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TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN LIANG SHUMING'S *EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURES AND THEIR PHILOSOPHIES*



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Introduction

Within the long tradition of debating the role of tradition in modernity that has been central to the Western and Chinese experiences of modernity, I believe three possible attitudes toward the relation between modernity and tradition can be distinguished. The first regards them as essentially antithetical. Modernity is basically construed, from this first perspective, as a process of emancipation from a tradition perceived as limiting the human potential for liberty. The Enlightenment thinkers have generally been associated with this approach, which I will call “anti-traditionalist.”

The second attitude offers a reversed image of the first. Modernity and tradition retain an essentially antithetical relation, but modernity as a process of breaking away from tradition is reconceptualized as an uprooting from traditions that make up our very identities. Modernization thus appears as a process of gradual alienation from ourselves. Intellectuals upholding this position tend to lay emphasis on the need to revalue traditions and protect them from the devastating effects of modernization. Although their attitudes toward modernity may differ, some rejecting it in toto while others acknowledge some positive aspects to it, they tend to view the modernization process as a whole in a predominantly negative light. The romantic reaction to the Enlightenment has often been portrayed as upholding this approach that I will call “traditionalist.”

Another position has been to problematize the strict distinction between tradition and modernity, which underscores both the anti-traditionalist and the traditionalist positions. Modernity is not to be construed in opposition to tradition, but as a tradition in its own right—a tradition that might discursively call for a radical emancipation from tradition, but that, in practice, inherited much from that tradition. In this sense, modernity is essentially a tradition of anti-traditionalism. Although, as noted above, modernity incorporates a traditionalist reaction to anti-traditionalism, this reaction has failed to challenge the antithetical portrayal of tradition and modernity, and as such has often worked within a framework that strengthens the anti-traditionalist position, in the sense that it seems to leave us no alternative but either to accept the loss of tradition within modernity or to reject modernity and return to tradition (something few of us are ready to assent to).

The third attitude challenges the very framework that obliges us to think of modernity and tradition in antithetical terms. I will call this attitude, which has been most famously defended by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, “reconciliatory.”¹

While I am fully aware that these distinctions are often problematic when applied to real-life thinkers, who are usually much more complex than any strict taxonomy of the kind outlined above could account for, this three-tiered typology will serve as a starting point for a close analysis of Liang Shuming’s 梁漱溟 1921 work *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (東西文化及其哲學), and will, I hope, enable the complexity of this work’s conceptualization of the relation between modernity and tradition to come to light. This analysis will not only enable us to better understand the relation between the conservative and progressive aspects of the author’s thought, but will also shed light on the strategies used by so-called conservative thinkers in adapting their position to a discursive milieu—that of May Fourth—already infused with the anti-traditionalist stance at the core of modernity.

Traditionalist, Anti-traditionalist, or Reconciliatory?

Historically, Liang Shuming has generally been associated with the traditionalist camp. In his biography on Liang, Guy Alitto portrays him as “this century’s foremost Confucian traditionalist.” Alitto also associates Liang with “a world-wide conservative response” to modernity that would regard “a traditional form of society as the touchstone for social excellence.”² Liang has also been perceived in a similar light by a majority of Mainland Chinese scholars. He has been labeled a romantic by Wang Hui, a conservative by Jing Haifeng, a cultural conservative by Zheng Dahua and Guo Qiyong, and a new conservative by Wang Zongyu.³

A more nuanced position has been offered by Yang Zhende, who sees Liang as a conservative whose thought nevertheless incorporates anti-traditional elements.⁴ This was also the position of Lin Yusheng, who categorized Liang, paradoxically, as an anti-traditional conservative.⁵ Others have rather argued that we should no longer use the term “conservative” to describe Liang’s thought. This is the position of Wang Yuanyi, who opposes the classification of Liang as a conservative, notably in light of the fact that the resurrection of Chinese culture could only take place, according to Liang, after the establishment of a socialist socio-political order.⁶

As for Thierry Meynard, he argues, in *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming*, that Liang opposed the portrayal of modernity and tradition as antithetical, emphasizing a synchronic cultural pluralism rather than a diachronic opposition between modern and premodern.⁷ This is a point that had been made previously by Chen Lai, who opposed the portrayal of Liang as a conservative and an anti-modernist, since his cultural pluralism saw benefits in the cultures of Europe, India, and China.⁸

This brief overview of how Liang has been portrayed by scholars suffices to show that there is no consensus regarding his position vis-à-vis the question of tradition’s role within modernity. Coming back to our three-tiered typology, it appears that, within recent scholarships, Liang has not only been associated with the traditionalist

camp, but has also been portrayed as partly anti-traditionalist and as a reconciliatory thinker.⁹

