. This is what Mencius later pointed out—that "human nature is good." Confucius himself said no such thing, but Mencius mentioned it specifically. So the distinguishing characteristic

[2] In English, of course, "reason" or "rationality" does not connote anything like what Liang is suggesting. As I note later, some culturally conservative Western intellectuals referred to this "moral sense" that Liang speaks of by other terms. For example, Cardinal Henry Newman, a prominent nineteenth century thinker, used the term "illative sense." It means what Liang's "rationality" (理性) means. One such Western intellectual did indeed use the English term "rationality" exactly the way Liang did. That was Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

of Confucianism is that it believes in, and is confident in, humans. Humans can make mistakes, or sink into degeneracy. But how can you correct the human who makes mistakes? How can you keep him from moral degeneracy, from doing evil? What do you rely on to do this? Aside from the human himself, there is nothing else that is dependable. So I feel that the distinguishing feature of Confucianism is that it has faith in man. In foreign countries, in Christianity, it is said that Adam ate some fruit. There is such wording? (Alitto: Yes, there is.) There is such a theory.

Alitto: Yes, in a chapter in the Bible there is this story.

Liang: This is in the West. In India there is something different still. India is very strange indeed. From ancient times [the tradition of] India was to deny human life, to negate it. It held that human life itself was a mistake. This was the common attitude and convention in ancient India. Were there any exceptions to this attitude? Yes. In Buddhist writing there is the saying "to act in accord with the world, its ways and customs, and with non-Buddhist doctrines." Act in "Accord," with the "World." This was a non-Buddhist sect, and was held as a heretical, outside path. A lot of other religions, aside from Buddhism, also excluded it and considered it cult. This was the one and only affirmation of life in ancient Indian thought. Aside from this, all others held that human life was bafflement. The ancient traditions of India were quite different from everywhere else. This is very strange.

Alitto: What is the greatest threat to Chinese culture, in the present situation?

Liang: I think that there is no threat.

Alitto: You think that there is no threat?

Liang: Even if some of the old customs, practices and usages are now destroyed, I think that the future is bright (for Chinese culture). Sixty years ago in the last chapter of my book *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, I said that the future culture of the world would be a revived Chinese culture. I am explicitly not pessimistic about the future of Chinese culture.

Alitto: Mr. Liang, you still hold that the future world culture will be…

Liang: A revival of Chinese culture.

Alitto: Chinese culture…

Liang: Will revive.

Alitto: Revive. Oh! Why did I ask? Because in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, you made this kind of prediction, but in your books written after that, you seldom mention this. You have just said that those old social customs and habits no longer exist.

Liang: They were undermined.

Alitto: In that case, what in Chinese traditional culture must be preserved? What things?

Liang: Of course I want to answer this question. I want to explain why I'm so optimistic about the future of Chinese culture.

Alitto: Good.

Liang: Very early I made an analysis of human life, and concluded that it has three great problems.[3] The first is the problem of "humans versus the natural world." This is the first and foremost problem. Before humankind had created cultures and civilizations, humans suffered from floods, wild animals, earthquakes, and so on. So later Western culture developed. The development of Western culture can be encapsulated in two phrases: the conquest of nature and the utilization of nature. It adopts an attitude of conquest toward nature, an attitude of utilization. In this Western culture has always been very successful, right down to the present. Its successes continue to be higher and higher through time. It can now go into space and circle the earth; it can go to the moon. In its conquest and utilization of nature, Western culture has achieved great success and great victories. This is a characteristic of Western culture. It is a problem of man versus matter [nature]. As soon as man opened his eyes and looked around, what he saw was matter. He extended his hand and what he touched was matter, what he was standing on was matter. So, man versus matter was the first problem encountered by man, and Western culture solved this problem. Aren't the solutions to this problem highly developed? Following on this path, I think that it is quite natural that human society should advance into socialism; capitalism will evolve into socialism. So-called "capitalism" is a society in which the individual is the basic unit. Capitalism can be encapsulated into eight characters: *gerenbenwei, ziwozhongxin* (Individual-based Egocentrism, and Self Centeredness). These characterize European and American modern societies. It is obvious that these societies (all human societies) will undergo a transformation to socialism in the future. Socialism is unavoidable. Capitalism will become a relic of the past. That is to say, the means of production and the materials of production definitely will be publicly owned. At present property is nominally individually owned. In fact, the economic production of a society is the whole society's production, not just the big capitalists'. Later society will become socialistic. This is inevitable. It is unavoidable that capitalism will develop into socialism. Society based on the individual as the unit will become based on society as the unit. When this has taken place, man comes to confront what I call the second problem, the problem of man versus man. That is, how to make it so that men can get along together, live in peace together. To do this, the relationship between man and man must be straightened out. That is, create a situation whereby I show consideration for you, and you show consideration for me. An old Chinese term describing this is "to give precedence to

[3] What follows is a summary of Liang's argument in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. He does not alter the original argument at all, but insists still that human societies by their very nature will evolve a kind of Chinese culture. He said the same thing about the inevitability of socialism for all human societies, so in his mind, there is a parallel between the two entities—Chinese culture and socialism.