

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 Campaign¹ 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)."

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

²In 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.

the other out of courtesy (*lirang*),” and “to govern a state with courtesy (*lirangweiguo*).” At that time, the problem of man versus man will become the primary one, while the problem of man versus nature will not have totally disappeared, but it will have receded to second place in importance.

... That is to say, science and industry will continue to advance, but the major problem will be the problem of man versus man. This is the way in the future. In the future, when this problem must be solved, that will be the time of Chinese culture, because Chinese culture is based on the family. The old term for this is “filial piety and fraternal duty”: the father is benevolent and the child is filial. I only use four words: *xiao* (filial piety), *ti* (fraternal duty), *ci* (kindness), and *he* (peace-harmony). So, in my view, when human society reaches the stage of socialism, then probably all people will have to strive for filial piety, fraternal duty, kindness and peace-harmony, to strive for respect for age, for treating children and the young with kindness, for harmony and good relations between brothers, and so go create good relations generally throughout society. This is the problem that takes place within a socialist society. Again, I say, at this stage the problem of man versus nature still exists, but is in second place, not the most pressing problem. And so this stage I call the revival of Chinese culture.

I do want to say more about this now. After the revival of Chinese culture will come the revival of Indian culture. I estimate, just off the cuff, that this revival of Chinese culture will probably last a very long time. Probably humanity will be in this kind of atmosphere and circumstances—these kinds of customs, conventions, and social practices—for a long time. But society will still change; it won’t be forever this way. It will change and transform, in my view, into a revival of Indian culture. What was ancient Indian culture like? What would it look like? I just inadvertently mentioned “acting in accord with the world, its ways and customs, and with non-buddhist doctrines.” That is, that particular sect affirmed human life. Its influence was quite small. Broader ancient Indian society, however, denied life, saying that human life had no value, even to the extent that life was deluding and confusing. Human life takes place in delusion and confusion. This attitude was common in ancient India, aside from the exception of the one small sect that I mentioned before. There were many religions in India aside from Buddhism, which arose later. Buddhism was not the earliest school of thought in India. Yet Buddhism pushed these attitudes of negation to their natural conclusion most completely. So, in my view, in the far distant future of mankind, this attitude and atmosphere of ancient India will arise. People will feel that their own life has no value. In Buddhist terms, the person will want to seek “release” or “deliverance” or “liberation from worldly cares” (*mukti*). This is the ultimate liberation. So, the above is my own deduction, my own logic.

Alitto: Actually, this reckoning is similar to that expressed in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. I myself am persuaded by your theory.

According to logical inference of developments in the future, it should be like this. But I still have a theory. I think that this process of modernization, or you could say the process of rationalization, is in conflict with, in contradiction with, in contradiction with “what makes humans human”—be it the “human” in Indian culture or in Chinese culture. Does the present Four Modernizations Movement hold any harm for Chinese culture?

Liang: China exists in this present world, and cannot go against the current. It can only advance forward and develop material culture, which was necessary. But the important thing is that in the past, the development of Western material culture was based upon capitalism. Ever since the overwhelming power of the West reached China, China has had no opportunity to develop capitalism. So China had to take the socialist road. It could only seek individual welfare within the context of the welfare of the whole society. It could not allow the welfare of the individual to prevail over the welfare of society. So the appearance and success of the Communist Party in China is very reasonable, and not peculiar or strange at all.

Alitto: What do you think the West should learn from the East, China in particular?

Liang: This is what I just said.

Alitto: In the future, Western culture and Western society will evolve into [the way of] China. In the present phase of history, what should Western society learn from the East, from China?

Liang: What should it learn? I'll answer that question. A human being, immediately upon being born, is related to other humans. At the least, he is related to his parents, and siblings. As he grows up, he has friends, teachers and so on. These relationships are called “*renlun*” (human ethical relationships) in Chinese. Human beings always live in the interpersonal relationships. One cannot be detached from other people, so how to foster the relationships becomes a major question. And those relationships, as the Chinese old term goes, are called “*renlun*.”

The distinguishing feature of Chinese culture lies in this. Chinese culture puts importance on human relationships. It expands the familial relationships into broader society beyond the family. For example, a teacher is called “teacher-father,” a schoolmate is called a “school brother.” In ways like this, a person always has the close, family-like, intimate feelings. Applying such relationships to society, it seems to bring distant people closer together, to bring outsiders inside. This is the distinguishing feature of China and Chinese culture. To put this feature into a few words, it is the opposite of the individual-centered, egocentric way. What is that, then? The essence of the matter is mutually to value and respect the other party.

For example, since Confucius (in *The Analects*) liked to talk about filial piety and fraternal duty, we should ask what they are. They are respect for and obedience to the older generation on the part of the young. There is also the virtue of kindness, which means affection and kindness for the younger generation on the part of the older generation. So, to sum up in

a word, these virtues are mutual respect. For example, a guest arrives. The host shows respect for the guest. In all things, the host thinks of and is considerate to the guest. The best seat is given to the guest. Tea is made for the guest. Now, a good guest will also turn this around, and respect his host. He will take the host into consideration in everything. And so, in Chinese society there exists the custom of “*lirang*.” What is this *lirang*? “*Rang*” is regarding the other person as important. “*Li*” is to respect the other. China, under Confucian influence, has always told people to respect others. Afterwards, when capitalism has passed away, and socialism has arrived, probably this *lirang* as a social convention will also arrive [on a world-wide scale]. With everyone living together, mutual respect is very important. So, that’s why I say that the future of the world will be a revival of Chinese culture. I will say, in conclusion, that I have always felt that Marxism is quite good. It is superior to Utopian (“Fantasy”) Socialism.

Alitto: “Fantasy.” France’s...

Liang: Owen of England, and Fourier. There were three men.

Alitto: Yes, yes. In the past there were many. In the 19th century there were quite a few. In any case, I know your...

Liang: Utopian Socialists. Their hearts were in the right place, but they didn’t understand that the natural development of society and history would produce socialism. So Marxism is called Scientific Socialism, which means that objective development of history will be in that direction.

Alitto: Chinese culture is extremely old, in a sustained unbroken continuity. In comparison with the short-lived cultures of the West and the Middle East, what is the special nature of Chinese culture that allowed this? Why did it occur? That is to say, what is the major reason for the length and continuity of Chinese culture? (Liang: A long history.) Longer by far than any other culture anywhere in the world. What’s the major reason?

Liang: I remember there was a man who wrote a discourse on this question and answered it. There was one, or you could say there were two. There were two people who did it. One of the two is already dead. He had studied biology in Europe. His name was Zhou Taixuan. Possibly the other hasn’t yet died. If he is still alive, he’s older than I. He’s now ninety-some. He had studied in France. His name is Xu Bingchang.⁴

...

Liang: Some sixty years ago, when I was only in my twenties, I published *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. In that book, I explained

⁴I still do not understand why Mr. Liang mentioned these two men. Neither of them, as far as I have been able to discover, attempted to answer my question about the longevity and continuity of Chinese culture. Mr. Xu was a historian of sorts, but his specialties were the very early period and archaeology. He actually died in 1976. Mr. Zhou was a famous biologist who, aside from his scientific work, did publish on less specialized topics about humanity. As far as I know, however, he did not address the question of Chinese culture directly. He died in 1968.