In the following sections, I will try to make sense of these seemingly contradictory perceptions of Liang through a close analysis of his major work *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. My aim will not be to side with one of the three interpretations of Liang's thought outlined above, but rather to show how the contradictory interpretations of Liang offered by scholars arose from actual tensions at work within Liang's text. Instead of attempting to provide a final resolution of these tensions—between value and history, universalism and particularism, modernity and tradition, et cetera—I will rather argue that they are representative of historical tensions that Liang's text set out to resolve. It must also be kept in mind that my aim is not to provide an analysis of Liang Shuming's whole oeuvre, but rather to show how the particular text under study has played a central role in the contradictory reception of its author by scholars.¹⁰

My approach will be that of a text-centered discourse analysis. It must be kept in mind, however, that my focus on the discourse of the text throughout the main body of my essay is not meant to suggest that the text should be understood as an autonomous phenomenon unrelated to the socio-historical background of its emergence. I would rather like to suggest that a discourse analysis can help us highlight some of the central tensions at work within the text, tensions which can then be related to a historical context within which Chinese intellectuals had to negotiate between the perceived particularism of Chinese culture and the perceived universalism of modernity.

Liang's Cultural Pluralism

It is the central question of the New Culture Movement that Liang Shuming tries to answer in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*: "Must Eastern cultures be eradicated from their roots, or can they come back to life?"¹¹ To answer this question, Liang attempts to find the origin of the divide between Eastern and Western cultures. This he does by a regressive study of what culture is.

For Liang, culture is simply the particular "way of life of a people,"¹² and life is the very essence of the universe. This means that the universe is nothing other than life itself, and "outside of life there is no living thing" (生活者),¹³ no substance independent of the endless flux of living. The universe is therefore construed as a holistic process of living that is in constant change. This change takes the form of what Liang terms "a question and an answer" (一問一答),¹⁴ meaning that human desires, which are impossible to satisfy fully, keep on seeking satisfaction in the world, and the universe is merely an answer to this human thirst for satisfaction.¹⁵ The universe can therefore be conceived of as a continuous process that arises, at every single instant, in answer to the human quest to satisfy its desires. Following Buddhism, desire or will (意欲) is thus positioned at the very foundation of Liang's metaphysics.

Liang's understanding of cultural differences finds its source in his metaphysics of desire. Although every need of the present self is met with an answer from the

world, Liang argues, “the answer does not necessarily satisfy our needs.”¹⁶ Liang distinguishes between three types of “needs” or “demands” (問) according to whether or not they can be satisfied. Material needs can be satisfied through a struggle with the material world. Needs that seek a change in other people (他心) can be satisfied, but their satisfaction lies outside the realm of our control. Finally, demands that relate to the causal laws of the universe simply cannot be met, since these causal laws are entirely independent of our will.¹⁷ Having established this typology, Liang goes on to argue that cultural differences have their origin in the relative emphasis each culture puts on one of these three types of needs. This difference of emphasis also translates itself into different methods to resolve issues. As such, the “way of life of a people” (culture) is another name for a particular method to resolve issues. There are, according to Liang, three types of cultures related to three methods of resolving problems that represent three different cultural “paths” or “orientations” (路向).

The Western will forward represents the first orientation. This will forward can be typified by someone who “does one’s utmost in order to . . . satisfy one’s needs. In other words, this is an attitude of struggle.”¹⁸ When facing an issue, those following this path will attempt to resolve the problem by changing the circumstances. For Liang, the domination of nature, science, and democracy all exemplify the fact that the West has chosen the will forward. The will predominantly used in Chinese culture is the will to “modify, mediate, and moderate one’s desires.”¹⁹ When confronted with a problem, a person who adopts this approach will not search for a solution by modifying the circumstances, but “will try to find personal satisfaction within the circumstances. . . . The method for coping with issues adopted by this person is merely that of reconciling one’s desires [with the circumstances].”²⁰ As for India, the method usually adopted to resolve issues is to turn one’s back on desire altogether: “When facing a problem, those who have taken this path . . . will want to eradicate the issue or the need from its very roots. . . . All those who hold an ascetic attitude toward desire belong to this category.”²¹ Buddhism is of course what Liang has in mind here, although he also associates Christianity with this attitude.

Although each of these three methods is only well suited to resolve one of the three types of problems or needs outlined above, Liang argues that each of the three cultures predominantly uses only one method, even when it is not suited for the particular kind of issue faced. This has given rise to problems that are specific to each culture. The West, for example, has been particularly successful at dominating nature and at increasing the livelihood of its citizens. But when attempting to resolve issues pertaining to interpersonal relations, the will forward of the West has been particularly devastating, and its use has led to unprecedented problems, such as social alienation and the replacement of the emotional bond between people by mechanistic and calculative interpersonal relations.²² As to the Chinese will to harmonize, it has led to disastrous results at the material level, but it has had great results in its attempt at resolving social problems.

