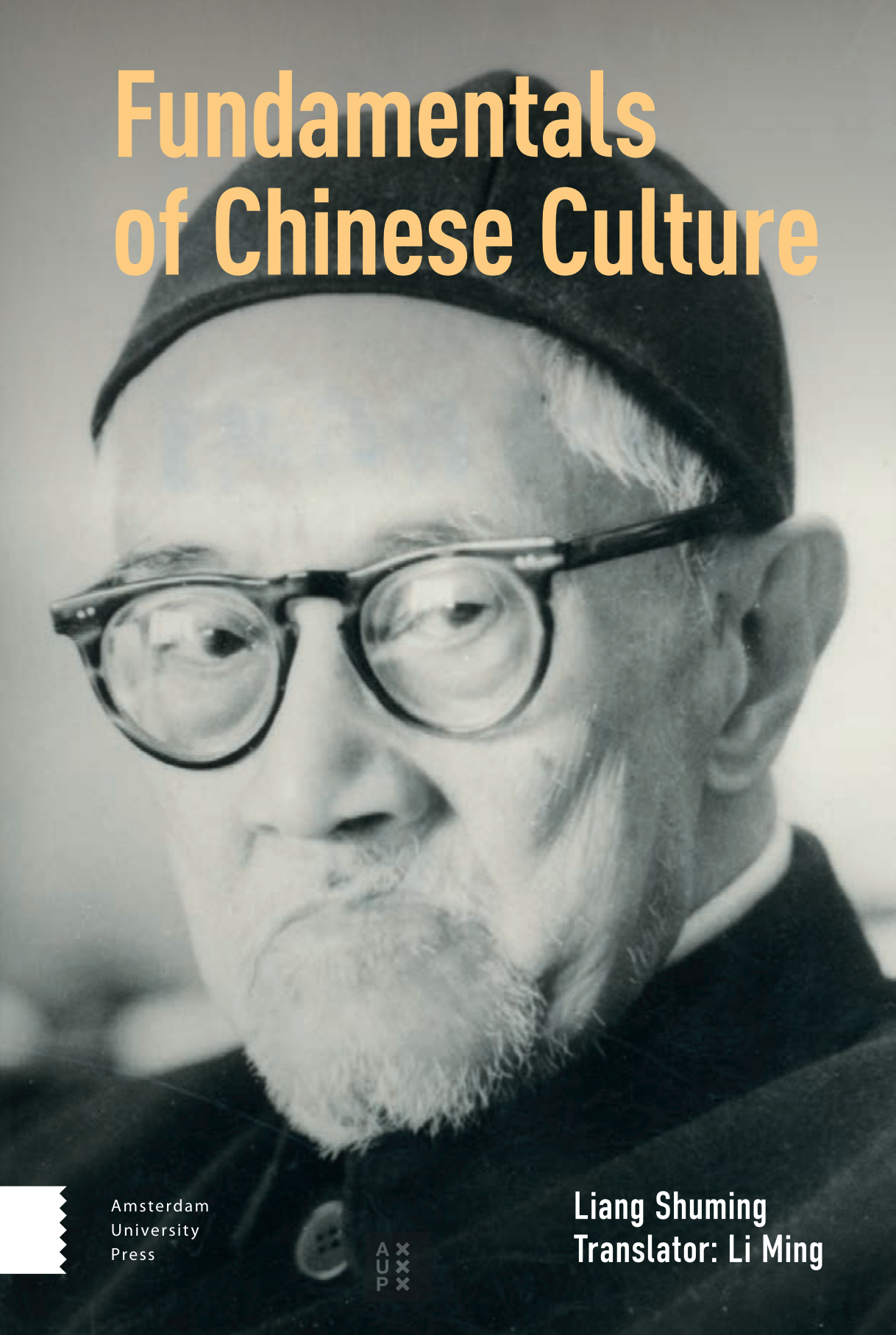
Fundamentals of Chinese Culture



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Translator: Li Ming

Amsterdam University Press

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This translation, authorized by Horizon Media Co., Ltd., a Division of Shanghai Century Publishing Co., Ltd., was sponsored by Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences [Grant Number: 16WSH008]