Confucius according to my understanding of him at the time. Now, doesn't Confucius often speak about Perfect Virtue (*ren*)? What did I say in that book? I said that Confucian *ren* is a kind of extremely sensitive, acute intuition. Didn't Mencius like to use the terms "intuitive understanding of the good (conscience)," which was what we call "instinct." "*Zhijue*" in Chinese is called "intuition" in English. "*Benneng*" is called "instinct" in English. So in this way, I used these modern terms to explain Confucius's and Mencius's thought. Now, I know I was wrong. These modern terms are close to the meanings I meant to convey; they are close, but they are not very direct equivalents. It was not really correct, nor completely incorrect, because Confucius's "Perfect Virtue" can be very deep and profound, so much so that it becomes abstruse. Isn't there this sentence in *The Analects*? The master said, "Is 'Perfect Virtue' a thing remote? I wish for it, and then virtue is at hand." If you explain *ren* in too abstruse a fashion, it is too one-sided, too narrow. *Ren* does not necessarily have to be explained in profound, abstruse ways. *Ren* is both shallow and profound, both simple and complex. If you only understand its superficial, shallow, easy aspects, that is not real understanding. So my mistake in that book was to stress its simple, shallow aspects too much. Mencius is also that way. When you go to understand Mencius's "intuitive understanding of the good," it can be understood both on a shallow level and on a profound level. For example, "intuitive understanding of the good," that is, conscience. Who doesn't have a conscience? Everyone does. Is this saying right or wrong? Can you put it this way? You can certainly put it this [simple] way. But, on the other hand, you can't understand it too simplistically, too shallowly either.

Why can't it be too simplistic, too shallow? Because we humans live within society, and cannot depart from society. It is likely that humans will follow the mores and usages of their society. If the mores of a society take [this] to be right, the individual considers it right. If the morals and mores of a society take it to be wrong, so does the individual human. It is easy for people to do this. But societies and their mores and morals are different. There are differences in both time and space. East and West are different. The modern and the ancient are different. People tend to follow their social norms. So, what is considered wrong in one society is considered right in another. This is very common, unless it is an inherently extremely gifted person, or an extraordinarily wise person, who possibly won't follow conventions—he often would lead a revolution. Exceptionally gifted people are this way, and so it is hard to say if these words apply to them.

Alitto: Each society has its own customs and mores. Each society has its own value...

Liang: Value judgments.

Alitto: Value judgments. If we say that each society is different, then does humanity have a universal truth, a universal standard for value judgments?

Liang: The answer is yes and no.

Alitto: "Yes" is to say...

Liang: Let's first address its non-existence. This life of ours must be lived in a society, so we must go along with the values of our respective societies. If you oppose society, you will not be accepted by society. So the values can be taken as "customs" or "etiquette." Probably on the one side of the issue, we can admit that each age, each place—that is to say, each society—has different customs, mores and morals. Probably it is natural to be in accord with different societies' values. The "rules of propriety" are for that time and place reasonable and true. On the other hand, however, there is also a kind of truth, which is not the "right" or "reason" of a particular time and place, bound by customs and mores. Rather, it is an absolute truth. This truth does exist, but only very few enlightened brilliant people are conscious of it, or realize it. They can rise above and see further than the average people. On the one hand, there are few of these people. On the other hand, there is an old Chinese saying that "Something something... great height and brilliancy, so as to pursue the course of the Mean." This kind of person is himself very brilliant and wise, but he does not want to divorce himself from the society of his time. So the path he takes is still the middle path. I don't know if you are aware that I never studied the Four Books and Five Classics?

Alitto: Yes, I am.

Liang: So the quotation I just used is not complete. "Something something... great height and brilliancy, so as to pursue the course of the Mean." This is because I never memorized the Classics, and so I'm not all that familiar with them. (The original phrase is: to raise it to its greatest height and brilliancy, so as to pursue the course of the Mean.—compiler)

Alitto: It's OK. I know. I haven't memorized ancient books but I know this sentence. These enlightened ones understand and are conscious of the truth. It's all one truth, right? It's one standard for all value judgments. That is to say, no matter where the enlightened ones are from, their conscious truth is the same.

Liang: We should say that there is only one absolute truth, but I usually say that there is a material physical truth and a human truth. The reason used in natural sciences and social sciences, especially the former, is this "material physical truth." This truth exists objectively, and does not follow man's will. It doesn't make any difference whether you like this truth or not, it still is ever there. The other kind of truth, "human truth," exists subjectively. When encountering this kind of truth, everyone nods his head, and says "Right" or "Yes." This truth (or reason) has some element of subjectivity. When encountering this kind of truth, people have a favorable impression of it, and are well disposed toward it. Let's say it is a matter of justice, for example. A person will say that he has a "sense of what is right." Justice resides in a sense of what is right. So in my final analysis, there are two truths—a physical truth and a human truth.

Master Zhu (Zhu Xi) of the Song Dynasty never made a distinction between these two truths. He had a paragraph, which I cannot recite.

Anyway, he never separated these two kinds of truth or reason. I can give you another example, concerning biological evolution. That is, in natural selection, the weak are eaten by the strong. This is a phenomenon that has an objective existence, a truth or a reason of the natural world. But we humans all dislike and oppose it. We feel that...

Alitto: Do you mean that people, no matter when they live or what place they are from, all dislike it? This “we” is in reference to humankind, no matter where one is from?

Liang: In what stands to reason with humans, the phenomenon of the weak being oppressed, being bullied gives a feeling of unfairness to the onlooker, and the onlooker does not like it. This feeling of dislike is reason, a kind of human truth. “The strong eating the weak” has an objective existence and that objective existence is material physical truth.⁵

I would like to continue today with what I said yesterday.⁶ I’m afraid that I didn’t make myself clear enough yesterday. So I have written it down. Mahayana Buddhism is based upon Hinayana Buddhism, and is a great reversal of it. Why a great reversal? Hinayana wants to renounce this world. The Mahayana Bodhisattva is “non-abandonment of sentient beings” and “non-residence in Nirvana.” Hinayana wants to end up in this place, wants to go to the tranquility of Nirvana; the Mahayana Bodhisattva does not abandon sentient beings and so does not reside in Nirvana, does not want to end up in Nirvana. That is to say, the Hinayana rule is to go beyond this world; the Mahayana, given a choice, still returns to this world. This is the Mahayana way.

So, in my own case, I admit to being a follower of Buddhism; I would not deny being a follower of Confucius either. Why? Why don’t I deny it? Because this way of the Mahayana Bodhisattva—I want to follow the way of the Bodhisattva—is “not to abandon sentient beings” and “not to reside in Nirvana.” So I want to go into the world. Because of this, all through my life, for example, everyone knows that I worked in rural reconstruction, rural movement, and that I worked in politics as a mediator between the two Parties (that is, national affairs), especially when Japan invaded China, so would this be considered “leaving the mundane world” or not? This [activity] does not in the slightest go against “leaving the mundane world.” Because this is what? It is the way of the Bodhisattva.⁷ This is not Hinayana.

⁵ This is one of the many times I tried to have Mr. Liang speak to the question of universal values and the source of morality. In each case, he proceeds from Mencius’s argument that values are inherent in human biology.

⁶ Mr. Liang continues to want to become the bearer of the Buddhist and Confucian messages to the West through me. What he explains here, however, is relatively basic Mahayana Buddhism; I don’t find anything particular or different in this description from his already recorded interpretation of Buddhism.

⁷ Here Liang says outright what I suggested in my first article on him, that he saw himself as acting in a messianic role of Bodhisattva. Like many of the first generation of radical reformers—Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong and, to some degree, Zhang Taiyan, all of whom had a deep and abiding interest in Buddhism—he saw his activist role in society and politics as Bodhisattva-like.

Hinayana wants to go into the mountains, to some monastery and not emerge. Mahayana is “non-abandonment of sentient beings” and “non-residence in Nirvana.” You can say that I am a Confucian, a follower of Confucius, and you can say that I am a follower of Siddhartha, because there is no conflict or contradiction [between the two].

Alitto: No conflict between the two. This is a relatively new way of putting it. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, or before then when Buddhism had just reached China, there was conflict between the two. So you are saying...

Liang: Insufficient understanding. The enlightened person has no problem. So, it seems that the Song Confucians had rejected Buddhism and Daoism, I think that it was a question of insufficient understanding. For the wise, enlightened person, there is no obstruction to understand; he sees everything clearly. If there is obstruction, it is that you yourself create an obstruction for yourself. But as a matter of fact it is not necessary. The enlightened person transcends this. Quite a few of the Song Dynasty Confucians like Master Zhu (Zhu Xi) rejected Buddhism and Daoism.