Liang therefore holds a holistic view of culture. Cultures are not the result of disparate and conflicting elements, but of a single will. For this reason, Liang agrees with Chen Duxiu—one of the most iconoclastic of May Fourth thinkers—in arguing

that Western and Eastern cultures cannot be reconciled.²³ But this is not, as in Chen's case, because Chinese and Western cultures belong to two different historical periods that are at odds with one another, but because the types of will at their foundation are diametrically opposed. The West, China, and India have embarked upon different historical paths. Without contact with the West, Chinese culture would simply never have given rise to science and democracy.²⁴

Liang thus criticizes the modern Western discourse according to which all cultures belong to a single, unilinear, and irreversible historical continuum within which the difference between East and West is to be explained in terms of an epochal gap between tradition and modernity. Instead, he proposes a pluralistic view of cultures, arguing that each culture possesses its own strengths and weaknesses, relative to the type of issues it faces. The only true superiority of Western culture was to be found in its suitability for the historical stage the world was in at the time.²⁵ But aside from this recognition of the temporary superiority of the West, Liang's work can be read as an attempt to salvage the cultures of China and India from the anti-traditionalist modernization discourse of May Fourth, which promoted the complete modernization—a term seen as essentially synonymous with Westernization—of China. This call for a reevaluation of the Indian and Chinese cultures explains why Liang has often been categorized as a traditionalist and conservative thinker.

However, Liang's cultural pluralism should not be mistaken for a cultural relativism that would be unable to find a universal, supracultural (or acultural) norm to assess heterogeneous cultures. His work does recognize such a norm in the form of a universal metanarrative of modernization. As such, Liang's cultural pluralism should not be read as meaning that the cultures of India, China, and the West are equally valuable, in all of their aspects, at any given time. The three cultures Liang studied are, rather, valuable only insofar as they contribute to the process of modernization that his metanarrative proposed. As we will see, this metanarrative criticized the Eurocentric model of unilinear historical development in order to replace it with one that would not relegate Chinese and Indian cultures to the dustbin of pre-modern history, but would rather authorize them by projecting them onto the telos of modernity.

Liang's Metanarrative of Modernization

Humankind, according to Liang, cannot resolve all of its problems at once, and must face them in order of priority. In the first period of history, humans face material problems related to food, clothing, and lodging—material problems that can be resolved. The Western will forward is the best method to resolve these issues, as it enables us to dominate nature and modify the natural environment in order to satisfy the basic needs of humanity. Once these basic needs are resolved, humanity would then face social issues pertaining to the interactions between human beings. According to Liang, only the Chinese will of internal satisfaction could help humanity resolve these issues. This is because, as we have seen, the other lies outside the realm of our

control, so that a Western will to control what is external will fail at ultimately resolving interpersonal issues. Rather, one must make use of the Chinese will in order to accept one's limitations and modify one's expectations in relation to the other. Finally, once interpersonal and social issues are resolved, a third period would emerge in which existential problems would take the central stage. At this level, Indian culture, and more specifically Buddhism, would provide the best method.²⁶ However, since humanity was still far from achieving this historical stage, Liang discouraged the practice of Buddhism.²⁷

Modernity was thus heading toward a revival of the cultures of China and India. However, what Liang meant by "culture" here was not the historical cultures of China and India, but ideals that had been imagined by Confucius and the Buddha and that had never been realized historically, at least not until they were to be revived in modern times. Therefore, the traditions or cultures that needed to be revived were in fact fetishized versions of it, in the sense that Liang subsumed the complex of phenomena and contradictions inherent in any culture under a single, tension-free will.²⁸

This explains why Liang regarded Western cultural products such as socialism and psychology as manifestations of "Chinese culture." Any sign of a passage toward intuition and social harmony, two of the most important aspects of the Chinese will, was invariably associated with "Chinese culture," regardless of the geographical context of the emergence of cultural products such as psychology and socialism. "Chinese culture" was thus only "Chinese" to the extent that it was established on an orientation emphasizing intuition and social harmony first imagined by Confucius. "Chinese culture" was a truly universal culture unimpeded by national boundaries that would gain over the world, not unlike the way Western culture was gaining ground at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Through this process of attempting to universalize "Chinese culture," Liang dissociated culture from history.²⁹ While Chinese culture-as-value³⁰ needed to be salvaged from the attacks of the anti-traditionalists, Chinese history was merely the history of a failure to bring about an ideal of harmony imagined by Confucius. Not unlike the most radical of May Fourth thinkers, Liang thus claimed that the historical manifestations of Chinese culture and Confucianism had to be rejected and relegated to the dustbin of history. For Liang, nobody had truly understood what he called the philosophy of human life (人生哲學) of Confucius, although some had come closer, such as Wang Yangming 王陽明, the Taizhou school (泰州派), and Dai Zhen 戴震.³¹ This was due to the fact that Confucius' vision was too far ahead of his time, too precocious (早熟) for his followers to put into practice.³²

The precociousness of the Confucian ideal explains why China attempted to enter the second stage of history, dealing with the problem of human interaction, before it had resolved basic human needs pertaining to the first stage of universal history. Because the problems of the second stage cannot be resolved until one has successfully completed the first stage, China could never evolve along the path of the universal historical model proposed by Liang. This explains why China had no proper history to talk of, and no progress at all from the time of Confucius until the

modern era.³³ Here, we can see how Liang inherited the association between China and premodern ahistoricity, which was present not only in Eurocentric models of history but in the May Fourth discourse of iconoclastic intellectuals as well.³⁴

