

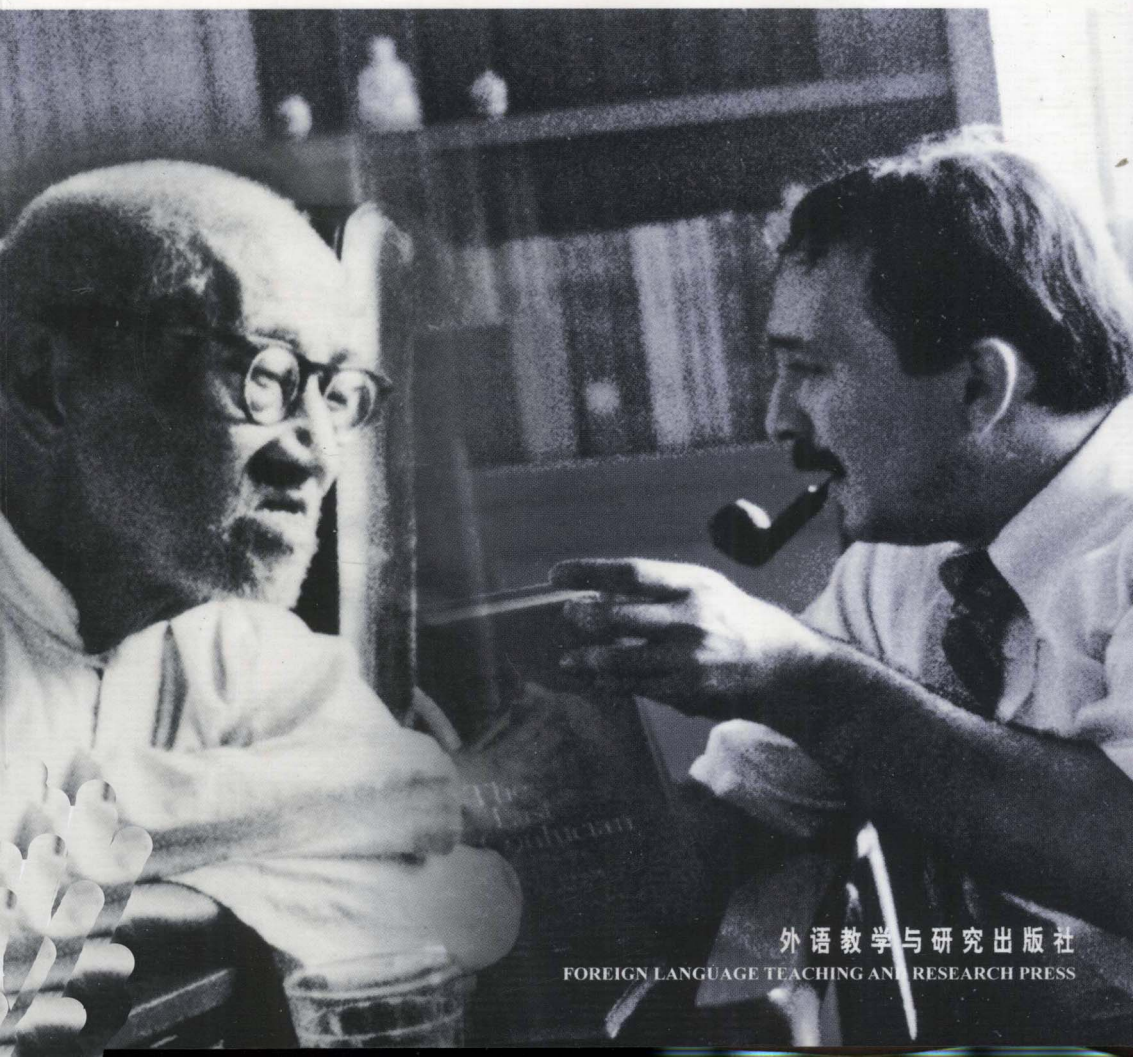
# HAS MAN A FUTURE?