First published as 《中國文化要義》, Horizon Media Co., Ltd., a Division of Shanghai Century Publishing Co., Ltd., 2005.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Typesetting: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 965 9
e-ISBN 978 90 4855 412 6 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789463729659
NUR 694

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About Liang Shuming and *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture*

Liang Shuming (Chinese: 梁漱溟; pinyin: *Liáng Shùmíng*; Wade-Giles: *Liang Shu-ming*; sometimes *Liang Sou-ming*, October 18, 1893-June 23, 1988), born *Liang Huanding* (梁煥鼎), courtesy name *Shouming* (壽銘), was one of twentieth-century China's most influential thinkers. A neo-Confucian philosopher and writer, he was an active participant in and a witness to the modernization of China, who, despite living through great social changes dedicated himself to an independent and unique style of cultural thinking, whenever needs arose, so that his powerful voice would be heard far and wide.

Born in Beijing, he received a modern education, including substantial study of Western writings. In 1917, he was recruited by Cai Yuanpei, then president of Peking University, to join the philosophy department of Peking University, where he wrote an influential book based on his lectures – *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, released in 1921.

In this book, Liang writes: "What is culture? It is the lifestyle of a people. What is life? It is the expression of inexhaustible will – something quite close to the will in Schopenhauer – always being satisfied and yet not fully satisfied". For Liang, will decides life and life decides culture, so cultures vary because the wills and desires of the people who populate them differ. According to Liang, there are three orientations of the will: (1) the desire to change and affect one's surroundings so that they bend to one's will; (2) the desire to change one's will in order not to desire to change one's surroundings; (3) the desire to eliminate will entirely, understanding that much of the world is an illusion, that one no longer desires anything. These three orientations of will, which are not unconnected, form a progression. Liang argues that, since knowledge comes into being by applying reason to one's surroundings, the first orientation is the most formative. This leads to an imbalance, where one must start to use intuition to relate morally to the world. Yet as intuition subsequently develops, it leads to hardship instead of relieving it. This leads to direct perception, which is the third orientation. Liang maintains that the West is characterized by the first orientation, China by the second and India by the third.

Liang's most representative work, *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture*, was published in 1949. In this book, Liang contrasted Chinese culture with Western culture. He did this by exploring the relationship between the

social structures in China and in the West, arguing that social structure creates the cultural factors that determine everything else about the two cultures. Liang suggested that social structure is heavily influenced by cultural viewpoint, which in turn is defined by the social foundation of the society. Liang viewed society as being made up of three components: collectives or communities, families and individuals. A cultural viewpoint that heavily emphasizes one combination of these will differ greatly from a viewpoint that emphasizes different elements.[1]

Liang believed that while China stressed the importance of family, the West focused on the relationship of the individual to the collective: China thus developed into an ethics-oriented society, while the West produced an individual-oriented society. The influence of kinship and emotional bonds, which dominated Chinese society and culture, led China down this path. The West, placing emphasis instead on mutual rights, proceeded down a different path, revolving around class distinction, economic independence and the rule of law. Chinese society, on the other hand, being based on professional divisions due to greater social mobility, could rely on mutual responsibility and personal bonds for the maintenance of order. In *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture*, Liang posits his "three cultures" theory and outlines China's position in this schema. He argues that China skipped straight to the second stage, bypassing the first, and consequently did not develop the benefits related to profit and power. Rather than suggesting that China regress to the first cultural stage, Liang suggests that Western science and democracy should instead be introduced into Chinese society in order to promote development in those areas.[2]

Due to its enduring influence, this book has been acclaimed as one of the greatest cultural studies of the Chinese nation and a classic among comparative studies on Western culture. By comparing, at the outset, the different cultural traditions and lifestyles of Chinese people and Westerners from the perspective of social structure, it advances the thesis that Chinese society is organized around ethical standards. Subsequently, drawing on an exhaustive investigation into religion in China, the argument runs that this ethics-based organization ensures that Chinese society is capable of great transformation. Liang also dismantles basic notions about the essential structure of Chinese society, on one hand diagnosing the maladies inherent in its culture and on the other revealing what he argues is the essence of the Chinese national spirit.

