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“Ceaseless Generation”: Republican China’s Rediscovery and Expansion of Domestic Vitalism

ABSTRACT:

After the arrival of the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch in the 1910s, Chinese intellectuals formulated and expanded a domestic version of vitalism that located its origin in such classical passages as “repeated generation of life constitutes change 生生之謂易” from the *Book of Changes*. Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 first formulated this domestic vitalism, which mirrored Bergson’s philosophy of change, flow, and life. Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, Li Shicen 李石岑, Xiong Shili 熊十力, and Fang Dongmei 方東美 expanded the idea in the context of their responses to new cultural, intellectual and geopolitical realities. This article surveys the trajectory of this domestic Chinese vitalism in the first half of the twentieth century and elucidates its importance as a curious combination of conservative and liberal, Eastern and Western, traditional and modern thinking.

KEYWORDS:

vitalism, Henri Bergson, Hans Driesch, New Confucians, Yogācāra Buddhism (weishi 唯識), *Republican China*

Rooted in Western antiquity, vitalism is a school of thought that postulates a source, or cause, of life. It was transformed in late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe into a medical theory and a philosophical position. In it, the working of the living body followed a principle – often known as the vital principle or vital force – that was distinct from the mechanical laws underlying the chemistry and physics at work in nonliving bodies.¹ Vitalism enjoyed some popularity in the early-twentieth century, largely thanks to the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and the German biologist and philosopher Hans Driesch (1867–1941).

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¹ For an overview of the history of vitalism, see, e.g., Hans Driesch, *The History and Theory of Vitalism* (London: Macmillan, 1914 [1905]). For vitalism in early-modern Europe and the Enlightenment, see Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang, “Alchemy as Studies of Life and Matter: Reconsidering the Place of Vitalism in Early Modern Chymistry,” *Isis* 102 (2011), pp. 322–29;

Bergson was one of the most influential philosophers in Europe and America at the turn of the twentieth century. Building on Darwinism, he argued in *Creative Evolution* (1907) that life continued to give rise to new forms in nature. It showed the existence of the *élan vital*, a collective vital impetus that constantly advanced new and higher forms of life in spite of material constraints. As in the case of the embryo, the development of life constituted a perpetual change of form.² Not only individuals changed, but species also did. This observation on the change of organisms applied to all other things of the world. “What is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition.”³ Everything “endures” through its constantly changing from one state to the next, while “real duration is that in which each form flows out of previous forms, while adding to them something new.”⁴ For Bergson, reality was a constant flow of changes.

For Bergson, man was able to set his consciousness free from the motor mechanisms of the body. This derived from the superiority of his brain, a product of evolution. Life’s creative power confirmed the superiority of the mind over matter and the freedom of the mind.⁵

Driesch was cited by Bergson to support the thesis on the distinction of organic life. First trained as an experimental embryologist, Driesch concluded from his empirical findings that a peculiar principle of life was at work in the embryo, a principle not bound by sheer physical and chemical forces. He called this principle *entelechy* after Aristotle.⁶ Gradually Driesch shifted to a philosophical career by substantiating his experimental findings with scientific and philosophical arguments, advocating the thesis that the living organism enjoyed biological autonomy in the material world.

Inspired primarily by Bergson and secondarily by Driesch, Chinese thinkers developed a domestic version of vitalism that saw succes-

Francois Duchesneau, “Vitalism in Late Eighteenth-Century Physiology: The Cases of Barthez, Blumenbach and John Hunter,” in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1985), pp. 259–95; Roselyne Rey, *Naissance et développement du vitalisme en France de la deuxième moitié de XVIII^e siècle à la fin du Premier Empire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000); Elizabeth A. Williams, *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier* (Aldershot [UK] and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003).

² Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 90, quotation, p. 319.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2, quotation, p. 384.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

⁶ Driesch, *History and Theory of Vitalism*, pp. 203–39.