Dialogues with the Last Confucian

## 这个世界会好吗？

梁漱溟晚年口述

梁漱溟 (美) 艾恺 著



外语教学与研究出版社

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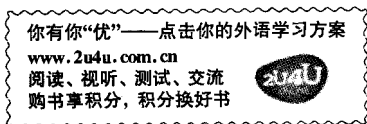
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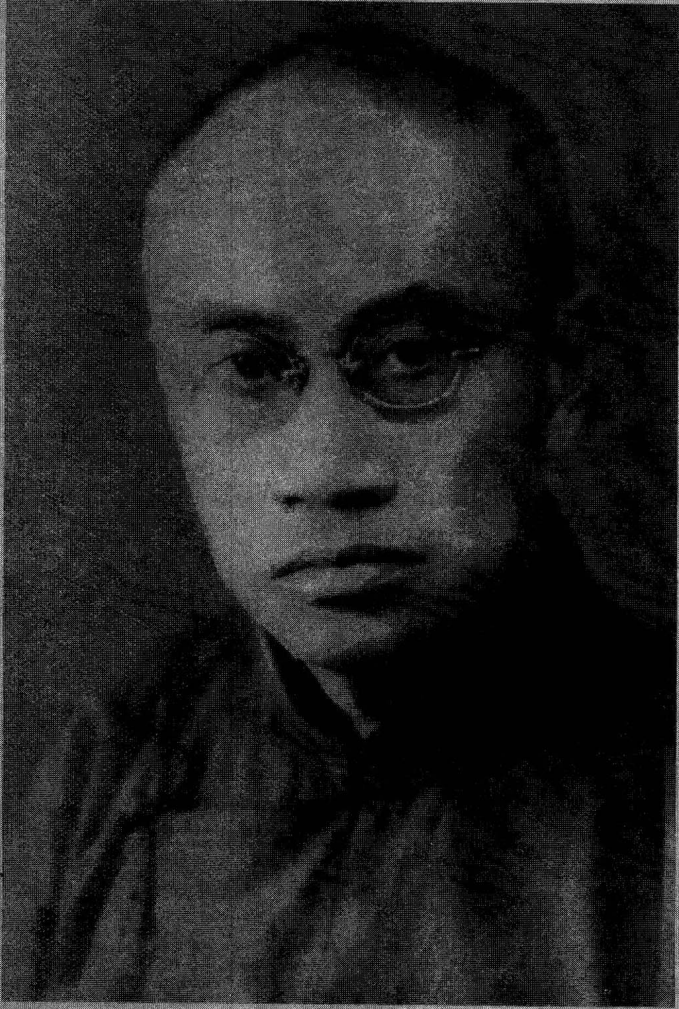
On Nov. 7, 1918, Liang Shuming's father, Liang Ji, encountered his son on his way out. The two spoke of a news report on the war in Europe.

"Has man a future?" asked Liang Ji.

"I believe that man is going to be better by the day." Shuming responded.

"I hope that will be so," said Liang Ji, and left the house.

Three days later, Liang Ji drowned himself in Jingye Lake.

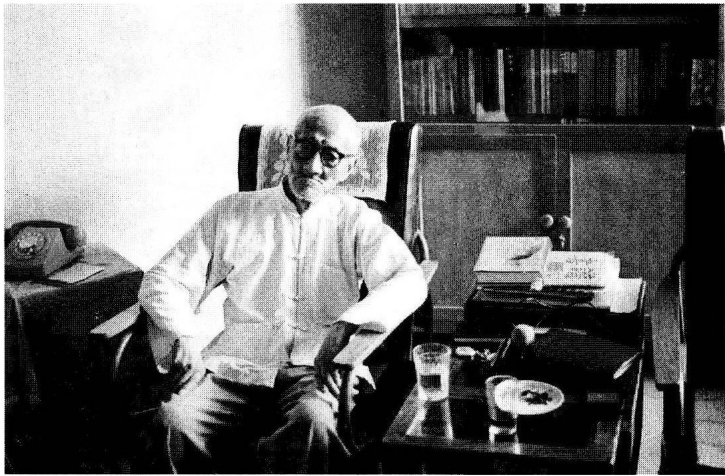


Mr. Liang Shuming, in Guilin, 1942





Mr. Liang Shuming, President of the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute, 1934



Mr. Liang Shuming, during the interview, 1980

# 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 China and meet personally the subject of my research, Mr. Liang. In the first part of 1973 I had my first opportunity to go to China. For an American to be able to go to China 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 China. 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 two 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 two 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—Sima Qian (in "Preface to the Histories of Sima Qian") and his father Sima Tan (in "A Summary of the Six Schools")—actually first classified the various pre-Qin thinkers and invented the system that we use today. 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's 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 couldn't 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.

# Introduction

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

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

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

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# Chapter 1

August 12, 1980

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

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

Alitto: Yes, that's right. She was a student of mine [at a university in the U.S. state of Ohio]. She told me that you knew about the book. So, how did you find out about my book? Was the book in China or abroad...?<sup>2</sup>

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

Alitto: Sent from the U.S.

