

Rethinking the temporalization of space in early Republican China: Liang Shuming's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*

Philippe Major¹

Received: 1 October 2014/Revised: 20 October 2014/Accepted: 20 September 2016/
Published online: 11 May 2017

© Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture and Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2017

Abstract This article discusses the temporalization of space central to the mainstream discourse of European modernity: a discourse which hierarchized all cultural spaces into a temporal narrative enabling Europe's self-portrayal as the emancipatory future of humanity. This discourse created a gap between the perceived particularism of non-European cultures (seen as traditional) and the universalism of a modernity associated with the contemporary cultures of Europe and North America, while portraying modernization as a passage from the former to the latter. Chinese intellectuals who adopted this metanarrative therefore faced the following challenge: how can Chinese particularism be adapted to a culture of modernity regarded as universal? While May Fourth iconoclasts answered this question by simply rejecting the idea that an accommodation between Chinese particularism and modern universalism was possible, other intellectuals attempted to argue that at least some aspects of Chinese culture could still be of value within the context of modern universalism. This article discusses an interesting instance of such an attempt at negotiating the perceived tension between the modern discourse of universalism and the particularism of Chinese culture, as provided by Liang Shuming in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. This work attempted to show that Chinese culture could still be of value within the context of modernity by providing a new metanarrative which peripherized the role of Western culture in the process of modernization. This article suggests, however, that by adopting a portrayal of modernization as a passage from particularism to universalism, Chinese culture could be reauthorized, within Liang's metanarrative, only at the cost of being de-complexified, homogenized, and de-historicized; only at the cost of being no longer Chinese.

I would like to thank Carine Defoort for her comments on an earlier draft. I would also like to thank the National University of Singapore for providing funding to present an earlier draft of this article at the 2016 East–West Philosophers' Conference.

✉ Philippe Major
a0109695@u.nus.edu

¹ National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore

Keywords Liang Shuming · New Confucianism · Modernization · Eurocentrism · Universalism

Introduction

One of the most significant aspects of the European modernization discourse, and one that has been under critique for quite some time already, has been an attempt at universalizing the modern cultures of Europe. This was done, I would argue, mainly through two discursive techniques. The first one is what I will call “the unilinear metanarrative of modernity;” a discourse which proposed a single unilinear developmental model of history accommodating all world cultures and hierarchizing them according to how far ahead in the progressive path towards a telos of emancipation they were. Within this metanarrative, the modern cultures of Europe were regarded as universal to the extent that they represented the most advanced stage of this modernization narrative, and could therefore be regarded as the universal future of humankind. This is what I will call the temporalization of space:¹ a discourse which hierarchized all cultural spaces into a temporal narrative enabling Europe’s self-portrayal as the emancipatory future of humanity.

Following Charles Taylor, I will call the second discourse used to universalize European cultures “the acultural understanding of modernity.”² Modernity was not portrayed, by this discourse, as a historical product circumscribed by its geographical and temporal delimitations, or as a new culture emerging out of an older one, but rather as a gradual discovery of truth and human autonomy (or liberty) which took place *in spite of* the cultural background of its emergence. Modernity was construed as a process of getting rid of everything that stood in the way of truth and liberty in the pre-modern era (superstitions, religions, the authority of tradition, etc.), while truth and liberty, represented by science, rationality, logic, and democracy, were seen as what had always laid there dormant within us under this thick layer of pre-modern irrationality. In short, European modernity was regarded as the destiny of humankind, a sort of natural way of life which came forth almost effortlessly once pre-modern superstitions were discarded. An unbridgeable gap³ was thus created between tradition and modernity by this discourse, a gap which was reinforced by a series of dichotomies between slavery/freedom,

¹ I borrow the expression “temporalization of space” from Johannes Fabian, who discusses, in *Time and the Other*, the denial of coevalness at work in anthropology—that is, the denial that the anthropologist and the people he or she studies belong to the same historical era—as a form of spatialization of time. I have reversed his expression in order to emphasize space rather than time, since the former is the main topic of this essay and of the conference at which it was presented. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

² See Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonka (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 172–196

³ By “unbridgeable gap,” I do not mean that no culture could pass from one to the other, but rather that tradition and modernity were often conceptualized as self-enclosed wholes independent from one another. The passage from tradition to modernity was thus often regarded as a historical caesura which needed to be constantly renewed. On this, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 6–7.

object/subject of history, particularism/universalism, dark/enlightened, unreflective/self-conscious, etc.