Alitto: Yesterday you said that you were a Buddhist all along.⁸

Liang: Because very early when I was quite young, a teenager, I wanted to become a monk.

Alitto: Thereupon to the present you had preserved your original...

Liang: It's still that way, but now I don't have to become a monk. In fact, I still want to.

Alitto: Still want to become a monk?

Liang: Yes, still. If I would be allowed to go live in a mountain monastery, I would be quite happy.

Alitto: Yes. Do you still meditate or do Buddhist cultivation...?

Liang: The basic way involves three words (Liang writes out the words for Alitto to see): discipline (*sila*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). These are disciplines that must be maintained. There are many rules of discipline. For example, one cannot marry. If you have already married, you must leave home and become a monk. Killing is forbidden, eating meat is forbidden and so on. There are many prohibitions. Only after observing these prohibitions can you achieve meditation referring to the trance state that we just mentioned. So only after you have observed the prohibitions can

⁸ Throughout these interviews, Mr. Liang maintained that he is simultaneously a Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Marxist, and Vitalist (à la Bergson), who also has a great respect for Christianity. In my view, this is part of a long tradition of eclecticism in Chinese thought, one of the first more important examples being the Han Dynasty “National Doctrine” (国教), which was Dong Zhongshu's eclectic mixture of Confucian teachings, Legalist teachings, Daoism, and cosmologies derived from the *Book of Changes* and folk religion. At the end of the Han, the earliest folk religious text we have, the *Taipingjing* (《太平经》) is similarly eclectic in composition, even including Moist (墨子) elements. In my view, this is a traditional attitude of Chinese intellectuals, even into the twentieth century. Liang's friend, Li Dazhao, for instance, was simultaneously a French-style Vitalist and a nationalist while he was embracing Communist internationalism. Often Westerners do not understand this attitude, and take it to be self-contradictory.

you achieve Samadhi. Only through this can you achieve wisdom. Buddhism does not hold what we commonly regard as intelligence and wisdom to be “wisdom.” Buddhism regards that kind of intelligence as merely a kind of cleverness and perceptiveness, not genuine wisdom, not the Great Wisdom. Great Wisdom comes only through Samadhi, and through it one has a breakthrough in consciousness. Of course, everyone knows that in the past there were thirteen different school’s of Buddhism in China; an important and well-developed one was Chan.⁹ In Chan Buddhism there is a saying that expresses its special feature or characteristic. What was the Chan school’s special feature? It’s “not relying upon language for explanation.” So, language and writing are not needed; it is not based upon language and writing. The Chan school was quite well-developed. There was a book called *Jingde Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*. Later there were many more *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*. Altogether there were five books combined to constitute the *Five Lamps Combined*. All tell Chan school stories. Laymen can’t understand these stories. For example, a famous successful Chan master is called a “Most Virtuous” (*Bhadanta*). So one Chan Buddhist went to see the “Most Virtuous.” As soon as he saw him, the Most Virtuous struck him with a stick, and he understood. The man understood. Other people don’t understand this matter. This is a Chan story. This is called the “Stick.” There is another called the “Shout.” A pilgrim went to the Chan Most Virtuous for instruction. He didn’t say a word, but gave a great shout. The pilgrim also understood. These kinds of stories are in the *Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*.

Alitto: I remember that I read some of those stories. So the Chan school is...

Liang: I mean, the Chan school does not rely upon language or writing, and two sides can influence each other. An old, successful monk who has achieved enlightenment can have influence on a newly arrived person, and make him able to achieve enlightenment, but he does not use language. An enlightenment of language is still on the conscious level. Only [an enlightenment] that is life-changing in a fundamental way can be considered true enlightenment.

Alitto: When you were young, in your teens, was it after the Republican Revolution when you had a spiritual crisis?

Liang: It was before the Republican Revolution. (Alitto: Before?) At the time of the Revolution I was nineteen. I wanted to become a monk at sixteen or seventeen.

Alitto: Oh, sixteen or seventeen. I was wrong about that. I thought that only after the Revolution did you really turn to Buddhism. That is to say, before then

⁹ In the West, “Chan” (禪) is almost universally known in the Japanese reading of the word “Zen,” because the Japanese version made the biggest impact in Western popular culture, especially in the 1950s.

you were adopting Western thinking, in any case, Western schools of thought. Only after the Revolution did you have a spiritual crisis, and turn to Buddhism. I was wrong.

Liang: I wanted to become a monk very early.

Alitto: But you also participated in the Republican Revolution. When you were participating in the Revolution, did you still want to be a monk?

Liang: I just spoke of this. Becoming a monk is going to the quietude of a monastery. This can be said to be an ideal for both Hinayana and Mahayana, but Mahayana is different in that it wants to save the world; it does not want to abandon living things.

Alitto: I understand this, but reading about that time of your life in books and essays you wrote, I got the impression that it was only after the Republican Revolution that you wanted to leave home and become a monk.

Liang: I have often said that there are two questions that have occupied my mind. One question is the practical problem of China. China was in a kind of national crisis, and the social problems were very serious. This practical problem stimulated my mind and occupied my brain. There is another problem. I just mentioned a practical problem. There is another problem that transcends practicality, which is the problem of human life. What should be done with its afflictions and uncertainties, the misunderstandings of life, and doubts about it? Isn't this what I just mentioned about wanting to leave home and become a monk? These two problems are not the same. One makes me involve myself in social and national affairs for society and the country; and the other makes me want to leave society.

Alitto: In fact these two problems are related. For instance, there is a close relationship between the problems of China and the rural reconstruction that you led; rural reconstruction is closely related to Chinese culture; and Chinese culture is intimately related to human life, human existence, and the life of the people. I have always felt that these two problems are closely related. Oh, do you dislike smoke?¹⁰ (Liang: It doesn't matter.) On this, I base myself on a Western psychologist. He wrote a biography of the medieval age German Martin Luther, and also wrote a biography of Gandhi.¹¹

¹⁰ I lit my pipe. I often smoked my pipe as we talked. I now regret smoking in front of him, because I am sure that Mr. Liang was just being polite when he said he didn't mind it.

¹¹ This is in reference to Erik Erickson, a Psychoanalyst and Professor of Psychology at Harvard. His focus was on personality and identity, and this work led to his theory of Stages of Psychosocial Development. In illustrating this theory, he wrote two famous biographies of historical figures, *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Gandhi's Truth* (1969). These two figures, Erickson wrote, were "spiritually talented." I was impressed by the two biographies and saw Liang Shuming as another example of a "spiritually talented" person who transferred his own spiritual crisis on to humanity as a whole. Liang's own life before his book *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, for example, had traversed the "three paths" he described for humanity's cultural evolution. He was first a utilitarian who was in favor of a Western-style government for China. Then he became dis-illusioned and became a Buddhist. After his father's suicide, he then went onto the Confucian path. As Erickson describes them, Luther and Gandhi did something similar with their lives.

He used a method of analysis which held that there are some sagacious people—Gandhi for one, Luther for another—who combine together their own personal problems and problems of humanity. No matter where they are from, you could say the exceptionally sagacious are like sages, so I used this theory to analyze your situation, which is also like those examples of his. I got some things wrong, though—for example I thought that only after the Republican Revolution did you genuinely believe in Buddhism. Before that you just had an interest in it, but only after the Revolution did your own problems force you to delve deeply into Buddhist studies. Before that you had an interest, all right, but it was not...

Liang: It was that way. I spoke of it yesterday a bit. I did speak of it yesterday. All along I wanted to leave home and become a monk. Not until the age of 29 did I abandon it; I only married at age 29.

Alitto: Why do I mention this again? Because I made a mistake. It's embarrassing, writing your biography and making a mistake about such an important thing. Before the revolution, how did you find Consciousness-Only Buddhism...

Liang: At that time I really didn't understand Consciousness-Only very well. It is very difficult to understand. The Faxiang (*dharmalakṣaṇa*) Consciousness-Only (*Yogācāra*) school in Buddhist studies is very hard to understand.