While attempting to criticize the Eurocentric model of unilinear historicity, Liang created an unbridgeable gap between the modern and the premodern. Pre-modernity was the time of synchronic, ahistorical, and plural cultures, a time when a plurality of cultures and traditions developed along unique pathways, each one having its advantages and disadvantages (at least when it came to the ideals they had produced). But with the advent of modernity, culture becomes diachronic, homogeneous, and historical. Modernity is thus perceived as a passage from cultural plurality to cultural homogeneity—this is why, for Liang, Chinese culture can survive in modernity only if it becomes a universal culture³⁵—and as a gradual filling of the gap between value and history. The premodern, in short, is conceived of as an ahistorical prelude to modernity, a time in which values were created but could not become historically materialized until true history—in the sense of a history with a telos—began with the advent of European modernity.

Not unlike the European discourse of modernity, Liang sees the beginning of the attempt by humanity at resolving its problems, at taking into its own hands its destiny, in modern times. Liang essentially reproduces the discourse of the Enlightenment, according to which modernity, in Kant's terminology, is a process of emancipation from humanity's self-imposed tutelage; a process of liberation from all external authority:

For thousands of years, [the ethical code, which was said to be Confucian] has made us impotent in any attempt to liberate ourselves from various authorities, and so individuality could not develop. Society could not develop either. This is our biggest point of inferiority compared to the West.³⁶

How did democracy come about? It did so by an awakening of humanity—an awakening to humanity's nature (本性)—and a liberation from the tutelage of the church, the pope, and feudal lords.³⁷

The Renaissance is thus associated, in Liang, with an “awakening from the darkness” of the Middle Ages.³⁸

Liang's understanding of modernity thus incorporates the modern Western idea that liberation from authority is possible and desirable. And the critique of authority inherent in this call for the liberation of the individual and society extends to tradition as well. That is, traditions and cultures are meaningful, within modernity, only insofar as ancient sages—mostly Confucius and the Buddha—pointed out the way to the second and third periods of the modern experience. Apart from this, the traditions of China and India represent a failure to put into practice the ideals imagined by these two sages. Thus, although Liang does not portray modernity as an absolute break from the past, the traditions he has in mind are highly fetishized extrapolations from the past, and point to single walls foreseen by ancient sages.

History and Value

A certain tension between history and value is highlighted by the text's ambivalent stance toward the divide between Eastern and Western cultures. As we have seen above, Liang's work claims that the cultures of the West, China, and India had embarked on different pathways, which should all be valued for different reasons. In this context, Liang rejected the perception of the difference between Eastern and Western cultures as diachronic, and thus attacked the association, popular at the time, of Eastern cultures with tradition and Western culture with modernity.

In the preface to *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, however, Liang contradicts this position and portrays the distinction between East and West as a temporal distance between premodern and modern:

The culture and philosophy of the East simply do not change. It has always been this way. . . . If you ask me about Eastern culture, I will not provide you with illustrations taken from the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, or from the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries, but will point to examples taken from before the beginning of our era, such as the Buddha in India and Confucius in China. There is no Eastern culture apart from this ancient culture. That is to say, Eastern culture is an ancient culture.³⁹

The text then goes on to contrast the ahistorical character of Eastern culture with that of the West:

Western culture is not like that. Western thought renews itself daily, and culture develops in concert with the evolution of the world. If asked about Western culture, examples taken from a thousand years ago, but also from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, will not do as an answer. I will rather be forced to reply to you with examples taken from this year or the year before, since the culture of today is Western culture. Western culture is therefore a contemporary culture. This means that Western and Eastern cultures are in effect ancient and contemporary cultures, and cannot be regarded as divided in a synchronic manner.⁴⁰

Although the main text claims to uphold a pluralistic and synchronic view of cultural differences, it seems that Liang's position reproduces, in these extracts from his preface, the dichotomy between an ahistorical and premodern East and a historical and modern West. The difference between East and West is a historical difference in the sense that one has already engaged itself in the race of teleological history, while the other has been unable to leave the starting line due to its untimely and precocious focus on the finish line (the cultural ideals imagined by Confucius and the Buddha).

How can we account for this tension between Liang's cultural pluralism and his characterization of Eastern and Western cultures as ahistorical and historical, respectively? It is, I believe, the tension between history and culture-as-value that underlies Liang's contradictory readings of the difference between Eastern and Western cultures.