Of course, this discourse reinforced the unilinear metanarrative of modernity, in the sense that non-European traditions, relegated to pre-modernity, were portrayed as limitations on their people's potential for truth and liberty, a potential which could be realized only thanks to the impetus provided by the European colonial powers. These non-European cultures only needed to replace their antiquated traditions with the universal culture of modernity. This discourse thus greatly contributed to the legitimation of Europe's imperial and colonial enterprises. And it strengthened the temporalization of space by authorizing European modern cultures now presented as a single universal culture of truth and liberty, while de-authorizing pre-modern, non-European locales as being held by irrational and servile traditions. In sum, the acultural understanding of modernity conceptualized modernization as a disembodiment, an uprooting from local cultures associated with an entering into the universal culture of modernity; a passage from particularism to universalism, from place to 'placelessness.'

Notably through the medium of social Darwinism, this historical metanarrative which temporalized space also became one of the most important paradigms of understanding the world and China's place in it during the early Republican period. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most important questions faced by what Chang Hao has called the intellectuals of the transitional period of modern China (1895–1925)⁴ was the following: how can Chinese particularism be adapted to a culture of modernity regarded as universal? The perceived tension between Chinese particularism and modernity's universalism became one of the central concerns of intellectuals working during this period, and often translated itself into a desire to save the particular nation on the one hand and to bring about the universal on the other—the Great Unity (*datong* 大同) for Kang Youwei (康有為), a universal New Citizen (*xinmin* 新民) for Liang Qichao (梁啟超), or a universal scientific culture for Hu Shi (胡適).⁵

Although the proposed model for the utopian and universal end to history diverged from one intellectual to another during this period, the discursive framework which saw modernization as a process of emancipation and gradual universalization was generally accepted in China.⁶ As such, Chinese culture came to be perceived, by May Fourth iconoclasts such as Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀), as a feudal

⁴ Chang Hao 張灝, "Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi de zhuanxing shidai" 中國近代思想史的轉型時代 (The Transitional Period of Modern Chinese Intellectual History), *Ershiyi shiji* 二十一世紀 (Twenty-First Century) 52 (1999), 29–39.

⁵ As such, Chinese intellectuals working during this period were not only seeking wealth and power for the nation (as Benjamin Schwartz argued more than half a century ago), but also a universal ideal which could provide meaning and telos to the process of modernization. This tension between nationalism and universalism was pointed out by Chang Hao in *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890–1911* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 2.

⁶ Zhang Taiyan (章太炎) is an exception to this. His critique of the teleological understanding of history central to modernity is rather exceptional in modern Chinese intellectual history. See Viren Murthy, *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 135–167.

culture diverging from that of Europe temporally: China and the West were partaking in the same unilinear progression towards emancipation, except that China was further removed from this goal. The reason for China's belatedness was to be found in its inability to free itself from its feudal culture and accept wholeheartedly the universal culture of the West represented by democracy and science. The relation between China and the modern West was therefore mainly understood in temporal—rather than spatial—terms.⁷

Although it has been pointed out that the iconoclastic discourse of May Fourth was in practice not as totalistic in its anti-traditionalism as it wished to portray itself,⁸ the object of this study will precisely be this level of discourse within which China, as a cultural space, was temporalized and projected onto the modern metanarrative. The question I would like to ask, in what follows, is the following one: within the context of a cultural milieu which mainly reproduced a discourse conceptualizing modernization as a passage from particularity to a universality represented by those cultures of the West ahead in the modernization process, which discursive tools did Chinese intellectuals have at their disposal to present their own culture and tradition as valuable within the context of modernity?⁹

Of course, to us who live in the twenty-first century, it appears that Chinese intellectuals could have simply held a relativistic view of cultures and rejected the historical framework of modernization as non-universal, as particular to the West only. But cultural relativism seemed ill-equipped to explain the predicament of China at the time, and the world-dominance of those nations which had already modernized. It was precisely its ability to explain the successes of the Western imperial endeavors of the nineteenth century, as well as the success, during the First Sino-Japanese War, of a Japanese army which had modernized faster than that of

⁷ On the iconoclasm of May Fourth, see Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

⁸ On this, see Chow Kai-Wing et al. ed., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington, 2008).

⁹ The reader might find that this question resembles that of Joseph R. Levenson in *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). His description of modern Chinese intellectual history as revolving around the theme of a tension between the concepts of "history" and "value" certainly echoes my discussion of the tension between a purportedly universal modernity and a Chinese culture regarded as particular. Where I differ from Levenson is that he himself assumed the universality of the metanarrative of modernity, which meant that China had no choice but to modernize through a process of freeing itself from its own traditions, now perceived as mere museum artifacts. As such, attempts to revalue tradition made by modern Chinese intellectuals had to be explained by irrational means—an emotional attachment to tradition, in Levenson—since a rational mind would have undoubtedly accepted the universality of the Western sciences and of modern culture in general. My approach differs from this outlook in the sense that I regard the metanarrative of modernity as a powerful discourse but also as a historical construct serving particular historical purposes, not as an objective description of a historical fact. As such, my interest in the modernization discourse lies in how Chinese intellectuals could attempt to re-authorize Chinese tradition discursively within the context of a metanarrative which was designed, in the West, to make non-European traditions valueless in the first place. I do not assume that the reason why Chinese intellectuals would attempt at demonstrating the value of Chinese culture is necessarily irrational; rather, I am interested in the discursive tools and rhetorics which were at the disposal of Chinese intellectuals critical of the iconoclasm of May Fourth.

the Qing, which accounts for the popularity of this metanarrative in China from the end of the nineteenth century on.