Alitto: It is difficult to understand, all right. You only started studying Consciousness-Only in the first and second years of the Republic.

Liang: Not yet. (Alitto: No?) At that time I couldn't understand it. I studied the Consciousness-Only school after I got to Peking University. Cai Yuanpei engaged me to teach Indian Philosophy at Peking University.

Alitto: But in 1916 you already published "On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts," so you had already studied Consciousness-Only.

Liang: That wasn't really considered study of Consciousness-Only. (Alitto: That can't be considered study?) In the article I quoted a lot from the Consciousness-Only school. There were an Old school and a New school within the Consciousness-Only school. The New school was derived from the monk Xuan Zang. You know Xuan Zang? (Alitto: Yes, I know.) Xuan Zang of the Tang Dynasty, Tang Tripitaka. At the time I wrote the article, I really didn't understand the New school of Consciousness-Only. I hadn't read its texts. What I had read was all Old school texts, and it was from these texts that I quoted in the article.

Alitto: I got this wrong too.

Liang: An ordinary layman would have a hard time distinguishing between the two schools of Consciousness-Only.

Alitto: Mr. Liang, you are so healthy.

Liang: My health has not been that good; it's just that I have had no illness.

Alitto: How sharp you are, virtually completely the same as a young person. Ordinary people feel that you have some secret. Is this secret related to Buddhism?

Liang: There is no relationship between my good health and Buddhism. Didn't I just mention discipline, meditation, and wisdom? Discipline I have some.

What is it? From a very young age I have abstained from eating meat. Not eating meat is the Buddhist injunction against killing, so no animals are eaten. Originally I didn't intend to marry. Only after age 29 did I abandon this idea of remaining celibate. Before age 29, I always wanted to become a monk.

Alitto: Are you still a vegetarian?

Liang: To this day I am still a vegetarian. I have been a vegetarian for seventy years.

Alitto: It's already been 70 years. So since you were 8, no, 18...

Liang: 70 years ago, I was living in Beijing, living together with my father. I already wanted to be a vegetarian then, but my father didn't like the idea, so I didn't do it. I did have an opportunity right then to leave Beijing and go to Xi'an, and so at that time I started practicing vegetarianism. From that time on, I have never stopped.

Alitto: I don't remember this. When did you go to Xi'an? For what reason?

Liang: Right at that time, my brother, my elder brother was in Xi'an, and I went to see him. My father was in Beijing; he [brother] was in Xi'an. I went to Xi'an.

Alitto: Wasn't this after the Revolution?

Liang: After the Revolution.

Alitto: So, it should be in 1912.

Liang: Right. A bit later than 1912, in 1913.

Alitto: Oh, 1913. How long did you stay in Xi'an that time?

Liang: Not too long, just a few months.

Alitto: In 1912 you went to Nanjing? In 1912?

Liang: I went there once. I participated in the Republican Revolution. After the revolution, I wanted to go to Guangxi, because Guangxi Province wanted to send students abroad to study. I went together with a few Guangxi men.

Alitto: Oh, so you didn't go...

...

Liang: He [Wang Jingwei] was here a few years before, before the Revolution, that is, he was here the first year of the Xuantong reign [1908]. He, together with a Sichuanese friend surnamed Huang, secretly came to Beijing. He wanted to use a bomb to kill the Prince Regent. The Prince Regent was the Emperor Xuantong's father. Because the Emperor Xuantong was a child, only four years old, the Prince Regent virtually controlled the government. Wang Jingwei had come to assassinate the Prince Regent. To do this he went at night to a place where the Prince Regent's horse carriage would pass. There were no automobiles yet. He went to this place and buried a bomb during the night, but someone saw him, and so he was arrested, and thrown into prison. Originally someone arrested for attempted assassination of the Prince Regent would possibly be executed. He wasn't executed; he was locked up, right up to when the Southern Revolutionary Army arose and confronted the North. In Beijing at that time, Yuan Shikai had emerged; he released Wang Jingwei from prison, and asked him to be

an intermediary and think of a way to negotiate peace [between the North and South]. It happened this way.

Alitto: The time you yourself went from Beijing to Nanjing was...

Liang: At this time I hadn't gone to Nanjing yet. (Alitto: Not yet?) Strictly speaking, I had not. It was like this. I'll continue what I was just speaking about. Wang was released by Yuan to be a mediator between the North and the Southern Revolutionaries. Wang organized a Beijing-Tianjin branch of the Revolutionary Alliance (the Tongmenghui). The Revolutionary Alliance was founded by Sun Yat-sen. Its official name was the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance. This new branch was considered its northern branch.

When I was still in middle school, I had already secretly joined a revolutionary organization, which was part of the Beijing-Tianjin branch of the Revolutionary Alliance that I just mentioned led by Wang Jingwei. At that time I was also a news reporter. The newspaper office was in Tianjin. Later it was moved to Beijing. For a time I led the life of a news reporter. Moreover, I was a field reporter who went out to cover the news on the spot. There was such a period. After the Republican Revolution, I went to Nanjing once. Later I doubled back. After Nanjing, I went to Wuxi, and from Wuxi doubled back. At that time my plan had been to go to Guangxi to sign up for the examination and go abroad to study, but I didn't succeed in going.

Alitto: I was wrong about this too. In my book this is wrong.

Liang: What is in the book?

Alitto: In the book I said that after the Revolution had been successful, and Sun Yat-sen had gone to Nanjing to be the Provisional President, you went to Nanjing because the Revolutionary Alliance people all went to Nanjing to begin the work of constructing a nation. I knew that at that time you were a reporter. I thought that around March, April or May of 1912 you went to Nanjing. In the end I was wrong. Your original intention was to go to Guangxi.

Liang: I did want to go to Guangxi and then came back quickly.

Alitto: The Beijing-Tianjin Revolutionary Alliance branch was organized after the Wuhan Uprising, I know now. But was it Wang Jingwei who founded it, or was it before...

Liang: Wang Jingwei organized it quite suddenly.

Alitto: In Taiwan, I read some documents from the Beijing-Tianjin branch of the Revolutionary Alliance. Wang Jingwei wasn't mentioned in them. I found the name of a classmate of yours. I couldn't find your name. In the book I speculated that you might have used another name.¹²

¹² These documents were in the Nationalist Party Archives, which at the time were still in a small town outside of Taizhong called Caotun. Perhaps the documents I saw were prior to Liang's joining, although I did see a classmate of his from Shuntian Middle School (顺天中学) on the membership list. Liang told me at another time he had smuggled arms in a mule cart.

Liang: At that time, we were all together in the Revolutionary Alliance. Because, the revolutionary army had arisen, the Qing court abdicated governmental power. Some of us originally were fooling around with bombs and pistols, but then we began to run a newspaper. (Alitto: *The Republic*.) We ran *The Republic*. The head of *The Republic* was Zhen Yuanxi. This man also ran a Chinese language newspaper in the U.S.A. At the time I was a field reporter, not someone who sat in the newspaper office writing essays, but was outside all the time. At that time, *The Republic*'s office was in Tianjin, and my home was in Beijing, so I commuted back and forth between the two cities, covering stories.

Alitto: Did you get to know Huang Yuansheng at this time?

Liang: I got to know him after this.

Alitto: Later? He was assassinated in the U.S. in 1915.¹³ (Liang: He was killed by assassination.) So was the first time you met Cai Yuanpei when you were a reporter...

Liang: I met Cai Yuanpei once during this period, but he didn't remember me. Afterwards, in 1917, when he became president of Peking University, I really got to know him. I had him sent my essay "On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts" for comments. He said, that when he was passing through Shanghai, he had read it and found it very good. He said that he was now going to Peking University, and asked me to come on board.¹⁴ I said that I really wasn't qualified to teach Indian thought. At the time, scholars of Europe and Japan did not include Buddhism as one of the six schools of Indian philosophy. Strictly speaking, I really didn't know much about Japanese or European scholarship on Indian philosophy. I only liked Buddhism, that's all. When Cai invited me, something else had come up, and being occupied with it, I couldn't accept Mr. Cai's invitation to teach at Peking University.