When claiming that the difference between East and West was not to be defined as a temporal gap, Liang was speaking from the standpoint of values: the three wills of the West, China, and India are all valuable within the context of humanity's progression toward the emancipatory telos of history. But from the standpoint of the actual histories of the West, China, and India, it appeared that only the West had truly engaged in the race of teleological history. The contradiction between the perception of the difference between East and West as cultural in the main text and as historical in the preface is thus predicated on a deeper tension, within the text, between history and culture-as-value. The premodern/modern divide, in Liang, is thus construed as a divide between ahistorical values never materialized (China, India) and the historicization of these values in a Hegelian dialectic between different human needs.

The West thus appears to be the birthplace of history. Ancient Greece had not only created the values on which the Western will forward would be predicated, but had already started the long march toward the satisfaction of the material needs of humanity. Similarly to China and India, Europe was cast out of history during the Middle Ages, since its ideal of extinguishing desires once and for all was too precious for the time. The modern West thus represents a return to history from an age of ahistorical stagnation within the realm of value. And it is through the impetus of the modern, historical West that China and India were shaken out of the torpor of ahistory, and had to face the challenge of attempting to fulfill the material needs of their citizens before the ideals of their culture could be achieved at a universal level.

Universalism and Particularism

One of the most fundamental aspects of the Western modernization discourse, and one that has already been under critique for quite some time, has been an attempt at portraying the modern culture of Europe as universal. According to the mainstream acultural understanding of the rise of modernity, to use Charles Taylor's terminology,⁴¹ modernity is conceptualized as a process of emancipation from limitations imposed on an otherwise autonomous subject by tradition. The cultural products that emerge from this process of modernization are viewed as a discovery, rather than a creation, of a natural way of being that had always lain dormant in humanity as its true potential to be revealed. The cultural products of modernity were therefore not seen, within this mainstream metanarrative of modernity, as cultural and historical products contingent in space and time, but rather as a realization of humanity's destiny. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity implied a series of other dichotomies between slavery/freedom, object/subject of history, particularism/universalism, dark/enlightened, unreflective/self-conscious, et cetera.

One of the most important critiques of this discourse has been provided within the framework of postcolonial studies, and has consisted of pointing out the collusion between this tradition/modernity dichotomy and the colonial and imperial enterprises of modern Europe.⁴² This collusion can be explained by the attempt to temporalize space within the framework of the metanarrative of modernity. By this I

mean that Europe's others were accommodated within the metanarrative as the pre-modern and traditional other of Europe's modernity, and could be made to enter the emancipatory universal culture of modernity only by being guided from darkness to light by the colonial powers. In short, what this metanarrative did was to universalize Europe's particular culture through a discourse that naturalized it as the destiny of humankind before portraying its others as needing to emancipate themselves from the shackles of tradition in order to accept the universal culture of modernity/Europe. Modernization was therefore conceptualized as a disembodiment, an uprooting from local cultures equated with an entering into the universal culture of modernity—a passage from particularism to universalism. And Europe's others were to be introduced into universalism by the European powers.

Notably through the medium of social Darwinism, this metanarrative became one of the most important paradigms of understanding the world and China's place in it during the May Fourth Movement. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most important questions faced by intellectuals working during this period was the following: how can Chinese particularism be adapted to a culture of modernity seen as universal?

Following the May Fourth Movement, the main way through which Chinese intellectuals attempted to present Chinese culture as valuable within the context of modernity was to argue that Chinese culture incorporated some elements that could be equated with aspects of the purportedly universal culture of modernity. Hu Shi 胡適, for example, tried to show that China, too, had a native tradition of logic comparable to that of the West, while Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 endeavored to demonstrate that China had its own tradition of philosophizing equivalent to that of the West. However, it must be kept in mind that the universal aspects of Chinese culture they wished to promote were valuable to China and China alone, since they were aspects that the West already had in a much more advanced form. The universality of Chinese culture present in this approach was therefore subsumed under Western universalism; Chinese universalism could not but become another form of particularism.

Liang's approach differed from the previous one in that it accepted the universality of the modern historical framework, but made the role of the West peripheral within this framework by arguing that the West represented only a partial and limited facet of the universal culture of modernity, which needed Eastern cultures in order to truly come to fruition. As such, Eastern and Western cultures were accommodated as segments of a single universal culture of modernity. Unlike the previous approach, which valued Chinese culture only insofar as it corresponded with a Western modern culture viewed as universal, this approach valued Chinese culture only insofar as it differed and complemented that of the West. This approach thus enabled one to argue that Chinese culture is valuable not only for the Chinese, as the previous approach suggested, but for all those embracing the universal culture of modernity. Chinese particularism, in sum, could be made to complement and bring to completion modernity's universalism.

That Chinese culture was only valuable to the extent that it diverged from and complemented Western culture, within Liang's approach, explains the text's

tendency to reproduce various Orientalist tropes: the perception of China and the West as historically stagnant and progressive (respectively); the strict dichotomization of Chinese and Western cultures along the lines of intuition versus rationality; the West as provider of the impetus for China's modernization; and Liang's fetishization of the cultures of the West, China, and India, which were made to answer to a single will, a move that did away with the inner contradictions and complexities inherent in each culture.