1 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Shuming
2 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Shuming

Regarding Western civilization as doomed to eventual failure and Western methods and doctrines unsuitable to China, Liang did not advocate complete reform and adoption of Western institutions. He believed that, in order to make China equal to the rest of the world, reform was needed, and that once the people of the Chinese countryside were awakened by enlightened understanding, the land would become a repository of traditional Confucian values, ending the need for continued struggle or revolution on the part of the Chinese people. He therefore pushed for socialism to adapt, starting at the grassroots level. As a believer in the unity of thought and action, Liang founded the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute, from where he directed the rural reconstruction of Zouping County, Shandong Province between 1931 and 1937. The Institute had three departments: the Research Department on Rural Reconstruction, headed by Liang himself, the Training Department of Service Personnel, and the Rural Reconstruction District. Liang's main emphases in rural reconstruction were the cultivation of collective unity, development of science and technology, and the elimination of outdated traditions.[3] The great improvements seen in that area are often attributed to his involvement.

Liang identified as a Buddhist. His deep interest in Buddhism began in his youth: he often attributed this fascination to his instinct that many of the mistakes of his past were caused by relying on the external world for answers that should come from within. Like many intellectuals of the time, he was very critical of Chinese folk religion, considering it too primitive to allow society to reach a high level of socialization, and at the same time as promoting a conservatism that impeded social development and promoted low moral standards and selfishness. He felt that Confucianism was China's answer to religion, as it provided a way to harmonize with the cosmos instead of being isolated from it.

3 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liang_Shuming.

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Acknowledgements

Translating a good book takes a lot of effort. Translating a *great* book demands even more. I began my translation project in 2016, sponsored by the Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences [Grant Number: 16WSH008]. My thanks are due to many people for their assistance over that period of time – so many that it is impossible to mention them all. Throughout the translation of this book, the support I have received from Professor Lu Hongmei, my wife, has been invaluable. She acted as a sounding board for my ideas about how certain culturally related elements in the book should be understood, and the discussions we had during the process of translating the book helped me to clarify my understanding of the source text and my vision for the translation. Her drafts of two translated chapters were very impressive, and her support and help to me at each stage have been unparalleled.

Next, I would like to acknowledge my debt to Dr. Li Siyi, who was still a doctoral student studying comparative literature and translation at Shanghai Jiao Tong University when he drafted translations of four chapters in this book. His erudition and accurate judgement have impressed me profoundly.

I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Zhang Xiuqiang, a specialist in Japanese language and culture, who has kindly helped me all the way by providing me with translations of the Japanese names that appear in the book.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the efforts of Professor Yang Feng and Professor Chu Dongwei, editors-in-chief of their respective journals – *Contemporary Foreign Languages Studies* and *Chinese Literature and Culture* – in publishing three excerpts from this translation. To Professor Chen Kaiju and Professor Xie Yanming I also owe many thanks for their suggestions and help during the translating of this book.

Special thanks go to my graduate students, including Li Guanxi, Zheng Rong, Qi Yufan, Xu Hui, and Zhou Zijun, as well as my visiting scholars Yuan Hongyan and Hu Aiqing, who have all made contributions in one way or another to the process of translating this book.

I would like to thank Professor Li Ruilin, whose inspiration, help and love for the world of translation have been crucial in my career, and from which I derive every encouragement. A special mention goes to my dear colleagues Professor Zhang Baohong, Professor Lan Hongjun, Professor Xing Jie and Professor Hu Zhengmao, who have a profound understanding

of translation and who were always willing to give up their valuable time to help me improve this translation.

At Amsterdam University Press, I would like to thank Dr. Saskia Gieling for her interest in this translation and I am greatly obliged to Dr. Vicki Blud for all the conscientious efforts she has made to copyedit this translation. I thank Dr. Thierry Meynard for writing Preface to this book and for his good suggestions.

Thanks go to my peer reviewers for their kind and helpful suggestions and encouragement. Any remaining flaws are, of course, my own responsibility.