Following the May Fourth Movement, the main way through which Chinese intellectuals tried to present Chinese culture as valuable within the context of modernity was to look for aspects of Chinese culture which could be equated with features of the purportedly universal culture of (European/American) modernity. Hu Shi, for example, set out to show that China had a native tradition of logic analogous to that of the West, while Feng Youlan (馮友蘭) endeavored to prove that China had its own tradition of philosophizing which was as valuable as that of the West. The problem with this approach, however, is that those aspects of Chinese culture seen as universal (such as logic) were valuable to China only, since they were aspects the West already had in a more advanced form. As such, the universality of Chinese culture present in this approach was subsumed under Western universalism; and Chinese universalism became another form of particularism.

Another approach, however, has often been neglected by scholars, most probably since it remained at the periphery of the mainstream discourse of the transitional period of modern China. This second approach, like the first, accepted the universality of the modern historical *framework*, but it differed from the previous approach in that it peripherized the role of the West within this framework by arguing that the West represented only a partial and limited aspect of the universal culture of modernity, which needed Eastern cultures in order to truly come to fruition. Chinese and Western cultures were accommodated, in this second approach, as two segments of a single universal culture: that of modernity.

Unlike the previous approach, which valued Chinese culture only insofar as it could be equated with a Western modern culture regarded as universal, this second approach values Chinese culture only insofar as it differs and supplements that of the West. This approach thus makes it possible for one to argue that Chinese culture is valuable not only for the Chinese, as the previous approach suggested, but for all those wishing to embrace the universal culture of modernity. Chinese particularism, it seemed, could be made to complement and complete modernity's universalism.

In what follows, I discuss an interesting instance of such an attempt at negotiating the perceived tension between the modern discourse of universalism and the particularism of Chinese culture, as provided by Liang Shuming in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (東西文化及其哲學), a work published in 1921 in answer to the following question: "Must Eastern cultures be eradicated from their roots, or can they come back to life?"¹⁰

¹⁰ 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* 梁漱溟全集 (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), ed. Committee of the Academy of Chinese Culture (Jinan: Shandong Remin, 2005), vol. 1, 338; Liang Shuming, *Les cultures d'Orient et d'Occident et leurs philosophies*, trans. Luo Shenyi (Paris: You Feng, 2011), 10. All translations are mine unless specified otherwise, and all are based on the Chinese version rather than the French translation.

Liang's metanarrative of modernization

To answer this question, Liang creates his own metanarrative of modernization which is built on the presumption that Chinese, Western, and Indian cultures are each based on a unique and single will (*yiyu* 意欲). Each of these cultures is then made to fit one of the three stages of the modernization process as construed by Liang. During the first phase of modern history, the will forward at the basis of Western culture dominates, and enables humanity to satisfy its basic needs (shelter, food, clothing, etc.), since it is rooted in a desire to control and modify the external world. The attitude of Westerners is characterized, in Liang's discourse, by someone who "does one's utmost in order [...] to satisfy one's needs."¹¹ Liang regards the domination of nature and the creation of science and democracy as products of a Western will or attitude which hopes to modify the external world in order to satisfy the most basic needs of the individual.

Once the basic needs of humanity would be fulfilled, human civilization would enter the second stage of modern history, represented by the will of internal satisfaction of Chinese culture. During this stage, social problems and interpersonal issues would be resolved once and for all, so that humanity could live in a state of harmony. The reason why the Chinese will of internal satisfaction could bring about such an ideal was that unlike the Western attitude which hoped to modify the external realm in order to satisfy a desire emerging in the internal sphere of the individual, the Chinese attitude was rather based on an attempt to "modify, mediate, and moderate one's desires."¹² "The method for coping with issues adopted by this person," Liang claimed, was "merely that of reconciling one's desires [with the circumstances]."¹³ This will was better suited to resolve interpersonal issues since other human beings lie outside the realm of one's control, and can never be made to act and think exactly as one would like them to. For this reason, Liang believed that an attitude which would enable the individual to modify his or her desire to control the other would prove a more appropriate method to resolve interpersonal and social issues.