One way to read Liang's model of history is by remembering that within modernity, tradition loses its authority precisely because it is believed to lie outside the boundary of a true history defined by the human ideal of self-mastery and self-grounding. What Liang does is to reinsert his own understanding of "tradition" within the modern teleological historical narrative, and thus reauthorize it in the process. However, as pointed out above, the Chinese tradition is re-authorized, within Liang's narrative, only at the cost of being de-complexified, homogenized, and de-historicized.⁴³

Within the modern framework, Chinese culture could be valuable only insofar as it was no longer Chinese, only insofar as it was universal. This means that Chinese culture had to be divorced from its historical roots and be universalized before it could be accommodated within the modern metanarrative. This is precisely what Liang does by abstracting value, in the form of a normative culture that points toward the future, from Chinese and Indian traditions, before projecting these values/cultures onto the telos of history, so that the gap between fact and value can be bridged once the horizon of history is reached. This dialectic between history and value thus provides a narrative of the creation of a universalist culture (Confucius' ideal) out of a Chinese particularism to be otherwise rejected in toto.

Concluding Remarks

Liang's goal in writing this work might have been highly traditionalist, in the sense that he hoped to show that the cultures of China and India were still valuable within the context of modernity. But the manner through which he attempted to re-authorize these cultures, by projecting them onto the telos of his metanarrative of modernization, suggests that the traditional cultures Liang had in mind had already lost authority in and of themselves, and had to be re-authorized with the authority of modernity. This means that Liang's traditionalist goal had to be inserted in a metanarrative framework that was essentially anti-traditionalist in its calling for the liberation of humankind from the shackles of past histories.

The tension between Liang's traditionalist goal and the anti-traditionalist discourse through which this goal could be authorized and achieved—itsself a product of Liang's attempt at resolving the problem of how to conceptualize the relation between Chinese particularism and modern universalism in a way that the former would still be of value within the context of the latter—translated itself, in Liang's discourse, into a dichotomization of the past into traditions-as-value and traditions-as-history. Through this dichotomy, Liang could claim that only the latter should be

relegated to the dustbin of history, while the former should be salvaged from it. In short, Liang authorized his own conception of tradition by projecting it onto the telos of a modernization process regarded as emancipatory, a process that universalizes a particular culture, but in doing so he reproduced the unbridgeable gap between universal modernity and particular traditions in his dichotomization between the culture of modernity and cultures-as-history belonging to the premodern and regarded as being of no value within the context of modernity.

I believe this analysis explains why Liang's thought has been perceived to incorporate traditionalist, anti-traditionalist, and reconciliatory elements. The goal of *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* is traditionalist to the extent that it hopes to salvage at least some aspects of the Chinese and Indian traditions, even if these aspects were ideals never realized historically. But Liang's rejection of Chinese and Indian histories as failures to live up to the ideals of ancient sages, and therefore his association of Eastern cultures-as-history with a premodernity that not only escaped the realm of human progress but impeded it, highlights the strong anti-traditionalist tendencies of his discourse, even when it is put to the task of a traditionalist reevaluation of ancient ideals. Liang was thus a traditionalist when it came to the traditions-as-value of Confucius and the Buddha, but a radical anti-traditionalist when it came to the traditions-as-history of India and China.

Liang thus manages to abstract value, in the form of normative cultures that point toward the future, from Chinese and Indian traditions, and projects these values/cultures onto the telos of history, so that the gap between fact and value can be bridged once the horizon of history is reached.⁴⁴ This suggests a reconciliatory view of the relation between the modern and the traditional, if the latter is understood in the narrow sense of the traditions-as-value Liang discussed. But two things should be kept in mind here. First, there still remains a gap between the traditions-as-value of Confucius and the Buddha on the one hand, and the realization of these ideals through the process of modernization. As such, I would characterize this work as revivalist rather than conservative.

Second, it appears that *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* works as a dialectic between history and value: ancient-traditions-as-values are abstracted from past history, only to be reinserted in future history. What this dialectic suggests is that the premodern is valuable only insofar as it has produced two geniuses foreseeing the future of humankind, while the modern, as a process of gradual implementation of these ancient values/cultures, is intrinsically valuable. In short, what is to be valued of the past is merely that which will make up the future of humankind. In a definitely modern fashion here, the future appears to be the only provider of temporal authority.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the reconciliatory aspects of Liang's thought do not suggest a recasting of the self and society within their own historicity, or a critique of the anti-traditionalist discourse of the Enlightenment, which calls for a liberation of the human from traditions seen as arbitrary, a project undertaken by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. Rather, the fact that the traditions Liang claims will be reconciled with modernity in the future are traditions-as-value instead of

traditions-as-history suggests a reproduction, within Liang's discourse, of the Enlightenment's hope to free humanity from its own limitations and historicity through a process of turning history into value—except that his is not a value produced by rational agents equipped with an infallible scientific method, but a value intuited by ancient sages.