sive expansions during China's Republican Period. Although Bergson did not regard himself as a vitalist and distanced himself from Driesch, that did not stop Chinese intellectuals like Liang Shuming (1893–1988) from seeing him as a vitalist (*shengming pai* 生命派 or *shengji lun* 生機論). Not all Chinese thinkers examined in this paper considered themselves vitalists, but it is legitimate, I argue, to use “vitalism” as an analytical term to describe this important intellectual trend. The trend per se was distinguished by two features. First was the notion of a ceaselessly generative power of life that was thought to permeate the cosmos. This feature was often summed up by its proponents in the phrase “*sheng sheng bu xi* 生生不息” (“ceaseless generation and regeneration of life”). The second feature is the location of the source of this theme in Confucian classics, especially the *Book of Changes*, for which Confucius (551–479 BC), or at least his subsequent school, was thought to have authored an appendix known as “Appended Remarks” (“Xici” 繫辭). Starting from Liang Shuming, this Chinese take on vitalism flourished in the works of influential authors, including Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 (1899–1972) and Li Shicen 李石岑 (1892–1934), who are well known for their works on European philosophy, and, even more importantly, the New Confucian thinkers Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) and Fang Dongmei 方東美 (1899–1977). Starting with the *Book of Changes* and Confucius, the ultimate sources, these Republican-era thinkers step-by-step rediscovered a Confucian vitalism that had lasted over two millennia, especially through the Neo-Confucianism that prevailed in the philosophical writings of the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties.

The vitalism of Republican China has been treated in four bodies of modern scholarly literature that often overlap with one another. The first is the literature dealing with *shengming zhexue* 生命哲學 (“philosophy of life”),⁷ a term that is used to bind together what is known in Chinese as the “philosophy of human life (*rensheng zhexue* 人生哲學)” and vitalism. This literature shows two shortcomings. First, though it seems to suggest that the philosophy of life concerns more forms of life than the human, in effect all authors whom this literature reviewed studied nothing but human life. The second shortcoming, and the more important one is that it neglects the difference between vitalism and the philosophy of human life. Vitalism considers what makes living beings distinct from nonliving ones, usually ascribing this distinction to a specific principle. Bergson took this principle to be the vital im-

⁷ E.g., Dong Defu 董德福, *Shengming zhexue zai Zhongguo* 生命哲學在中國 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2001).

petus, while for Driesch it was “entelechy.” The philosophy of human life considers the ideals, conditions, and problems of human life. It is essentially moral philosophy. Some vitalists, including Liang Shuming, applied their vitalism to their philosophy of human life, while others, like Driesch and Xiong Shili, were seemingly indifferent to moral philosophy. On the other hand, the most celebrated philosopher of (human) life of the early twentieth century, Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926), and his Chinese disciple Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1887–1869) as well, were not vitalists.

The second group of literature on Chinese vitalism examines the influences of Bergson and Driesch on Chinese intellectuals.⁸ Though well researched, these influential studies usually ignore the distinct Chinese character of this new vitalism. The third group is the scholarship on New Confucianism.⁹ This scholarship has made little effort to delineate the trajectory of Confucian vitalism in Republican China, let alone the trajectory of figures outside the New Confucian school. Moreover, few studies have paid attention to the role that this Chinese vitalism played in certain conflicts between Confucianism and Buddhism. The fourth group, consisting of analyses of the vitalist publications of the Chinese Nationalist Party in the 1930s, largely misses the relationship of those publications to China’s domestic vitalism.¹⁰

⁸ Wu Xianwu 吳先伍, *Xiandaixing de zhuiqiu yu piping: Bogesen yu Zhongguo jindai zhexue* 現代性的追求與批評, 柏格森與中國近代哲學 (Hefei Shi: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2005); Long Guocun 龍國存, “Du Lishu dui Zhang Junmai ‘kexuan lunzhan’ de yingxiang” 杜里舒對張君勱“科玄論戰”的影響, *Xinan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 西南大學學報(社會科學版) 35 (2009), pp. 186–90; Long Guocun, “Qianxi deguo zhexuejia Du Lishu dui jindai Zhongguo shidaijinshen de yinxiang” 淺析德國哲學家杜里舒對近代中國時代精神的影響, *Wenjiao ziliao* 文教資料 10 (2009), pp. 78–81; Long Guocun and Wang Ruixiang 王瑞香, “Du Lishu dui Zhu Qianzhi zhi shengji shiguan de yingxiang” 杜里舒對朱謙之生機史觀的影響, *Dezhou xueyuan xuebao* 德州學院學報 3 (2010), pp. 63–67; Wong Zhiguang 翁芝光, “Lun Bogesen shengming zhexue dui Liang Shuming xinruxue sixiang de yingxiang” 論柏格森生命哲學對梁漱溟新儒學思想的影響, *Jiangnan luntan* 江漢論壇 11 (1995), pp. 66–72.