Finally, I would like to extend my profound gratitude to my closest friends and all my family members, who have sustained me with unwavering encouragement, strengthened my powers of self-discipline, instilled in me the love of languages and cultures (both Chinese and English), and endowed me with a firmer conviction that I am, after all, engaged in something worthy of a person's lifelong efforts.

This translation is dedicated to intellectuals everywhere who seek a more profound understanding of Chinese culture, and of the crucial differences between Chinese and Western culture.

Profile of the Translator

Dr. Li Ming is Professor of English in the School of Interpreting and Translation Studies, researcher in Institute of Hermeneutics, and researcher in Center for Foreign Literature and Culture, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, PRC. His areas of research include Translation Studies, Translation Criticism, Functional Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Social Semiotics, Text Linguistics, Stylistics and Studies in Translation for Business Purposes.

He has published over sixty academic papers on a variety of topics, in journals that include *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, *Foreign Languages*, *Chinese Translators' Journal*, *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, *Foreign Languages Research* and *Translation Quarterly*.

His published works include *Language Studies and Translation* (2014), *An English-Chinese Translation Course for Business* (2010), *Translation Workshop* (*Chinese-English Translation*) (2006), *Chinese-English Translation in Interaction* (2016), *Chinese-English Translation for International Business* (2007), *Translation Appreciation and Criticism* (2006; 2016), *English-Chinese Translation in Interaction* (2016), *Interlingual Translation from a Sociosemiotic*

Perspective (2005), *English-Chinese Translation for International Business* (2011), *Essentials of Chinese-English Translation* (1997) and *A Basic Coursebook for Translators* (2020) among others.

His translated works include English-Chinese translations of *The First Blast of the Trumpet* (2001), *A Christmas Carol* (2016), *The Million Pound Note* (2015), *Leading through Uncertainty* (2014) and *A Thousand Miles of Miracle in China: A Personal Record of God's Delivering Power from the Hands of the Imperial Boxers of Shan-si* (unpublished); he has also published Chinese-English translations of *Old City of Beijing: Its Grandeur and Splendours* (2014), *Are You Ready? – A Guide to Emergency Preparedness and Response* (2012), *Atlas of Shaoguan City* (2009) and several other works.

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Preface to This Translation

Liang Shuming is an important Chinese philosopher who is often credited as one of the founders of the neo-Confucian movement, which aims to rejuvenate ancient Confucianism in the twentieth century. When the New Culture movement and Chinese Marxism rejected Confucianism as an obstacle to the modernization of the country, Liang was among the first to proclaim its relevance not only for China, but for all humanity. As a philosopher, he was concerned with the question of the ultimate meaning of life, finding his answer in Buddhism, but he dealt with this question in his other works, as can be seen in my doctoral dissertation on this topic at Peking University, published in English as *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist* (Brill, 2011). In *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture* translated here by Li, Liang's focus is on social and moral philosophy, attempting to express the specificity of Chinese experience compared with that of the West. His project is not to refuse the modernity brought by the West; on the contrary, he considers that the absence of a capitalist economy and of a nation-state has hindered the social development of the country. But he wants to combine this modernity with Chinese social and moral traditions. As he says, a strong social body needs also a strong spirit, and Liang finds this spirit in Confucianism as a practice by which a person can return to their true self, through introspection and ethics.

Liang received no academic training and he had a short academic career at Peking University. This explains why many of his works may appear to be collections of personal ideas, lacking systematicity. This is particularly true of the original work of this translation, which was written over the course of a nine-year period marked by the war against Japan and by the civil war. The original work was published in 1949, only a few months before the proclamation of the People's Republic of China.

For the reader today, the book presents three points of particular interest. The first is historical, allowing the reader to become familiar with the debates that agitated Chinese intellectuals before 1949. Liang is in contact with many important thinkers and he avidly reads their works that nourish his thought. The second aspect concerns the actuality of his thought. In the seventy years following its publication, China experienced remarkable economic development, but not much space is left for the development of Confucian personal cultivation and morality, except in very fragmentary forms, and this makes Liang's ideas even more relevant. The third facet of the work is truly philosophical, beyond the question of China. In this work,

Liang elaborates a vitalist philosophy in which human beings and societies are on a quest for a deep spiritual communion, and here lies the universal significance of Liang's philosophy.