Liang: Yes. One surnamed Hu. His name is Hu Shiru.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

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<sup>2</sup> One of my students approached me after class and said that "Liang Bobo" [Uncle Liang] knew about the book and hoped that I would visit him. She had just arrived from China, and had lived in the same neighborhood as Liang. It was an extraordinary coincidence that such a person would end up in my classroom at a public university in a small American city.

<sup>3</sup> This man, an engineer who had lived in the U.S. for many decades, was one of Liang's students at Peking University in the early 1920s. He had gone to China right after Mr. Liang had moved into a suitable, gracious residence and so was able to receive foreigners. During the Cultural Revolution, Liang and his wife were thrown into one small room with almost all of the room taken up by the bed. Obviously it was not suitable for receiving visitors from abroad. Hu phoned me right after he returned to the U.S. Once again, this was quite an extraordinary coincidence that one of the first foreign visitors who had seen Liang was able to contact me. Hu phoned me shortly after Ms. Zhu had spoken with me after class.



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

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

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

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

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

Liang: Right.

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

Liang: Do you mean Hu Shisan? His original name is Hu Yinghan, and his sobriquet is Shisan.<sup>4</sup>

Alitto: Yes, that's him. I visited him ten years ago when I was in Hong Kong and started my research. He provided me with a lot of very valuable materials. I also met a man named Wang Shaoshang. It seemed that he was a student of yours at the First Middle School, in Guangzhou. (Liang: Right.) I also met Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan in Hong Kong. They are also your acquaintances. (Liang: Right.) In the U.S. I met another person surnamed Zhang who worked in rural reconstruction in Ding

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<sup>4</sup> This Mr. Hu was one of Liang's most loyal students. In Hong Kong in the 1950s he had publicly defended Liang during the criticisms of him. Mr. Hu was originally one of the Research Department's students in Zouping in the 1930s. He still had contact with Mr. Liang in the late 1940s. I spent over a week talking to Mr. Hu in 1970. After I met Mr. Liang, I realized that Mr. Hu had modeled his dress, demeaned behavior, and manner of speech after Liang. Of course, Mr. Hu's own view of the world, his personal philosophy and his ideas in general were closely modeled on Liang's as well.

County, Hebei Province, during the old days. In any case, he was at a university in the U.S....<sup>5</sup> In the past several years, I haven't been in touch with him. In Taiwan, I became acquainted with a man named Zhou Shaoxian.<sup>6</sup> He admires you greatly and has published a number of essays about you. Recently a Taiwan newspaper translated and published an essay of mine. They only selected some parts of it for translation, so it was not very systematic, and Mr. Zhou wrote an essay criticizing it.

Liang: What publication was this in?

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

Liang: Yes, they came to interview me.

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

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

Alitto: Do you still write or...?

Liang: I have been writing in the past few years, but most recently I have written very little. A few years ago my most important

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<sup>5</sup> I conflated two men surnamed Zhang into one. One was an old rural reconstruction worker who I discovered at Berea College, in Kentucky, U.S.A. He told me about his experiences, and shared with me his impressions of Mr. Liang. It was this Mr. Zhang who had worked in Ding County, Hebei, with Mr. Yan Yangchu. Another Mr. Zhang was Zhang Hongjun (张鸿钧) whom I found at Donghai University in Taiwan. Both he and his wife were Sociologists who had both been involved with rural work. I interviewed them at some length twice. Mr. Zhang had had considerable contact with Mr. Liang. I remember very clearly the only "disagreement" between husband and wife when they were telling me of their experiences and contact with Mr. Liang. Mr. Zhang described Mr. Liang to me as "very handsome," and his wife disagreed, saying that she didn't find Liang so attractive.

<sup>6</sup> Mr. Zhou was an extraordinary elder gentleman. He had been a student at the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute. After the war started, he was part of a guerilla unit in his home county of Laiyang, Shandong. Although he was an academic, he was clearly a man of action as well. Mr. Zhou, like all of Liang's students that I met, was extremely loyal to Liang, and often publicly defended him. In Taiwan at that time, Liang's books could not be republished. Mr. Zhou often railed against the Guomindang (KMT) for being hostile to Liang.

project was writing a very long book, titled *The Human Heart/Mind and Human Life*.

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

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

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

Liang: None of them have been published. In the past, ... it is better now, but in the past, the government controlled thought, and one could not publish freely.<sup>7</sup>

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

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

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<sup>7</sup> Although Deng Xiaoping's reforms were only just starting in mid-1980s, they had an immediate effect on the intellectual atmosphere, which I found completely different from my earlier 1973 visit to China.