⁹ Dong Defu 董德福, “Xiandai Xinrujia yu Bogesen shengming zhexue” 現代新儒家與柏格森生命哲學, *Fudan xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 復旦學報(社會科學版) 3 (1993), pp. 76–79; Yan Binggang 顏炳罡, *Dangdai xinruxue yinlun* 當代新儒學引論 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1998); Umberto Bressiani, *Reinventing Confucianism: The New Confucian Movement* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, 2001), pp. 126–27, 275–77; John Makeham, “The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism,” in idem, ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 31.

¹⁰ Consult, e.g., Zhang Junmai 張君勱, *Duijie yu chongtu: Sanmin zhuyi zai Sun Zhongshan shenhou de liubian* 1925–1945 對接與衝突, 三民主義在孫中山山後的流變 1925–1945 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2005), pp. 44–60; Terry Bodenhorn, “Chen Lifu’s Vitalism: A Guomindang Vision of Modernity,” in idem, ed., *Defining Modernity: Guomindang Rhetorics of a New China, 1920–1970* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), pp. 91–118; Zhang Diankui 張典魁, “Chen Lifu Weisheng lun yu Bogesen zhexue guanxi zhi tantao” 陳立夫“唯生論”與柏格森哲學關係之探討, *Zhongzheng lishi xuekan* 中正歷史學刊 12 (2009), pp. 157–94.

The present paper will only briefly point out that relationship below; in fact, considering their intensity and impact, such party publications require another proper study.

A study of the formation and development of Chinese vitalism is warranted for several reasons. First, prominent intellectuals in Republican-era China integrated it into their reconceptualization of Confucianism in the face of the Western thought that was continuing to gain popularity and influence. Second, this vitalism reacted not only to Western thought, but also to Buddhism. For New Confucians like Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili, the interest in life, seemingly embodied in Confucian classics, made Confucianism superior to Buddhism, although they each incorporated important metaphysical premises that were found in Yogācāra Buddhism. Third, instead of passively accepting vitalism, the thinkers reviewed in this article dwelled on and expanded it successively. Fourth, in the 1930s and 40s, their influential works convinced a large portion of the Chinese public, including Daoists, Confucians, scholars of Western philosophy, and a least one Buddhist leader, that vitalism represented the Chinese tradition. Fifth, while the New Confucian advocates of vitalism were conservative in the sense that they looked for primary values in the past, Zhu Qianzhi and Li Shicen adopted it to liberate values that had been suppressed in traditional Chinese society, such as free love and the autonomy of the individual. The study of Chinese vitalism thus sheds light on the ways in which these intellectuals adapted the Chinese tradition to a changing world. As Arif Dirlik, Shima Kenji, Terry Bodenhorn, and Edmund Fung point out, Chinese cultural conservatives, the New Confucians for example, strove to make sense of the Chinese spiritual tradition in terms of modern conditions.¹¹ This paper complicates and enriches their thesis by examining a subject that attracted both conservatives and those who sought liberation, and one that was inspired by Western thinkers but thought to be rooted in original Confucianism. Chinese vitalism was thus a curious combination of conservative and liberal, Eastern and Western, traditional and modern.

¹¹ Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution," *JAS* 34.4 (1975), pp. 945-80; Shimada Kenji 島田虔次, *Xiong Shili yu Xinrujia zhexue* 熊十力與新儒家哲學, trans. Xu Shuisheng 徐水生 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1992); Bodenhorn, "Chen Lifu's Vitalism"; Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2010).

LIANG SHUMING'S REDISCOVERY OF
VITALISM IN ANCIENT CONFUCIANISM

The philosophy of Bergson (usually known as 柏格森 in Chinese) was first introduced to the Chinese public in 1913, a time when Westernization was gaining tremendous momentum. The Qing court resisted Westernization for as long as it could, and when it finally collapsed the new Chinese Republic, though chaotic, appeared to many as a hopeful experiment for the adoption of Western institutions and ideas. Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), a leading proponent of Westernization in the 1910s, saw in the French philosopher's work a justification for pushing Chinese society to change in the face of resistance. Chen wrote in 1915:

Seen from the fundamental laws of the cosmos, there is no time when the multitude of things in nature do not undergo progressive evolution. There is no reason to stay with the status quo. ... This is why the great French philosopher Henri Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice* is so influential in our age. 自宇宙之根本大法言之，森羅萬象，無日不在演進之途，萬無保守現狀之理... 此法蘭西當代大哲柏格森之創造進化論所以風靡一時世也。¹²