Prof. Li Ming is to be congratulated for translating this lengthy work into English. The language and the vocabulary used by Liang are quite different from contemporary Chinese, and the translator requires great agility to render it into English. Following the work of Michel Masson S.J. of the Ricci Institute of Paris, who translated the work into French as *Idées maîtresses de la culture chinoise* (Cerf, 2010), this English version will enable yet more readers to discover this important thinker and one of his major works.

Thierry Meynard S.J., Sun Yat-sen University
Guangzhou, China
July 2020

Liang's Preface

This is my fourth book, following the completion of such works as *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (1920-1921), *The Final Consciousness of the Chinese National Liberation Movement* (1929-1931), and *Rural Reconstruction Theory* (1932-1936). During the spring of 1941, I gave a two-month series of specialist lectures at Guangxi University, and during the next spring, I set out to write the book in Guilin, a city in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in China. By 1944, I had finished six successive chapters totaling about 80,000 Chinese characters, but I stopped in the middle of writing when Guilin was invaded by the Japanese. After China's victory, I promoted domestic peace throughout China and could afford no time to do any actual writing. In November 1946, I returned from Nanjing to Beibei, a district in China's southwest Chongqing City, where I resumed my writing; meanwhile, I was also delivering some lectures. The original manuscripts I had prepared in Guilin, however, only served as the raw material, which had to be reorganized and restructured. But now (i.e., June 1949), the whole book has been finished at last, after a struggle of nine years' duration from the beginning to the end.

In these four books, which have been written successively, it has become essential to restate certain ideas. This is because certain issues under discussion are basically related to each other or are simply different versions of the same issue. Moreover, my thought continues to derive from the same tradition, and though there might be a difference in the maturity of these ideas, my philosophy is fundamentally unchanged. Indeed, as the fourth book is connected to the third, there is a closer relationship between these books. As a result, if you have managed to read the third book, you can better understand the key points in the fourth book. The third book, *Rural Reconstruction Theory,* once entitled *The Future of the Chinese Nation*, consists of two parts. Part I is concerned with gaining an understanding of the problems in China and Part II with finding solutions to the problems in China. To resolve a problem, efforts must be made to understand it. Problems in China arise out of the international exchanges over the last hundred years, as Western influence and Western culture spread to the East. To understand the problems in China, one has to be clear about both the changes that have taken place and the internal and external situations in Chinese society in the last century. This provides an understanding of why the former Chinese society was unchanged and what the preconditions are for its future development. The present book, with the title *Fundamentals*

of Chinese Culture, is an expansion or an elaboration on the features of the former Chinese society, which have already been discussed in the third book.

It can be seen from this that I do not pursue academic learning for its own sake. Compelled by my concern with the problems in China, I am determined to commit myself to finding solutions, so as to fully understand China by tracing its history and its culture. In the beginning, I never thought of concepts such as "social history of development" and "philosophy of culture". From one perspective, the Chinese people are motivated by practical things (this, indeed, is their shortcoming), which is the root cause of China's lack of academics. But from another perspective, this is neither bookish knowledge nor pedantic research, but rather insight gained from living with everyday problems and material concerns. It is the culmination of my whole life, not just my intellectual activities. With my forty years' experience integrated into this work, I want to assure my readers that I am not using empty words or false concepts.

As a native Chinese, living at a time when China's problems in recent decades loom large, naturally, I feel totally obsessed with all these problems. Both my family environment and my social environment have acquainted me with these problems.[1] Once, it seemed that I was involved in such tribulations and that it was my nature to pay attention to the general situation and the current affairs in China. Though I am now over fifty years of age, I often lament that "ultimately I will be a man of thought instead of being a man of action; I will wholeheartedly engage in thought so as to let others take actions." However, ever since childhood, I have always been an enthusiastic "doer".[2] I was always fond of actions without being willing to indulge in empty talk. Whenever one has the idea of withdrawing from the world like a recluse, he will live like a recluse. And whenever one has revolutionary ideas, he will mount a revolution. To find the solutions to the problems in China, to find the way out, I participate in all revolutionary practices for fear of falling behind others. I have been hard-working all my life, as can quickly be seen from my experience.[3]

1 See Section Four and Section Five of my book Wǒde zìxué xiǎoshǐ《我的自學小史》*A Short History of My Independent Study*, 1947.