What was I busy with at the time? By that time Yuan Shikai had already died and the North and South were reunited. The major force that overthrew Yuan was in the Southwest. In Guangxi, the important figures were Cai E and Lu Rongting. In Guizhou, it was Liu Xianshi. Among the forces overthrowing Yuan inside the government was Liang Qichao (Rengong). In the North, when Yuan was dying he had asked Duan Qirui to come into politics. Duan was, among the Beiyang militarists, a very honest, decent,

¹³ I think that previously it had been widely speculated that Yuan Shikai's agents had assassinated him. In fact, the affair turns out to be a farcical tragedy. As Huang had indeed written an ambiguous article backing Yuan Shikai's imperial plans, he was somehow considered by Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Party to be on Yuan's side. So, Huang fled to San Francisco to escape from Yuan's wrath, and was shot to death by the Revolutionary Party assassin because he was considered Yuan's backer. The order, carried out on Christmas night, came down from Sun himself.

¹⁴ Astonishing as it seems today, it was solely on the basis of this essay that Cai appointed Liang as professor at Peking University. Liang, of course, had never even attended the university, much less had specialized academic training in Indian thought.

fine person. Duan resolutely and firmly opposed Yuan Shikai's becoming emperor from the first. So a group of Yuan's supporters wanted to assassinate him. He was at the time Minister of the Army. He resigned and went to live in the Western Hills of Beijing. They still wanted to assassinate him. The upshot was that he was never killed. Yuan's plan for becoming emperor failed. In order to maintain the power of the Beiyang clique, he had to ask Duan to return to Beijing. Because Yuan was intent upon becoming emperor, he had already abolished the State Council and had set up a Political Bureau within the Presidential Palace. At the time he knew that he was dying, that he was done for, and he asked Duan to abolish this organ, restore the State Council and assume the post of Premier. Because Duan was honest and upright, and because he had opposed Yuan's plans to be emperor, the Southwestern forces still recognized Duan. In any case the Southwestern forces didn't have sufficient military forces to attack Beijing, so they came to terms. A cabinet that united the North and South was organized.

An older relative of mine entered the government as a representative of the Southwest. (Alitto: Zhang Yaozeng?) This was Zhang Yaozeng, who drafted me to be his confidential secretary. There were secret telegrams and letters between the anti-Yuan forces of the Southwest—Guangxi, Yunnan and Sichuan—and him; I managed these affairs for him. So when Mr. Cai asked me to come to Peking University to teach, I could not go. I asked a friend of mine to substitute for me. The next year the political situation changed, and Duan left. Zhang also fell from power. Only at this time was I able to go to Peking University.

Alitto: Your article "On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts" was originally published in *Eastern Miscellany*. Did you have a friend at *Eastern Miscellany*? That is, did you send it to him, send the manuscript to him, and he wasn't...

Liang: That friend of mine was very famous...

Alitto: Zhang Shizhao?

Liang: Yes, exactly.

Alitto: When did you get acquainted with Zhang Shizhao? I didn't mention in the book when you got to know him.

Liang: Zhang Shizhao (Xingyan) was famous primarily because of his magazine *The Tiger*. I hadn't met him, but I had sent manuscripts to this magazine. It was this kind of relationship. What were we just talking about?

Alitto: I said that I made mistakes about the events of these years. I thought that you went to Nanjing after the Republican Revolution was successful. I found this very interesting. I knew more or less about these events, but I wasn't clear on the details. How would you evaluate the historical figures of that time, such as Chen Duxiu? It's best to start with Mr. Huang Yuansheng. How did you get to know him? What sort of person was he?

Liang: He was a very famous journalist of the time, because he was extremely smart and had literary talent, and had made a lot of friends. He was connected

with secretaries in the Presidential Palace when Yuan Shikai was President and people in the State Council too. He wrote dispatches for the *Shenbao* in Shanghai. These dispatches included some news reports and some essays. In this way, he became a famous news reporter. When I had returned from Xi'an, I began to get to know him. At the time I had a book, the title was... (Alitto: Oh, yes, the "Preface.") I had selected some essays from the late Zhou, Han and Wei Dynasties, especially those that were able to express thought and theory. In the late Zhou there were a lot of scholars, especially those like Han Feizi and so on; in the Han and Wei Dynasties there were also some. I assembled their essays together, and titled it *Selected Literature from the Late Zhou, Han and Wei Dynasties*. I had asked Mr. Huang Yuansheng to write a preface for this book. That is how I met him.

Alitto: What was your major purpose in putting these essays together?

Liang: My purpose in putting out this book was to introduce some of the writings of those periods. The language used in these essays was relatively easy to understand, but at the same time comparatively elegant and refined, not really colloquial. This was especially so of some of Han Feizi's and some of Mozi's writings, as well as some of Zhuangzi's. I didn't include any of Laozi's. So they were writings of this sort, also including some from the Han and Wei periods. At that time, the colloquial written language had not arisen. Only when Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi started the New Literature Movement at Peking University was there a colloquial written language.

Alitto: Your motive was to establish a standard, a written language better suited to modern society, correct?

Liang: Somewhat like a kind of liberation, more liberating than the Tongcheng school, which promoted the classical Chinese.

Alitto: Was Mr. Huang Yuansheng also concerned about the problem of the written language?

Liang: Not necessarily, but I was acquainted with him, and asked him to write a preface. I asked him to read the manuscript and write a preface. We were friends, and he was relatively open-minded.

Alitto: At that time were you much concerned about the problem of the written language?

Liang: He, as I just said, was a news reporter. His writings were not in the colloquial language, but it was a classical language quite easy to understand and popular. I took the volume of things that I had selected, and asked him to write a preface. He wrote one. After he wrote the preface, he left for America, and on shipboard on the way, he wrote "Confessions." When he arrived, he died.

Alitto: Yes. Was there any direct connection between the essay he wrote and your article "On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts"?

Liang: Because I read his article "Confessions," I wrote "On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts."

Alitto: So, after having read this article, you wanted to express your ideas on this question....

- Liang: He left Beijing to go to the U.S. Actually he was fleeing. Why was he fleeing? Because he was a talented, smart and famous news reporter. Yuan Shikai, in his bid to be emperor, had wanted to win him over. He sent someone to speak with him directly, hoping that he could write an article praising the imperial system. At that time there was an American named “Bidenuo” [Frank Goodnow].¹⁵ So, wanting to institute an imperial system, he hoped that Huang would write an article supporting it. Huang was not willing to write it, and so Yuan threatened him. He did not willingly write it, or willingly become someone supporting the imperial system, so he wrote a bad article that was ambiguous. Friends told him that he couldn’t hand in such an ambiguous article. It wouldn’t pass muster; they wouldn’t be satisfied with it. You should either surrender or leave immediately. He chose the latter, and stole out of Beijing.
- Alitto: He wrote the article on the boat. It seems that it had no relationship to the matter you just mentioned.
- Liang: He fled because of this matter. In the “Confessions” article he wrote that he had continuously been hanging together with the ruling class, the high officials and aristocrats of the time. Although it seemed that he did not join them and although he didn’t, he was well acquainted with them. They wanted to force him to support the imperial system. He wasn’t willing and had to run. So this confession was a matter of repenting for the actions of his past life. He was a person of talent and talented people all have desires; in sexual matters and spending money he had been wanton. His repentance was in these areas.
- Alitto: What relationship was there between his article and yours?
- Liang: Which one?
- Alitto: “On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts.”
- Liang: I wrote my article only after I saw his “Confessions.”
- Alitto: I think that in that article he had brought up some problems of modern society.
- Liang: My article “On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts” implied that it would have been much better if I had supplied my Buddhist ideas to Mr. Huang earlier. I feel sorry that I hadn’t. At the beginning of “On Tracing the Origin and Solving Doubts,” I wrote this; it seemed that I had not given my friend something very valuable.
- Alitto: I didn’t get this wrong. What do you think of Chen Duxiu?
- Liang: Chen Duxiu was really a formidable person.
- Alitto: You met him only after you went to Peking University, or...