Finally, once the second phase of modern history would be completed, the will turning its back on desire characteristic of Indian culture would enable humanity to emancipate itself from desire and suffering once and for all. "When facing a problem," Liang argued, "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 towards desire belong to this category."¹⁴ The Indian will is of course representative of the Buddhist stance which regards desire as the root of suffering, although Liang also associates other religions, like Christianity, with this will turning its back on desire.¹⁵ It must also be noted that since humanity

¹¹ Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 381; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 57.

¹² Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 382; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 58.

¹³ Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 381; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 58.

¹⁴ Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 381–382; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 58.

¹⁵ On the three stages of modern history, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 493–495; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 195–198. On Liang's view of history, see also Thierry Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy*

was still far from achieving the third stage of modern history, Liang discouraged the practice of Buddhism.¹⁶

Liang believed that the globalization of Western culture meant that the world was in the first phase of history. However, he also saw signs that the West was gradually moving towards an acceptance of Chinese culture. Liang relied on a rigid dichotomy in order to argue that Western philosophy was transitioning from an intellectualist and rationalist study of the absolute, the unchanging, and the external world towards an intuitive study of the relative, the constantly-changing, and life. Signs of this passage could be detected, Liang claimed, in the works of Peter Kropotkin, Henri Bergson, Bertrand Russell, William James, John Dewey, and Rudolf Christoph Eucken. The rise of psychology and socialism were also seen as signs that the West had embarked on a sinicization of its culture.¹⁷

The world was therefore heading towards a revival of Chinese culture. This did not mean, however, that the *contemporary* culture of China represented the future of humanity, in a way that would echo how the contemporary culture of the modern West was portrayed as the future of humanity by the mainstream discourse of modernization. The Chinese culture towards which the world was heading was rather an ideal which had been imagined by Confucius (*Kongzi* 孔子) more than two thousand years ago, but which had never been truly understood by subsequent Confucians, and which had never been put into practice throughout Chinese history.¹⁸ This was an ideal of social harmony and of union between heaven and the

Footnote 15 continued

of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 30–37; 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); Wang Yuanyi 王遠義, “Ruxue yu makesizhuyi: xulun 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; 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 sixiang-shang de geren* 轉向自我：近代中國政治思想上的個人 (Turning towards the Self: The Individual in Modern Chinese Political Thought) (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 2009), 331–384.

¹⁶ Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 528, 533–534; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, 237, 244. On the fact that Liang saw the end of history as a Buddhist salvation from desire and suffering, and for suggestions that Liang had always remained a Buddhist throughout his life, 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), 187–218; and Thierry Meynard, “Is Liang Shuming Ultimately a Confucian or Buddhist?,” *Dao* 6 (2007), 131–147.

¹⁷ On the sinicization of Western culture, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 503–512; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, 206–218.

¹⁸ Liang therefore resembled the most iconoclastic of May Fourth thinkers in rejecting the historical culture of China. This means that nobody had truly understood Confucius, according to Liang, although some Neo-Confucians had come closer than others: Wang Yangming (王陽明), Wang Gen (王艮), and Dai Zhen (戴震), for example. On this, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 472–477; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, 168–175. Implied in this discourse was the claim that Liang himself was the first Confucian to have achieved a complete grasp of Confucius’ ideal. Guy Alitto points this out in *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 104.

human (*tianren heyi* 天人合一) which could be brought about if humanity was to follow a natural way of life centered on the notion of intuition (*zhijue* 直覺), as opposed to rationality (*lixing* 理性), which was central to the Western will.¹⁹ This explains why Western cultural products such as socialism and psychology were regarded as manifestations of ‘Chinese culture,’ since what the former sought after was a social harmony not unlike the one imagined by Confucius, while the latter studied the irrational and the unconscious beneath rationality, aspects of the mind Liang related to the intuitive method he believed was promoted by Confucius.

The Chinese culture that would be universalized in the process of modernization Liang had in mind was therefore unconnected with the historical culture(s) of China, since Liang regarded the latter as a failure to put in practice the ideal of Confucius. Liang’s ‘Chinese culture,’ according to his metanarrative, would in fact first take root in the Western soil. It is precisely through this process of abstracting ‘Chinese culture’ from its geographical and historical settings that Liang managed to claim its universality, and argue that it could still be valued within the context of a modernity regarded as a passage from particularism to universalism.

The gap between the historical culture of China, which was of no value in modernity, and the ideal imagined by Confucius, which would become central in the second phase of the modernization process, reproduced the gap central to the European discourse of modernity between modern universalism and traditional particularism, in the sense that the ideal of Confucius was universal and the historical culture of China was particular to China before its entry into the universal process of modernization. Liang’s metanarrative differed from that of Europe only to the extent that it tried to peripherize the role Western culture played within the universal culture of modernity by arguing that it represented the first phase of modernity only. It should therefore be noted that the Western conceptualization of the modernization process as a passage from traditional particularism to modern universalism, from place to placelessness, is left intact in Liang’s discourse.