2 This refers to the time when I was eight years old, when I had already begun to distribute leaflets in Peiping. See Wǒde zìxué xiǎoshǐ《我的自學小史》*A Short History of My Independent Study*, 1947.

3 As a teenager, I was active in the constitutional monarchy movement. Later on, I took part in the 1911 Revolution. After the year 1927, I began the rural reconstruction movement. From 1937, I was busy in the Anti-Japanese War. Up to the time when we were victorious in the War, I strived to secure and promote peace domestically.

Before and after exerting my efforts to find solutions to the problems in China, I surely have ideas or thoughts of my own, which have been gained from my own experience. As a Chinese, how can I abstain from committing myself to facing these genuine problems? However, some problems are either not prominent enough or have passed unnoticed. I give more consideration to or indulge more in retrospection of certain problems. On this basis, I have very different ideas or actions from other people. Even if these ideas or actions are not revealed to the outside world, they are in my heart. In other words, I have ideas of my own, and I have learned much from my work and study. Thus, from my feelings come my actions, from my actions comes my knowledge gained in work and study, from the accumulation of what I have learned in work and study come ideas of my own, and from these ideas of my own come further actions of my own. In such a cyclic accumulation, each reiteration of the cycle goes one step further. During this process, I read a lot. But what I read and what I research are closely related only to what I am concerned about. I never read superficially, nor do I carry out research superficially. To this day, in terms of opinion or thought, the deeper it is, the more expansive this system becomes. Though I wish to say that I am ignorant so that I can keep on learning from others, how much more can I learn from them?

My opinion or thought, of which I speak here today, naturally arises from both the stimulus of problems and the response to actions. It must be noted, however, that just because a person is forced both to face real problems and to give themselves over to dealing with real problems, he cannot be expected to come up with any opinion or thought of profundity. He must at the same time go beyond what he is concerned with and meditate upon it before he can come to any such result.

Here, I would like to tell you what happened to me when I was young. A little while after I felt called to action by the problems in China, I was profoundly impressed by the problems of life itself, so I began to make an in-depth study of them and could not help but meditate on them.[4] The problems of life, compared with the current problems in China, are more extensive, more fundamental and more profound. Thus, they cannot be confined only to the category of real-world problems. Over my past forty years' meditation on these two different categories of problems, I laid special emphasis sometimes on one category and sometimes on the other. Though

4 I began to meditate on the problems of life at about seventeen and when I reached twenty, I became fascinated by the life in which one withdraws from the world like a recluse, seeking Buddhist doctrines.

such irresolution never yields any result, these two categories of problems are closely related and complementary. In addition, as I have been both active and quiet, at different points in my life I have sometimes busied myself with hard work and sometimes retired to tranquil meditation. I have alternated between activity and tranquility on quite a few occasions.[5] So, when I was active, I was not blindly active, and when I was meditative, I was not emptily meditative. Fortunately, I am not so shallow as to follow those who, in this aspect, are indeed shallow.

My obsession with the problems of life inspires me to go and search, with an open mind, for answers in philosophical works by thinkers from both the West and the East. However, as soon as I seem to have grasped something about the truths of life, I make no further explorations. If philosophy is considered to be the type of learning that everyone should have a little bit of, it is just this little bit that I have understood. This is the difference between me and those who specialize in philosophy. Moreover, when I dedicate myself to exploring the problems of life, I research repeatedly into both issues of "withdrawing from the world" and of "returning to the world". That to which I am dedicated is found not only within knowledge and speculation but also beyond them. This is another difference between me and ordinary philosophers. No further discussion, then, is needed concerning similarities and differences, and gains and losses. In the end, I have my own understanding of and thoughts on the problems of life and, what is more, on the way in which I now conduct myself. In a similar manner, the pressing problems in China that have been unresolved for several decades cannot do otherwise but compel me to take action and to acquiesce to such academic disciplines as politics, economics, history and social culture. However, once China's prospects seem promising, I will no longer continue to make academic learning my major occupation. However, what can be counted as academic learning and what cannot are not to be discussed here. So in the end, I have my own understanding and my own opinion of the problems in China. What is more, I have my own propositions and actions for today.