Liang's discourse could thus be understood as an attempt to integrate a Confucian nostalgic call for a return to a normative but lost tradition within a modernization narrative that posits cultural normativity not at the source but at the end of history. The text finds a compromise between the two narratives by dissociating (Confucian) value from history. This is, in a sense, Liang's answer to his question: "Must Eastern cultures be eradicated from their roots?" The text manages to answer this question negatively by associating the modern and the Confucian with history and value, respectively, before providing a metanarrative at the end of which is posited a fusion of the two. This, I believe, offers a fascinating account of how the metanarrative of modernity had already become a powerful tool of authorization of discourses at the beginning of the Republican period, so much so that even traditionalist projects had to be legitimized by it.

Notes

- 1 – Hans-Goerg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2003).
- 2 – Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 3, 9–10. In his conversation with Alitto, which took place after the publication of his biography, Liang openly rejected the notion that he could be classified as a conservative. See Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, *Liang Shuming quanji* 梁漱溟全集 (The complete works of Liang Shuming), ed. Committee of the Academy of Chinese Culture (Jinan: Shandong Renmin, 2005), vol. 8, p. 1175.
- 3 – Wang Hui 汪暉, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* 現代中國思想的興起 (The rise of modern Chinese thought) (Beijing: Sanlian, 2008), vol. 2.2, pp. 1316–1317; Jing Haifeng 景海峰, *Xinruxue yu ershi shiji Zhongguo sixiang* 新儒學與二十世紀中國思想 (New Confucianism and twentieth-century Chinese thought) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Guji, 2005), p. 53; Zheng Dahua 鄭大華, *Liang Shu-ming yu xiandai xinruxue* 梁漱溟與現代新儒學 (Liang Shuming and modern New Confucianism) (Taipei: Wenjin, 1993), p. 169; Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇, "Wusi de lingyige bei ren hulue de chuantong: Wenhua baochengzhuyi de xingcheng, fazhan jiqi yiyi" 五四的另一個被人忽略的傳統：文化保成主義的形成、發展及其意義 (Another forgotten tradition of May Fourth: The formation, development, and meaning of cultural conservatism), accessed January 28, 2016, <http://ric.whu.edu.cn/Web/ShowArticle.aspx?id=684>; Wang Zongyu 王宗昱, *Liang Shuming* 梁漱溟 (Liang Shuming) (Taipei: Dongda, 1992), p. 298. It should be

noted that Jing and Wang Zongyu admit that Liang's thought also incorporates progressive elements.

- 4 – Yang Zhende 楊貞德, “Renxin yu lishi: Liang Shuming baoshouzhuyi zhong de jinhua lunshu” 人心與歷史—梁漱溟保守主義中的進化論述 (Human heart and history: The evolutionary discourse in Liang Shuming's conservatism), in *Zhuanxiang ziwo: Jindai Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshang de geren* 轉向自我：近代中國政治思想上的個人 (Turning toward the self: The individual in modern Chinese political thought) (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 2009), pp. 333, 382.
- 5 – Lin Yü-sheng 林毓生, “Hu Shi yu Liang Shuming guanyu Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue de lunbian jiqi lishi hanyi” 胡適與梁漱溟關於「東西文化及其哲學」的論辯及其歷史涵義 (Hu Shih and Liang Shuming's debate on *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* and its historical significance), in *Zhengzhi zhixu yu duoyuan shehui* 政治秩序與多元社會 (Political order and pluralistic society) (Taipei: Linking, 1989), pp. 303–324.
- 6 – Wang Yuanyi 王遠義, “Ruxue yu Makesizhuyi: Xilun Liang Shuming de lishiguan” 儒學與馬克思主義：析論梁漱溟的歷史觀 (Confucianism and Marxism: An analysis of Liang Shuming's view of history), *Taida wenshizhe xuebao* 臺大文史哲學報 (Humanitas Taiwanica) 56 (2002): 145–195.
- 7 – Thierry Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), p. 34.
- 8 – Chen Lai 陳來, “Liang Shuming de Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue yu qi wenhua duoyuanzhuyi” 梁漱溟的東西文化及其哲學與其文化多元主義 (Liang Shuming's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* and its cultural pluralism), in *Xiandai Zhongguo zhexue de zhuixun: Xinlixue yu xinlixue* 現代中國哲學的追尋—新理學與新心學 (The search for modern Chinese philosophy: New Cheng-Zhu studies and new Lu-Wang studies) (Beijing: Renmin, 2001), pp. 3–40.
- 9 – Another issue regarding the classification of Liang's thought, which will not be discussed here but should nevertheless be pointed out, has been the question of whether Liang was ultimately a Buddhist or a Confucian. For works challenging the classification of Liang as a Confucian, see John. J. Hanafin, “The ‘Last Buddhist’: The Philosophy of Liang Shuming,” in *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, ed. John Makeham (New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 187–218, and Thierry Meynard, “Is Liang Shuming Ultimately a Confucian or Buddhist?” *Dao* 6 (2007): 131–147. On the relation between Henri Bergson and Liang's philosophy, see also An Yanming, “Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (1997): 337–362.
- 10 – *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* is certainly the most influential work by Liang, and as such it has played a central role in how Liang's