However, when it came to the pre-modern phase of history, a phase characterized by cultural particularisms, Liang criticized the Western view according to which the pre-modern cultures of China, India, and Europe belonged to a unilinear historical continuum which shared the same telos. He rather argued that in pre-modern times, the evolution of these three cultures ran parallel to one another, since they were each based on a different will which had led them to embark on different historical paths. As such, Liang famously claimed that without the impetus of the West, China would have never developed cultural products such as science and democracy, since pre-

¹⁹ On intuition, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 452–457; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, 141–148. Regarding Bergson’s influence on Liang’s notion of intuition, see An Yanming, “Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms,” *Philosophy East & West* 47, no. 3 (1997), 337–62. On social harmony, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 480; Liang, *Cultures d’Orient et d’Occident*, 178. Regarding the relation between intuition and the unity of heaven and the human, see Wu Chan-liang 吳展良, “Western Rationalism and the Chinese Mind: Counter-Enlightenment and Philosophy of Life in China, 1915–1927” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1993), 111, 183–184; Wang Zongyu 王宗昱, *Liang Shuming* 梁漱溟 (Liang Shuming) (Taipei: Dongda, 1992), 121–124; and Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇 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), 93.

modern China had taken a historical path which was altogether different from that of the West.²⁰

This was explained by the fact that Chinese and Indian cultures had been too precocious (*zaoshu* 早熟), and had attempted to engage in the second (China) and third (India) phases of modernization before they had completed the first, something which his metanarrative precluded. As such, China and India had embarked on historical paths which differed from that of the West, but they had been unable to progress towards the realization of the goals characteristic of the second and third phases of history: social harmony and emancipation from suffering. Liang thus claimed that pre-modern China and India were devoid of any progress, since their attempts at realizing the ideals of Confucius and the Buddha could not but fail unless they first completed the initial phase of the modernization process represented by the Western will forward. This means that without the impetus of the West, China and India would never have entered the universal, unilinear model of history proposed by Liang, and its cultural ideals would have never taken shape in history.

Liang thus claimed that Chinese, Indian, and Western cultures all had a certain value. This has sometimes been interpreted as a form of cultural relativism. However, Liang valued aspects of these three cultures, as we have seen, only insofar as they contributed to the realization of the universal culture of modernity. Western culture was valuable only to the extent that it could satisfy the basic needs of humanity, while Chinese and Indian cultures were valuable only insofar as they produced two geniuses (Confucius and the Buddha) who had predicted the future of humanity, consisting of a realization of social harmony (Confucius) and an emancipation from desire and suffering (the Buddha). The particularisms of Chinese, Indian, and Western cultures, in other words, were of no value unless they could be made to fit within the universal culture of modernity.

Liang's cultural pluralism (his arguing that the three cultures had a certain value in modernity) does differ from what could be called the cultural monism of the European unilinear metanarrative of modernity presented in the introduction, but it must be remembered that the cultural pluralism deployed by Liang is subsumed under a single, homogeneous, and universal culture of modernity. As such, the particularisms of Western, Indian, and Chinese cultures are lost within the universalism of modern culture. In other words, what Liang did was to criticize the Eurocentric model of unilinear historical development in order to replace it by one which 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 thus clearly reproduced the gap between tradition and modernity which was central to the Western, acultural view of modernity presented in the introduction. Pre-modernity was regarded as a time when a plurality of cultures and traditions had embarked on unique paths. With the advent of modernity, however, culture becomes diachronic and homogeneous. Modernity is thus

²⁰ See Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 392 (on the three paths being holistic wholes distinct from one another, and embarked on different paths, see also 441); Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 68 (128).

construed, within Liang's metanarrative, as a passage from cultural plurality to cultural homogeneity, and as a gradual filling of the gap between value (the ideals imagined by Confucius and the Buddha) and history (the materialization of these ideals through the process of modernization), a gap which had precluded pre-modern China and India to develop along the universal metanarrative of history proposed by Liang. The pre-modern is here conceived of as a prelude to modernity, a time when values were created but could not be realized until true history—in the sense of a history with a telos—began with the advent of European modernity. Liang thus sees the human attempt at resolving its problems, at taking into its own hands its destiny, as beginning with the modern times, a view which echoes that of the acultural understanding of modernity.