It can thus be seen that "I have no intent at all to devote myself to academic learning", that "I am simply not a learned man", and that "philosophers cannot understand me from their perspective." Such confessions of mine (for which see all my previous published books) are, to me, by no means

5 Altogether, there have been three stages in the past when I devoted myself with tranquility to self-study and meditation: (1) from the latter half of the year 1912 to the first half of the year 1916; (2) from the spring of the year 1925 to the spring of the year 1928; (3) from the time of my withdrawal from domestic peace talks in 1946 up to the present day.

banal statements. I hope that when friends of mine hear someone ask the question, "What kind of person is that Mr. Liang?" they would answer for me:

"He is a person with ideas."

Or:

"He is a person who has ideas and acts on his own ideas at the same time."

Or rather, the following might be the most appropriate and the most desirable answer:

"He is a thinker and at the same a social transformation activist."

That would be the highest of compliments.

This book, which is mainly about my views on Chinese history and culture, draws on a variety of disciplines. It was not originally intended for scholars and experts, but is a book from which scholars and experts can be expected to learn a lot. I hope to make this clear to readers before they begin reading it, so that they will not rush to regard this book as either too difficult or too easy for them.

"Understand Old China so as to build New China" is a slogan that I favor. Following the completion of this book, I will begin writing another book, to be titled *Researching Modern China's Political Issues*. The turmoil of domestic politics in recent decades and the constant failure to get on the right track indeed constitute the focus of the anguish caused by the problems in China. The construction of New China can only be ensured by political means: this is certain. However, once an understanding of Old China is assured, we will have our own understanding of why China has witnessed this endless turmoil in recent decades. What the road ahead for China's future politics may be, or not be, can also be hinted at here in my next book. I would like to continue to seek advice from my readers.

Liang Shuming, October 10, 1949

Preface to the reprint of *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture*:

I have been taking "Understand Old China so as to build New China" as a slogan of mine ever since I wrote the book *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture* to seek advice from my countrymen. The first edition of the book was printed and distributed by Luming Bookstore in Chengdu; few copies were printed but there were many missed or wrongly written characters. Now I would like to revise the book for reprinting in Shanghai, with the hope of being granted instruction from my countrymen through its wider circulation, which is a blessing to the writer himself!

Liang Shuming, February, 1986

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Chapter One **Introduction**

1.1 Definition of Chinese Culture

"Culture" is everything we rely on as we live in this world. For example, we have to rely on agricultural and industrial production in order to live. Connected to this are tools, technologies and their social systems, which constitute an important part of culture. Our lives also depend on social security and order. Therefore, those things that ensure and maintain that social security and order, such as national politics, legal systems, religious beliefs, morality, law courts, the police and the army, undoubtedly constitute an important part of culture. What's more, since we are born capable of nothing, we need to acquire learning in order to gain ability. As a result, all facets of education are indispensable to us and also to the transmission and the incessant progress of culture. Needless to say, written language, books, learning, schools and so on are thus considered elements of culture.

The popular view that written language, literature, ideology, education, and publication are elements of culture is rather narrow in scope. My statement that culture is everything that we rely on in life insists that culture is concrete. In its literal sense, culture should encompass economy, politics and almost everything else.

However, can music, drama and all kinds of recreation be thought of as things that we rely on in life? My answer is: they seem to be something we enjoy, rather than something "we rely on". But human beings often need something more than mere food and clothing. Thus people often use the expression "spiritual food". Viewed from this perspective, music, drama and other kinds of pastimes soothe and nourish the soul and cultivate and foster the spirit, and can to this extent be considered essential.