Likewise, Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1889–1927), Chen's close colleague in their campaign for Westernization in the late 1910s and thereafter, saw in Bergson's philosophy a motivation for China not to take the reality of international politics as given. The Chinese nation instead must strive upward, beyond determinism and pessimism.¹³

The association of Bergson with Westernization and these Chinese reformers was short-lived, however, for the end of World War I (1914–1918) introduced a new mood in both Europe and China. The devastation of the war reversed Europe's optimism about a forward progress. Its pessimism infected Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929). Once one of the most vocal Westernizers in the 1900s, Liang despaired of the dysfunctional democracy after dabbling in the new Republic's failed parliament, a supposedly Western institution. Thereafter he observed the war's devastation firsthand on a tour in Europe. The observations entered in his travelogue popu-

¹² Chen had access to the Japanese translation of Bergson's *Creative Evolution* that had just been published while he was studying in Japan. Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, "Jingao qingnian" 敬告青年, *Qingnian* 青年 3 (1915).

¹³ Li Dazhao 李大釗, "Yanshi xin yu zijue xin" 厭世心與自覺心, *Jiayin zazhi* 甲寅雜誌 1.8 (1915), p. 10.

larized the view that Western civilization, in serious trouble, was no longer China's favored model for the future.¹⁴

Bergson's status in China was elevated after the war in this context. In his travelogue Liang Qichao praised the French philosopher's suggestion of a fearless and persistent endeavor to grapple with unceasing changes, resonating with Li Dazhao's previous interpretation of Bergson. The world should create a new future, Liang proposed, by combining Bergson's philosophy of perseverance and the Confucian idea of a harmony between heaven and man (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一); it would make an alternative to the West's reckless conquest of nature.¹⁵ It was not just Chinese thinkers who praised Bergson. The eminent Western philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) called Bergson one of the three greatest living philosophers during his lecture tour in China in 1920,¹⁶ when the Chinese translation of *Creative Evolution* in the previous year had greatly expanded the accessibility of Bergson's work. Famous Chinese intellectuals besides Liang Qichao attested to Bergson's towering status in the West with glowing reviews and introductions.¹⁷

Liang Shuming (unrelated to Liang Qichao) published his *Dongxi wenhua ji qi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 (*Eastern and Western Cultures and Philosophy*, 1921) amid this enthusiasm about Bergson. Like Bergson, Liang highlighted change and flow in his discussion of Chinese metaphysics. For Liang, Indian and Western metaphysics looked for a static fundamental reality. This made them different from Chinese philosophy. For the Chinese, the fundamental reality was change. The cosmos constantly underwent change, just like a perpetual flow from disharmony (*bu tiaohé* 不調和) to harmony (*tiaohé* 調和), then from harmony to disharmony, and so forth. This philosophy of change, Liang suggested, was the gist of the *Book of Changes*. Liang was fond of the description that “the cosmos was a grand flow 宇宙是大流.” Everything was interrelated in this flow.¹⁸

Besides, Liang used Bergson to justify the Chinese reliance on intuition. The Chinese studied abstract principles of change without bothering with concrete questions, whereas the Indian and the Western investigated concrete questions with static concepts. The Chinese com-

¹⁴ Dong, *Shengming zhexue zai Zhongguo*, p. 150–53.

¹⁵ Dong, “Xiandai Xinrujia,” p. 54.

¹⁶ Jessica Ching-Sze Wang, *John Dewey in China: To Teach and to Learn* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 23.

¹⁷ Wu, *Xiandaixing de zhuiqiu*, pp. 28–30.

¹⁸ Liang Shuming, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 (1921; Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1924), pp. 115–18.

prehended the abstract only with intuition. This reliance on intuition would have been rejected by scientific thinkers. Instead it received a secure place in the modern world thanks to Bergson. Known for his assertion of intuition as the best access to reality, Bergson argued that metaphysics should oppose scientific reasoning and adopt meek and mobile thinking.¹⁹ By doing this, Liang said, Bergson “blazes a trail for Chinese thought 為中國式思想開其先路.”²⁰ This served Chinese philosophy nicely, as “Confucians always used intuition and very rarely spoke of reason 儒家盡用直覺，絕少來講理智。”²¹