Finally, Liang's metanarrative reproduced the discourse of the acultural understanding of modernity at another level. As we have seen in the introduction, modernity was often presented, in the West, as a natural and universal mode of being which had always laid dormant within us, but which awaited humanity's emancipation from the shackles of tradition before it could be brought to light. Similarly, Liang portrays the ideal culture proposed by Confucius as a natural way of life centered on the notion of intuition; a way of life which is a mere realization of a potential always present in our heart-mind (*xin* 心).²¹ The West, Liang argued, had developed a culture centered on rationality, a method of acquiring knowledge which Liang valued to the extent that it gave birth to science and provided humanity with the tools to satisfy its basic needs. However, rationality was also responsible for some of the most important problems Liang saw as plaguing the first phase of the modernization process. First, it broke the unity of the universe, in the sense that it studied different phenomena by abstracting and isolating them from their surroundings, while Liang saw the universe as a singular process of endless mutations which was indivisible. Second, the use of rationality had replaced the natural, emotional bond which had once united people by interpersonal relations which were now mechanistic and calculative.²² This explains why another phase to the modernization process was necessary in order for humanity to reconnect with the oneness of the universe on the one hand,²³ and re-establish a natural and emotion

²¹ On this, see the author's article "Textual Authority and Its Naturalization in Liang Shuming's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*," *Monumenta Serica* 65, no. 1 (June 2017), 127–149.

²² On these two aspects of rationality, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 485, 504; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 184, 208–209. It must be noted that Liang's book, despite his best intention, does rely on rationality, and does divide the world into distinct cultures based on unique and independent wills, a claim which seems to break the true unity of the universe Liang claims can be accessed through intuition.

²³ On this, see Fang Keli 方克立 and Cao Yueming 曹躍明, "Liang Shuming de feilixingzhuyi zhexue sixiang shuping" 梁漱溟的非理性主義哲學思想述評 (A Critique of Liang Shuming's Non-Rational Philosophical Thought), in *Cong wusi dao xin wusi* 從五四到新五四 (From May Fourth to New May Fourth), ed. Yu Yingshi 余英時 and Bao Zunxin 包遵信 (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1989), 360–366; and Zheng Dahua 鄭大華, *Liang Shuming yu xiandai xinruxue* 梁漱溟與現代新儒學 (Liang Shuming and Modern New Confucianism) (Taipei: Wenjin, 1993), 133.

bond between people.²⁴ This was to be achieved by a gradual transition from rationality to an intuition which had first been promoted by Confucius.

In other words, the transition from the first to the second stage of the modernization process was construed, by Liang, as a gradual passage from an artificial culture (that of the West) to a natural culture (that of China). Western culture was artificial to the extent that it severed the natural oneness of the universe and the natural bond which unites people in order to satisfy humanity's basic needs.²⁵ In short, it was a cultural tool which dissected cosmological and social realities which Liang saw as inherently (or naturally) unitary and harmonious. Chinese culture could reverse this process of alienation by reconnecting the human with the natural flow of oneness of the universe.

Both metanarratives, that of Western modernity and that of Liang, thus perceive the modern as an experience of emancipation from a culture perceived as artificial and an entry into the territory of a natural mode of living which had always laid dormant within humanity, awaiting modernization's break from tradition in order to be activated. In both metanarratives, the place-ness of the human condition is perceived to be a barrier to an emancipation taking shape through the process of modernization, and construed as a gradual universalization and naturalization of the human order. What distinguishes Liang's conceptualization of this process of naturalization, however, is that it is contrasted with the first phase of modernity and not the pre-modern irrationality decried by the European discourse of modernization. In other words, the rhetoric which naturalized modern European cultures and authorized them as standing above pre-modern traditions regarded as impeding humanity's achievement of its destiny was put to the task, in Liang's discourse, of de-authorizing Western culture as an unnatural—yet necessary—limitation on the development of a natural and harmonized way of life imagined by Confucius. Unlike pre-modern traditions in the European discourse of modernization, Western culture, in Liang's metanarrative, was however not altogether relegated to the dustbin of history, as it provided, like capitalism in Marxist discourse, a necessary evil without which history's telos could never be reached.

Of course, the acultural understanding of modernity and the rhetoric of naturalization which underscores it highlight the fact that projects of universalization are often related to a desire to distinguish between an orthodox mode of being and a heterodox one through a discourse which naturalizes the former and presents the latter as an artificial mode of being running counter to our natural tendencies. Authority and power, it must be kept in mind, are always central concerns of these claims.

²⁴ The Confucian notions of filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and ritual and music (*liyue* 禮樂) would help re-establish a natural and emotional bond between people which had been broken by Western rationality. On this, see Liang, *Dongxi wenhua*, 466–469; Liang, *Cultures d'Orient et d'Occident*, 161–164.

²⁵ It should be noted that Western culture is, from another perspective, also natural, in the sense that it is the necessary (and thus natural) first step of human history. Yet this natural first step is also one that breaks the unity of the natural world and the natural bond between people by creating a distance between the knower and the known object (a category which includes other human beings).