thought has been received by scholars. Moreover, Liang himself admitted that his basic conception of history outlined in this work remained unchanged throughout his life. As such, I hope my analysis of this work will be meaningful to those interested in Liang's other works as well. See Liang Shuming, *Zhong-guo wenhua yaoyi* 中國文化要義 (The characteristics of Chinese culture), in *Liang Shuming quanji*, vol. 3, p. 3. A variety of scholars have also pointed out that Liang's view of history remained essentially unchanged throughout his life. See Guo Qiyong and Gong Jianping 龔建平, *Liang Shuming zhexue sixiang* 梁漱溟哲學思想 (The philosophical thought of Liang Shuming) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011), p. 72; Wang Zongyu, *Liang Shuming*, p. 73; Wang Yuanyi, "Ruxue yu makesizhuyi," p. 149; and Yang Zhende, "Renxin yu lishi," p. 381.

- 11 – Liang Shuming, *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 (Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies), in *Liang Shuming quanji*, vol. 1, p. 338; Liang Shuming, *Les cultures d'Orient et d'Occident et leurs philosophies*, trans. Luo Shenyi (Paris: You Feng, 2011), p. 10. All translations are mine unless specified otherwise, and all are based on the Chinese version rather than the French translation.
- 12 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 352; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 27.
- 13 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 376; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 52.
- 14 – Liang also uses the Buddhist terms "seeing-part" (見分; *darśana-bhāga*) and "image-part" (相分; *nimitta-bhāga*), that is, the subjective and objective realms, respectively, to talk about this question-and-answer phenomenon.
- 15 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 411; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 91.
- 16 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 380; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 56. Note that the French translation does not include this statement.
- 17 – Here, Liang has in mind the desire for immortality, for example. On these three types of demands, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 380; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 56–57. Liang also points out certain kinds of issues, such as artistic ones, which do not call for a resolution or satisfaction at all, and are thus excluded from this typology.
- 18 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 381; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 57.
- 19 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 382; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 58.
- 20 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 381; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 58.
- 21 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 381–382. Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 58.
- 22 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 485; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 184.
- 23 – Liang actually praised Chen Duxiu on this point. See Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 335 (on Chen, see also pp. 531–532); Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 7 (p. 241).

- 24 – See Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 392 (on the three cultures being holistic wholes distinct from one another, and embarked on different paths, see also p. 441); Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 68 (p. 128).
- 25 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 526; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 234. On Liang's cultural pluralism, see Chen, "Liang Shuming," pp. 3–40.
- 26 – On the three stages of modern history, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 493–495; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 195–198.
- 27 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 528, 533–534; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 237, 244.
- 28 – On the abstraction and simplification of the three cultures in Liang's thought, see Chen, "Liang Shuming," pp. 23–24; Zheng, *Liang Shuming*, p. 69; Lin Anwu 林安梧, "Liang Shuming and His Theory of the Reappearance of Three Cultural Periods: Analysis and Evaluation of Liang Shuming's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 30.
- 29 – On this dissociation between culture and history, see Yang, "Renxin yu lishi," pp. 334–336, 348, 357; Liu Shu-hsien 劉述先, *Essentials of Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 30; and Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, p. 104.
- 30 – I use "culture-as-value" and "culture-as-history," as well as "tradition-as-value" and "tradition-as-history," in order to distinguish the cultural ideals offered by the past (by Confucius and the Buddha for Liang) and the historical cultures of China and India, which, according to Liang, failed to live up to the ideals of culture-as-value.
- 31 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 472–477; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 168–175. Of course, implied in this view is that Liang himself was the first one to decipher the Confucian message thoroughly (Alitto points this out in *The Last Confucian*, p. 104).
- 32 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 481–482; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 179–180.
- 33 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 375, 472, 529; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 51, 168, 238. On this, see also Wang, "Ruxue yu makesizhuyi," p. 165.
- 34 – On May Fourth iconoclasm, see Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).
- 35 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 338; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, pp. 10–11.
- 36 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 479; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, p. 177; translation from Alitto, *The Last Confucian*, p. 103.

- 37 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, pp. 388–389; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, p. 65.
- 38 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 390; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, p. 66.
- 39 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 261; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, p. 264.
- 40 – Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, p. 261; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, p. 264.
- 41 – See his distinction between the acultural and cultural understandings of modernity in Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonka (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 172–196.
- 42 – Such a critique has been provided, for example, by Johannes Fabian in his conceptualization of the spatialization of time by anthropology in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- 43 – On the tendency of modern Chinese intellectuals to portray the Chinese tradition as a homogeneous whole that either should be or is in fact independent of foreign influence, see John Makeham, “Disciplining Tradition in Modern China: Two Case Studies,” *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 89–103.
- 44 – Wang Yuanyi made a similar claim in “Ruxue yu makesizhuyi,” p. 187.