¹⁵ Frank Goodnow was a famous Columbia University Professor of Administrative Law. He had worked with both President Taft and then-governor of New York, Theodore Roosevelt. In 1912, he became a legal advisor to the Yuan Shikai government, and in this capacity, he helped draft a new constitution. The reason that Liang remembered him was because of his assertion that the Chinese people were not mature enough for a republican form of government; Yuan Shikai immediately used Goodnow to promote his Imperial plans.

Liang: I ran into him right before I went to Peking University. There was someone who was known by everyone, Li Dazhao. He had some guests over to his house for dinner. He invited Chen and he invited me. That was the first time I met Chen. At that time, Chen had just come from Shanghai to Beijing. He had intended to persuade people to buy shares from him in an "East Asia Library" publishing house he was creating. Each share was 50 silver dollars, and two shares were 100 dollars. He hoped that his old friends would persuade everyone to buy shares in order to finance this publishing house of his. He came to Beijing for this purpose. Right at that time Cai Yuanpei had returned from abroad and assumed the presidency of Peking University. He needed a corps of teachers, obviously. He couldn't teach everything himself. He was an old friend of Chen Duxiu's, so he told Chen, "Alright, since you have come to Beijing, forget about this publishing house project. Don't mess with publishing houses. You come help me out?" So, in this way, the three of us—Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and myself—entered Peking University at the same time.

Alitto: My impression is that your relationship with Chen Duxiu wasn't as good as yours with Li Dazhao.

Liang: Right. My relationship with Li started slightly earlier than with Chen. When I ran into Chen, it was at a banquet at Li's. But we three entered Peking University at the same time.

Alitto: With Chen Duxiu, you...

Liang: Chen left a very strong impression on me. Chen was someone who could really make breakthroughs, a man of great power.

Alitto: What do you think of the role he played in history?

Liang: He started the Communist Party.

Alitto: Right! Very important?

Liang: Very important.

Alitto: He and Li Dazhao, naturally they together founded the Communist Party.

Liang: The friendship between the two was very good, but their personalities were different.

Alitto: So, Li was relatively...

Liang: On the surface Li was a very gentle person. Everyone who had personal contact with him liked him. In fact, though, he was a very radical person in his heart.

Alitto: His personal relations with others were comparatively good.

Liang: Better than Chen Duxiu did in his relationships. Most people's attitude toward Chen Duxiu was to "respect him but give him a wide berth." Everyone was afraid because he was often very rude in his speech with others. At meetings of the University, he was the dean of the College of Arts. There was a College of Sciences, which was headed by Mr. Xia Yuanli. These two were of the same rank, one in the Arts and one in the Sciences. During meetings Chen would be very rude toward Mr. Xia and embarrass him.

Alitto: Li Dazhao wasn't that kind of person. Which of these two people do you feel yourself...

Liang: Of course my relationship with Li Dazhao's was better.

Alitto: Was the most important reason that Li was gentle, or...

Liang: Yes, Li was gentle.

Alitto: In thought, was Li's close to your own? So [your good relationship with him] had to do with thought, or with the way he conducted himself?

Liang: It was very strange. What was strange? Both Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao were members of the Chinese Communist Party, but Li never said anything to me about joining it. I don't know why. We were good friends but he never tried to get me into the party.

Alitto: What about Chen Duxiu? I remember he had talked about this with you. In *The Chinese People's Final Awakening* (It should be *The Final Awakening of the Chinese People's Self-salvation Movement*.—compiler) you mentioned Chen Duxiu's criticism of your conception of the rural reconstruction, calling it some petite bourgeois fantasy. At that time Chen Duxiu wanted you to join the Party. You didn't...he also didn't...

Liang: No, he also didn't ask me to join the Party.

Alitto: What was your relationship with Hu Shi like? What do you think of Hu Shi?

Liang: Hu Shi was a very smart man.

Alitto: Did you usually get along well with him?

Liang: We got along fine. At the time at Peking University there was a New clique and an Old clique. The New clique included Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Hu Shi and Lu Xun. But Lu Xun wasn't a Peking University professor. He worked in the Ministry of Education. He did teach some courses at Peking University, though. He taught a course on the "History of Chinese Fiction." He didn't have much strong connection with Peking University. He was also a part of the New Youth Group, which included Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Li Dazhao, and also Tao Menghe.

Alitto: Do you say that your relations with the New Youth Group were not that close? Who were you extremely close to at that time?

Liang: During that time at Peking University, there were two cliques, the New and the Old. There were two student periodicals, one called the *New Tide*, and the other called the *National Heritage*, which was devoted to China's old literature. They were matched by two student cliques, which were in turn both backed by professors. I wasn't in the New clique, and ever less in the Old clique, because the Old clique was interested in China's old style learning, of which I had no mastery. After all, I was younger than them. Hu Shi was older than me, but not by much, probably only by one or two years. Li Dazhao was probably three or four years older.

Alitto: Hu Shi was three years older than you?

Liang: Not by that much.

Alitto: You were born in 1893. (Liang: Yes.) At the time of your birth Hu Shi was already three years old, when his father was the county magistrate of Taidong County in Taiwan. I wrote that in the book. You were younger by a bit than these people—Hu Shi, Li Dazhao, of course Lu Xun and Cai

Yuanpei were both older than you by a lot. This is the reason why you didn't go with the New Youth group and why you left Peking University, because you were relatively young, and it wasn't so easy to deal with the people of the various cliques.

Liang: I went to Peking University in 1917, and left in 1924. Altogether from start to finish, I was at Peking University for seven years. To my recollection, Mr. Cai was thirty years older, and it seems that Hu Shi was about one year older.

Alitto: From what I researched, he was born in 1890, and you were born in 1893, three years' difference. In the second chapter talking about your family, when you were born, Hu Shi was already a few years old and Chairman Mao was two months old. (Liang: Chairman Mao and I were born in the same year, but he was born some months later.) Because of this, I remember very clearly that Hu Shi was three years older.

Liang: Chen Duxiu was much older than I.

Alitto: There was also a Philosophy Department member Mr. Yang, who was Chairman Mao's father-in-law. (Liang: Right.) You met Chairman Mao for the first time at Mr. Yang's house?

Liang: Yes, it was that way.

Alitto: Was Mr. Yang someone who you could talk to?

Liang: Mr. Yang's name was Yang Changji; he used the sobriquet Huaizhong. He was much older than we were. At Peking University, he was in the Philosophy Department. He taught "Western Ethics" and the "History of Western Ethics." We were both in the Philosophy Department, colleagues. But he was much older than we were. He did come to my house frequently. Why did he come to my house often? It was not to see me, but to see my elder brother.

Alitto: Oh, it was that way. He already knew your elder brother?

Liang: Right.

Alitto: I'm now clear. I had thought that it was because you were a member of the Department of Philosophy that you were often together with him.

Liang: This elder brother was not my sibling.

Alitto: Oh, he wasn't your sibling.

Liang: He was an elder relative of the same lineage.

Alitto: Your elder maternal cousin?

Liang: No, the same lineage, so he was surnamed Liang. I am also surnamed Liang. If he was an elder maternal cousin, he would not be surnamed Liang. The Chinese wording is different from that of foreign countries. He was surnamed Liang, and was Hunanese. On my desk is an article I am writing right now for the new *Hunan Province Gazetteer*, a provincial history. The provincial gazetteer has a section called "Biographies of Local Personages." In that section there is my elder brother. He was someone of importance in Hunan and he came to Beijing to stay with me, so the present *Hunan Provincial Gazetteer* wanted me to write a biography; it's on my desk.

Alitto: Was it because Mr. Yang was a Hunanese that there was this relationship?