Concluding remarks

While from today's perspective it is easy to criticize Liang's inability to attack the modern metanarrative which made impossible a true re-evaluation of Chinese culture in its historical and multifaceted dimensions, it must be remembered that within a historical context which mainly accepts the metanarrative of 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 did was to project his own understanding of Chinese 'tradition' onto the telos of the modern metanarrative and thus reauthorize it in the process. However, the Chinese tradition was reauthorized, within Liang's metanarrative, only at the cost of being de-complexified, homogenized, and de-historicized; only at the cost of being no longer Chinese.²⁶

In a sense, the metanarrative framework within which Liang attempted to reauthorize Chinese tradition made it impossible for his goal to be achieved. Chinese culture could be authorized, within this framework, only by being universalized, and thus be made non-Chinese. To this extent, his goal to present Chinese culture as valuable within the context of modernity was doomed to failure. Liang's text thus reminds us of the difficulty inherent in the task of universalizing something particular without altogether departing from the particularism one wished to universalize in the first place.

By comparison, the Western modernization discourse could claim that its universalism did not depart from the particular cultures of Europe and North America with more ease, since it was the *contemporary* cultures of these regions which were presented as universal, and not an ideal which had been alienated from the historical process in the past, as in the case of Liang's metanarrative. As such, only the contemporary cultures of Europe and North America could be valued as universal within this metanarrative framework, since only they were regarded as positioned at the vanguard of history. By comparison, Chinese attempts at universalizing Chinese culture along the line of Liang Shuming could difficultly draw from the contemporary or historical culture of China, since this culture was already regarded as behind that of the West at that time. What could be universalized of Chinese culture, and inserted into the modern metanarrative, had to be a trans-historical essence that had not been contaminated by Chinese history. But, as we have seen, this position made it difficult to demonstrate in what sense this trans-historical essence was Chinese, precisely because it was presented as universal, and because it had never been materialized in Chinese history.

This discussion shows, I believe, how powerful the discourse which temporalizes space and universalizes European cultures was at the time. Its power comes from the fact that it presents the contemporary cultures of the West, mostly those of Northern Europe and North America, as universal, but makes it rather difficult, if not impossible, for cultures not yet modernized to fit in this metanarrative. Both the attitudes of intellectuals like Hu Shi—who tried to show that Chinese culture

²⁶ On this, see the following article by the author: "Tradition and Modernity in Liang Shuming's *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*," *Philosophy East & West* 68, no 2 (April 2018).

incorporated elements corresponding to the culture of modernity—and that of Liang Shuming could not but fail in the end, since the first one made Chinese universalism another form of particularism, and the second did create a new form of universalism, but one that was so abstracted from the historical cultures of China that it no longer had much to do with China.

Moreover, what could be valued of Chinese culture from the perspective of these two attitudes was to a great extent already determined by the Western metanarrative. The first attitude could only see value in cultural elements which were already regarded as valuable in the Western metanarrative, while the second attitude (that of Liang) could find value in Chinese culture only to the extent that it differed and complemented Western culture. In both cases, the process of reevaluating Chinese culture was either positively (in the first case) or negatively (in the second case) predetermined by what was regarded as valuable by the Western metanarrative of modernization—cultural elements or attitudes such as science, democracy, and the domination of nature, to reprise Liang's categories. This explains why Liang's portrayal of Western and Eastern cultures often reproduced a variety of Orientalist tropes: the distinction of West and East (here China) along the lines of rationality vs intuition, the perception of Eastern cultures as stagnant and Western cultures as progressive, the West as providing an impetus for the entry of the East into the historical progression towards a telos of emancipation, and the fetishization of national cultures into coherent and contradiction-free wholes which could then be contrasted with one another.²⁷

Orientalism, as discussed by Edward Said, is a discourse which enabled Europe to portray itself as belonging to an emancipatory pole of history called modernity through its depiction of an Orientalist other performing the role of providing Europe with an antithesis against which Europe's position at the vanguard of history and modernity could be celebrated.²⁸ What Liang's discourse did was to adopt the framework of the distinction between a modern, rational West and a traditional, intuitive China, while adopting a different value judgement regarding this distinction: the intuitive Chinese culture was in fact representative of a universal culture even more modern and ahead of the teleological metanarrative than that of the West. Rather than providing a post-colonial critique of Europe's Orientalist discourse—something which might have been impossible at the time, given the socio-historical setting within which Liang lived—Liang's metanarrative of modernization turned this discourse against the Eurocentric nature of the European metanarrative and in favor of China, but at the cost of assimilating the Orientalist tropes of the European metanarrative. This was an attempt at working against

²⁷ On this fetishization and simplification of cultures in Liang's discourse, see Chen Lai 陳來, "Liang Shuming de *Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue yu qi wenhua duoyuanzhuyi*" 梁漱溟的中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 zhuxun: 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), 23–24; Zheng, *Liang Shuming*, 69; Lin Anwu, "Liang Shuming and His Theory of the Reappearance of Three Cultural Periods," 30. On the tendency of modern Chinese intellectuals to portray the Chinese tradition as a homogeneous whole, see also John Makeham, "Disciplining Tradition in Modern China: Two Case Studies," *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 89–103.

²⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

Orientalism yet from within it; an attempt which might appear highly problematic from a post-colonial perspective, but which was, given the socio-historical setting within which *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* was written, a powerful attempt at making a space for China within a temporal metanarrative which had been designed to exclude it.

References

- Allitto, Guy. 1986. *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- An, Yanming. 1997. Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms. *Philosophy East & West* 47 (3): 337–362.
- Chang, Hao. 1987. *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890-1911*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chang, Hao 張灝. 1999. Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi de zhuanxing shidai” 中國近代思想史的轉型時代 (The Transitional Period of Modern Chinese Intellectual History). *Ershiyi shiji* 二十一世紀 (Twenty-First Century) 52: 29–39.
- Chen, Lai 陳來. 2001. 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), 3–40. Beijing: Renmin.
- Chow, Kai-Wing, Hon, Tze-ki, Ip, Hung-yok, and Don. C. Price, ed. 2008. *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fang, Keli 方克立., and Cao, Yueming 曹躍明. 1989. Liang Shuming de feilixingzhuyi zhexue sixiang shuping 梁漱溟的非理性主義哲學思想述評 (A Critique of Liang Shuming’s Non-Rational Philosophical Thought). In *Congwusi dao xin wusi* 從五四到新五四 (From May Fourth to New May Fourth), edited by Yu Yingshi 余英時 and Bao Zunxin 包遵信, 340–385. Taipei: Shibao wenhua.
- Guo, Qiyong 郭齊勇., and Gong, Jianping 龔建平. 2011. *Liang Shuming zhexue sixiang* 梁漱溟哲學思想 (The Philosophical Thought of Liang Shuming). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hanafin, John J. 2003. The ‘Last Buddhist’: The Philosophy of Liang Shuming. In *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, edited by John Makeham, 187–218. New York: Palgrave.
- Levenson, Joseph R. 1972. *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Liang, Shuming 梁漱溟. 2011. *Les cultures d’Orient et d’Occident et leurs philosophies*. Translated by Luo Shenyi. Paris: You Feng.
- Liang, Shuming 梁漱溟. 2005. *Liang Shuming quanji* 梁漱溟全集 (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming). Edited by the Committee of the Academy of Chinese Culture. Jinan: Shandong Remin.
- Lin, Anwu 林安梧. 2009. 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): 16–38.
- Lin, Yü-sheng 林毓生. 1979. *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Major, Philippe. 2017. Textual Authority and Its Naturalization in Liang Shuming’s *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. *Monumenta Serica* 65: 127–149.
- Major, Philippe. 2018. Tradition and Modernity in Liang Shuming’s *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*. *Philosophy East & West* 68, no. 2 (April 2018). Forthcoming.

- Makeham, John. 2012. Disciplining Tradition in Modern China: Two Case Studies. *History and Theory* 51: 89–103.
- Meynard, Thierry. 2007. Is Liang Shuming Ultimately a Confucian or Buddhist? *Dao* 6: 131–147.
- Meynard, Thierry. 2011. *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Murthy, Viren. 2011. *The Political Philosophy of Zhang Taiyan: The Resistance of Consciousness*. Leiden: Brill.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Taylor, Charles. 2001. Two Theories of Modernity. In *Dilip Parameshwar Gaonka*, ed. *Alternative Modernities*, 172–196. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wang, Yuanyi 王遠義. 2002. 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 wenshizhexuebao* 臺大文史哲學報 (Humanitas Taiwanica) 56: 145–195.
- Wang, Zongyu 王宗昱. 1992. *Liang Shuming* 梁漱溟 (Liang Shuming). Taipei: Dongda.
- Wu, Chan-liang 吳展良. 1993. Western Rationalism and the Chinese Mind: Counter-Enlightenment and Philosophy of Life in China, 1915–1927. PhD diss., Yale University.
- Yang, Zhende 楊貞德. 2009. 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 ziwu: jindai Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshang de geren* 轉向自我: 近代中國政治 思想上的個人 (Turning towards the Self: The Individual in Modern Chinese Political Thought), 331–384. Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica.
- Zheng, Dahua 鄭大華. 1993. *Liang Shuming yu Xiandai Xinruxue* 梁漱溟與現代新儒學 (Liang Shuming and Modern New Confucianism). Taipei: Wenjin.