We designate as "Chinese culture", our own culture, that which differs from alien cultures. This refers in particular to everything that we Chinese people are used to depending on in life. As culture originates from transmission and communication, it is almost impossible for us to make a distinction between "our own culture" and "foreign cultures". Moreover, due to the sharp rise in communication in recent one hundred years, Chinese culture has been so greatly influenced by Western culture that it has almost lost its original flavor. As a result, we take as Chinese culture only the fundamental part that remains intact after the past century.

But culture is all-encompassing and it is impossible for this book to be inclusive. As Chinese people have been focused on mundane things and

incurious about logic and reason, we will discuss Chinese culture specifically from the perspective of social life.

1.2 Specifics of Chinese Culture

Compared with other cultures, Chinese culture has certain distinctive characteristics, which can be described as follows:

First, Chinese culture grew gradually out of its own independent development. Unlike Japanese culture and American culture, it is not a culture which is fostered by other cultures.

Second, Chinese culture has its own features and its unique systems (for example, its writing system, legal system, etc.) which are radically different from those of other cultures. It is natural, of course, for one culture to be different from another culture while, at the same time, sharing some similarities with that other culture. However, Chinese culture, Indian culture, and Western culture are generally acknowledged to be the world's three great distinct cultural systems because each of them has its own structures.

Third, while ancient cultures that were counterparts to Chinese culture, such as Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Persian and Greek cultures, either disappeared or were transformed or lost their national independence, only Chinese culture still survives today, having ensured its status as an independent nation has remained uninterrupted.

Fourth, it can be well seen from China's past history that from the very beginning, Chinese culture has possessed the greatest capacity to assimilate other cultures and absorb their advanced elements without being subject to any transformation itself.

Fifth, thanks to this great power of assimilation, China has been able to integrate its neighboring countries and other ethnic groups into the huge nation it is now. It can be said that Chinese culture not only exceeds all other cultures in longevity, but also goes beyond them in space. For example, the huge unified society which has grown out of Chinese culture boasts a huge percentage of the world's population.

Sixth, in its enduring life span (i.e., more than two thousand years), Chinese culture witnessed a lack of change or progress, especially in recent centuries. This seems to show that Chinese culture is so inherently appropriate and harmonious that it has attained cultural maturity.

Seventh, the impact of Chinese culture upon its surrounding areas is both great and far-reaching. Its sphere of influence has reached Siberia in the north, the South Sea Islands in the south, Pamirs Plateau in the west, and

Korea and Japan in the east. Needless to say, not only China's neighbors, such as Vietnam and Korea, but also countries like Japan, Thailand and Myanmar, derive their culture mostly from Chinese culture. In places like Europe that are further away, modern civilization has also been greatly influenced by Chinese culture. As is well-known, modern European civilization originated in the Renaissance, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and Renaissance culture actually benefited from several Chinese inventions such as paper making and printing, which supported its material basis. Later, the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also drew illumination from Chinese thought, which served as its spiritual inspiration.[1]

It has only been in the last hundred years that Chinese culture has begun to fall behind other cultures, becoming subject to changes under the influence of foreign cultures or even succumbing to radical alterations.

1.3 Features of Chinese Culture

So, we cannot help but ask: What is Chinese culture? Does it refer only to a geographical space or a certain period in history? Or is it related to a certain meaning or spirit? The unique features of Chinese culture described above may prompt us to investigate the solid foundations behind its elasticity and greatness, or they may suggest that there is a certain meaning or spirit derived from them. If such a spirit can be discerned, isn't it of great significance to describe it so that people can discover more about it and cherish something lively or spiritual in their hearts? This is precisely the task of the present book, *Fundamentals of Chinese Culture*.

This entails the following things:

Firstly, efforts will be made to identify those particulars of culture that are easily visible and often referred to. As many of them as possible will be enumerated, from the most obvious to the least obvious. When this is done, we will naturally find that some of them are closely related to each other and can therefore be incorporated into one element, since they mean the same thing. What are then to be highlighted will be only a few particulars.

Secondly, having selected a certain feature as the starting point for our research, we will turn our efforts to each of the other features in turn. Through thorough interpretation and illustration, we will gain more insights and shed light on other features in the meantime. If these other features are

1 See ZHU Qianzhi, *Influence of Chinese Thoughts upon European Culture*, 1940.