

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.

Has Man a Future?

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