Liang: I'll explain the relationship Mr. Yang had with this elder brother of mine. What relationship did he have with my elder brother? At the time, under the influence of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, the Guangxu Emperor wanted to carry out reforms. In the entire nation, the first province to respond actively to Beijing's Reform Movement was Hunan.

The governing authorities in Hunan, those who held the political power—previously each province had a governor, and some provinces had a governor-general. Hunan and Hubei were under one governor-general. Hunan itself had a governor. Hunan had had several famous governors. At the time of the Reforms the province in the lead of reform movement [was Hunan]. My elder brother took an active part in the Hunan Reform Movement. Now they want me to write [his biography]. For example, at that time Chinese first called those who had been influenced by Europe “paying attention to foreign affairs,” and later [because] it was felt that this phrase “foreign affairs” wasn't good, [and because] “outstanding talents knew current affairs,” [the term was changed to] “current affairs” [actually referring to Western learning]. So first in Hunan, an “Academy of Current Affairs” was established with Liang Qichao as the Dean. This elder brother of mine helped Liang Qichao with the “Academy of Current Affairs.” At that time they wanted new education, and also wanted to set up industry, so in order to set up industry, there was a Vocational Academy. My elder brother sponsored this Vocational Academy. What was taught in the Academy? Industry and Mining, so the province established a Bureau of Industry and Mining and an Office of Academic Affairs. My elder brother was both in the Office of Academic Affairs and in the Bureau of Industry and Mining.

This Mr. Yang—that is Yang Changji (Yang Huaizhong), was considered a student of my elder brother. He addressed my elder brother as teacher. Because at the time an aspect of the reforms was to learn from Europe and America, so people would be sent to Europe and America to study. Of course, Japan was closer and it seemed relatively convenient. So, at one time those studying in Japan were quite numerous. This elder brother of mine suggested to the provincial authorities—the governor—rather than sending young people out to study, it was better to send those who had already had some knowledge resources and some grounding in education domestically. The provincial authorities—the governor—approved his suggestion. He suggested—originally didn't each province have civil service examinations for the Juren Degree? The first examination was for the Xiucai Degree....

...

Alitto: ...researched question...the region of Henan, western Henan,¹⁶ I want to write a local history, from the late Ming Dynasty to the present. Probably

¹⁶ The area referred to here, a highly successful local self-government “experiment” in the 1920s and 1930s is the area west of Nanyang, sometimes called Wanxi (宛西), consisting of Zhenping (镇平), Neixiang (内乡), Xixia (西峡), Xichuan (淅川) and Deng (邓) Counties.

I'll come again the year after next and stay in China for a long period, and I hope to have the opportunity to go to western Henan to have a look. I've already collected the materials abroad—the university libraries in the U.S., the Library of Congress. In Hong Kong and Taiwan there are some people... There's an old gentleman, older than you by two years, Chen Zhonghua; Shunde is his sobriquet. I learned some things from him too. Mr. Meng also worked there?

Liang: He was Peng Yuting's student, a Henanese. Back then we had a Henan Village Government Academy. He was a student at the Village Government Academy. (Alitto: Oh, he was a student at the Village Government Academy!) He stayed in the region of western Henan and participated in militia work and local self-defense.

Alitto: You went to Zhenping and Neixiang Counties?

Liang: I've been to Zhenping.

Alitto: What time was that?

Liang: During the War of Resistance.

Alitto: Before that you were at the Henan Village Government Academy in Hui County, together with Peng Yuting?

Liang: He was the Academy's president.

Alitto: Yes. You didn't go to Zhenping then?

Liang: I didn't go then. I went later, during the War of Resistance. We withdrew from Shandong, going from east to west, withdrawing to Zhenping.

Alitto: The "we" refers to whom?

Liang: "We" were a group of friends and students, a lot of cadre of the Rural Reconstruction Institute, a large number of people. When we withdrew, we brought with us a portion of the militia conscripts, along with 800 rifles, military uniforms, and over a hundred thousand silver dollars. At the time, we stayed in Zhenping. There was a large temple in Zhenping. We stayed in the large temple. Outside the county seat, outside was a large temple.

Alitto: Do you remember the situation in Zhenping at that time? What impressions do you have?

Liang: We didn't stay there that long. After Zhenping, we went on to Wuhan. At the time, the central government was still in Wuhan, and so we went to take up matters with the government. At that time, the Minister of the Political Department was Chen Cheng. He also wanted two or three hundred of the students transferred into Wuhan for inspection. He gave an admonitory talk to them. Afterwards he appointed a person, recommended by us, to return to Zhenping to lead the students. This person led our men and the rifles back to Shandong. When they returned to Shandong, they were divided into Wuhan for inspection four routes, east, west, north and south, and then went to carry on guerilla operations behind enemy lines.

Alitto: What impressions do you have of Peng Yuting?

Liang: Peng Yuting and I were very good friends. He was the president of the Henan Village Government Academy. The vice president was Liang Zhonghua. I was the Academic Dean. Actually I drew up all the academy's

regulations and measures. The students there...now there are not many students there.

Alitto: In your mind, what sort of man was Peng Yuting like?

Liang: He was a man of wholehearted dedication. A Chinese old saying holds that a person with a dark face is a good person, and a pale face indicates wickedness. Now, Peng was with very dark complexion, and an extremely good person.

Alitto: He was also a quite capable man.

Liang: Very capable. Unfortunately he was assassinated, murdered.

Alitto: It seems that in Nanzhao County, or in Zhenping County, there was a Yang family. In Zhenping County there was a powerful local bully who had supported Peng Yuting's education. Peng returned, and that person who had supported his education thought that this was an opportunity. Peng returned, but in the end did not accommodate him and give him preferential treatment. He became angry, got in touch with this Nanzhao County rich and powerful person, and carried out the assassination. Did you meet Bie Tingfang?

Liang: I also met him.

Alitto: Did he come to Zouping to see you?

Liang: No, he was in Neixiang County. I ran into him in Zhenping County. When I went to Zhenping, he did too, and we met.

Alitto: What impression did he leave with you?

Liang: My personal impression was that he was a very crude person. Probably his heart was good, but he had a local bully style and demeanor. He decided everything himself alone and imposed these decisions on everyone by force.

Alitto: Naturally Peng Yuting's education...

Liang: Peng was much better.

Alitto: Do you consider the Zhenping self-government to have been successful?

Liang: At that time it was quite successful. The county magistrate and county government existed in name only. The local self-government divided the entire county into ten districts, and organized a ten-district office. Everyone elected Peng Yuting to be the director. The ten district heads together with Peng Yuting formed the ten-district office. The office handled all matters. The county government was an empty shell put to the side and performing no function.

...

Alitto: Aside from you, who in the modern period is a representative Confucian personage?

Liang: I can't say, but I will address a few words to the issue. There's someone named Feng Youlan. When I was teaching at Peking University, he was a student in my class. He studied in America. While in America, he often sent letters to me, corresponding with me. After he returned from America he became a university professor, a very famous one. He authored three books, especially [well-known] is the one titled *History of Chinese*

Philosophy. This man—each person has his own disposition and individual personalities are different—he appears to be a Confucian and to have developed and elaborated upon traditional Chinese thought. It appears that way, but in reality, he behaves more like a follower of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The Laozi school is not like the Confucian in that a follower does not have a commitment to one's own integrity and to honesty. He isn't that way. He is more like what, like...the expression "...*shibugong*" ...the four characters "*wanshibugong*" (cynical and frivolous). He is not like [a Confucian] who loyally follows and acts according to the principles he believes in, who does not bend with the prevailing wind. No, he is more cynical and frivolous.

Alitto: Actually we Westerners who study China generally acknowledged this.

Liang: Later, didn't that Jiang Qing think highly of him and go to Peking University to see him? He even gave some poems to Jiang Qing. Later Jiang Qing was defeated, so his reputation withered. He is still alive, still at Peking University, but he doesn't have any work responsibilities. All he has now is a good salary, that is, a professor's salary. His health has not been good either. He has cataracts, and someone supports him when walking.

Alitto: No one is representative [of Confucianism]?

Liang: No. There is another philosopher. He cannot really be considered as representing Confucianism. Someone named He Lin. He is better [than Feng], not so willful and wanton. He teaches mostly German philosophy, Hegel. There is another philosopher named Shen Youding. (Alitto: Afraid I don't know about him.) They all play an important role in the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. There is another philosopher in Beijing; he studied in the U.S., his name...it's on the tip of my tongue.

Alitto: Do you think that the Hong Kong Confucian thinkers like Mou Zongsan and Tang Junyi have made a contribution to the elucidation and development of modern Confucianism?

Liang: They have made a contribution.

Alitto: Have you read their publications?

Liang: I have here six volumes by Tang Junyi. I haven't read Mou's.

Alitto: What about Tang Junyi?

Liang: He's good. I think that what he has to say about Confucianism is all accurate.

Alitto: You appreciate his...

Liang: Mou is a Shandongese, Tang a Sichuanese. I have been sent Tang's works. I have six big volumes of his.

Alitto: In general, do you approve of his interpretations about Confucianism?

Liang: I think that he really understands Confucianism. Right now I have only two volumes left of the six. Someone took four away. It's a pity that Tang has already passed away. Mou is still alive.

Alitto: Yes, Mou is still alive. Are they considered Xiong Shili's students?

- Liang: Mou is. It seems that Tang has no connection with Xiong. Mou has been on intimate terms with Xiong. He addressed him as teacher. It seems Tang did not.
- Alitto: Did Mr. Xiong also teach at Peking University?
- Liang: He taught there.
- Alitto: You met him at that time or after he had arrived at Peking University? Or before then?
- Liang: I knew him before that. In fact, it was I who brought him to Peking University.
- Alitto: In the materials that I read I didn't see anything about him personally...
- Liang: Mr. Xiong and I were together for forty years.
- Alitto: So when you were in Shandong, he went too?
- Liang: He was with me in Shandong for a period. He didn't follow me from beginning to the end. In 1924, I went to Shandong to start a school. We went together. When I returned to Beijing from Shandong, we again were living together. In that period when I went to Guangdong, he went to West Lake in Hangzhou. Those two years we were separated. Later, when the War of Resistance started, I withdrew to Sichuan, and we were again together.
- Alitto: As far as his publications go, can he be considered close to your own thought philosophically...
- Liang: Xiong Shili was worthy of being called Confucian. From start to finish, his thought was Confucian. Other people mistakenly call him Buddhist, mistakenly term his theories Buddhist. Actually, this is not so. In China there was a Buddhist group. It was in Nanjing, and was called the Institute of Buddhist Studies. (Alitto: It was Ouyang Jingwu?) Yes, there was an Institute of Buddhist Studies run by Ouyang Jingwu. I knew Xiong very well, I advised him to go to this Institute to study. How we became friends was kind of funny. At that time Mr. Xiong was teaching Chinese language at the Nankai Middle School. He had written articles for Liang Qichao's journal called *The Justice*. These articles were written from a Confucian position vilifying Buddhism, saying that Buddhism was no good, that it made people lose their moorings spiritually and philosophically... In my article I criticized him. I said that in "this place" (referring to China) "a common fellow," (an ordinary Chinese) was "striving for survival" such and such. I said that his words were nonsense, that he was wrong. The article was published and he read it. In 1920, he wrote me a postcard from Nankai Middle School to Peking University. His postcard said, "You reprimanded me quite deservedly. I'm now on summer vacation and am coming to Beijing. I want to meet you." And so it was in this way we began our relationship. So he arrived in Beijing that summer. His personality had its cheerful side. When he was talking in high spirits, he would laugh heartily, and would gesticulate wildly, waving his hands and stomping his feet very exuberantly. He criticized Buddhism from a Confucian perspective, but I was myself a Buddhist, so I told him that he didn't understand Buddhism, that the Buddhist doctrine was extremely profound. He said he was going to

explore Buddhism. I said, “All right, I’ll introduce you to Ouyang Jingwu and his Institute of Buddhist Studies.”

Alitto: Oh, it was this way.

Liang: So there he went through my introduction, and for three years, from 1920 through 1922, he studied there. Now, I was at Peking University teaching; at first I was teaching Indian Philosophy and later added Consciousness-Only Buddhism. Consciousness-Only is an extremely specialized type of learning, technically very difficult. It originated with Xuan Zang of the Tang Dynasty. A follower of his, Kui Ji, also contributed to it. This type of doctrine is actually very scientific, with a lot of “names and phenomenal appearances”. That is why it is sometimes called the “appearances school (dharma-character school).” It has a lot of technical terms that make extremely fine distinctions. These terms cannot be used arbitrarily, or casually. In using these terms one must be precise. The entire body of doctrine is highly structured and systematic, very scientific-like.

At the beginning, I taught Indian Philosophy at Peking University, then I also taught Confucianism, Buddhism and Consciousness-Only Buddhism. When I was teaching Consciousness-Only Buddhism, I quoted a lot of Western scientists in order to explain it. The Consciousness-Only doctrine speaks of eight *parijñāna* (kinds of cognition, or consciousness). The first five are the senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile feeling). The sixth is *mano-vijñāna*, the intellect. The six ones enable us to cope with our external environment. The seventh is called *klistamanas* [the discriminating sense] and the eighth, the *ālāyavijñāna* [the “storehouse consciousness” from which come all “seeds” of consciousness]. These last two come from egoism and the ego. Compared with the eighth, the seventh is far more... Not only do we humans have the ego, but all [other] animals do. All of us satisfy our desires from the external environment. So, with all animals we distinguish between the self and the “other,” the internal and the external.

Thus I was at Peking University, writing and lecturing on the Consciousness-Only school, and published two books on it. When I tried to continue writing, however, I felt that I was not really competent to deal with Consciousness-Only, and was not at all sure if I was correct. So I thought, well, the people at the Nanjing Institute of Buddhist Studies are true experts in this field. They can really penetrate and grasp the doctrines of Xuan Zang, Kui Ji and their school, so why don’t I ask one of them to come teach this subject at Peking University? I had a discussion with President Cai Yuanpei about it, explaining that I was not really qualified to teach this subject, had no confidence and so on, and that I wanted to get one of the scholars from the Buddhist Institute at Nanjing to do it. President Cai agreed to provide the position, so I went to Nanjing. Of course, Ouyang Jingwu himself could not be moved from the Nanjing Institute, so I thought that I would invite one of his disciples, a man named Lü [Lü Zheng]. Lü was an excellent scholar who knew Tibetan and Sanskrit, a man of great erudition. But Lü was Ouyang’s right-hand man and so he would not let Lü leave.

At that time, Mr. Xiong was already starting his third year at the institute. This was the winter of 1922, and it was I who, after all, was responsible for his being there in the first place, and he was an old friend. So, when I couldn't get the man I wanted, I invited Mr. Xiong to come instead. I invited him to teach Consciousness-Only Buddhism at Peking University. Ah! How could I have known that he would do the opposite of what I had hoped! I didn't have any confidence in my own understanding, and was afraid that I was teaching a confused jumble, distorting what Xuan Zang introduced from India. My original aim was to get an expert on Consciousness-Only to come teach instead of me, as I thought that this would be a more suitable arrangement. Who would have thought that after Mr. Xiong arrived, in fact he would do precisely the opposite of what I had hoped. He wanted to create an entirely new pattern of things, to start a whole new entity. He entitled his lectures on Consciousness-Only the "New Consciousness-Only." For fear that I might distort or lose the original message of the ancients, I asked Mr. Xiong to come teach Consciousness-Only for me, and he very subjectively simply took his own interpretations to be the substance of Consciousness-Only! But since he had already arrived at Peking University as a professor there was no way I could then ask him to leave. So I was stuck.

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