Liang suggested that the foundation for Confucius’ metaphysics was his philosophy of human life, though without elaborating the relationship between intuition and the philosophy of human life.²² For Liang, Confucius celebrated living (*shenghuo* 生活) as fundamentally right and good. His metaphysics centered on the “life of the cosmos” (*yuzhou zhi sheng* 宇宙之生), and “the [Chinese written] character *sheng* 生 was the most important 這一個‘生’字是最重要的.”²³ Liang then asserted:

There is nothing in Confucius’s teachings but to follow nature’s order, to try the best to generate and develop lively and fluidly. He supposed that the cosmos always generated and developed forward, and that we would be in concord with a cosmos full of vitality and vegetation if we let all things live as they wish without artifice. 孔家沒有別的，就是要順著自然道理，頂活潑頂流暢的去生發。他以為宇宙總是向前生發的，萬物欲生，即任其生，不加造作，必能與宇宙契合，使宇宙充滿了生意春氣。²⁴

This passage suggests an inherent procreative power of the cosmos and associates it with a quality of lively or vigorous flow. Moreover, it resonates with Liang’s characterization of Bergsonian vitalism, namely, “the

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 115–19. For Bergson’s discussion, see, for example, Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 186–87.

²⁰ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, pp. 119, 120. On Liang’s reception of Bergson’s notion of intuition, see, e.g., Wong, “Lun Bogesen shenming zhexue,” pp. 69–70; Dong Defu, “Bogesen shengming zhexue yu Zhongguo xiandai sixiangjie” 柏格森生命哲學與中國現代思想界, *Tianjin shehui kexue* 天津社會科學 1 (1996), p. 90.

²¹ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, p. 121.

²² Liang probably assumed that Confucius approached the philosophy of human life also with intuition. For Liang, in his metaphysics Confucius put aside calculation and reasoning. Liang even suggested that Confucius’ notion of benevolence was nothing but the intuition for doing good work. Ibid., pp. 123–26.

²³ Ibid., p. 121.

²⁴ Ibid.

reality of the cosmos is not static bodies, but life and duration [into the future] 宇宙的本體不是固定的靜體，是生命、是綿延。”²⁵

Liang quoted several passages in the “Appended Remarks” of the *Book of Changes*, the chief Confucian classic for Chinese metaphysical discourses, to elucidate the vitalism that centered on the procreative power of the cosmos. The most important one reads: “*Sheng sheng* constitutes [the principle of] Change 生生之謂易。”²⁶ The Chinese character *sheng* 生, like many others, works as a verb, a noun, and, if appearing in combination with other characters, as an adjective and an adverb, all without different forms of declension. As a verb it means to live, be alive, grow, germinate, procreate, beget, produce, or generate. As a noun it means the action or product of the verb; or it means life, living, livelihood, the span of time one lives, or birth. As an adjective it can mean lively, vigorous, or agile. As the character *sheng* repeats once in this passage, it conveys a sense of an action taking place again and again or a condition that amplifies. *Sheng sheng* thus denotes repeated generation of life, an ample power of life, or both. The entire sentence then amounts to the assertion that ceaseless procreation constitutes the principle that underlies the *Book of Changes*.

Just as important is another passage, “the grand virtue of Heaven and Earth is life 天地之大德曰生。”²⁷ It suggests that life, or the procreative power of life, is an inherent virtue of the cosmos. Liang endowed the cosmic procreative power with a moral value, as he read this passage together with other passages from Confucian classics, such as: “How Great the Way of the Sage is! Radiating, it germinates and fosters all things 大哉聖人之道！洋洋乎，發育萬物” (*Doctrine of the Mean*, or *Zhongyong* 中庸).²⁸ The sage, Liang implied, should follow in the way that cosmic vital power, much like the sun, shone on and fostered all lives. Liang also quoted other passages in Confucian classics that likewise conflated cosmology and morality.²⁹ For Liang, a celebration of the procreative power of the cosmos thus characterized the Confucian philosophy of human life.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 78–79.

²⁶ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, p. 121.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. For more on Liang’s vitalism, see, e.g., Wu, *Xiandaixing de zhuiqiu*, pp. 65–66; Dong, “Xiandai Xinrujia,” pp. 50–51.

²⁹ Such as “only the ultimate sincerity of the world ... may support the transformation and fostering of Heaven and Earth 唯天下至誠 ... 可以贊天地之化育” (*Doctrine of the Mean*); “ultimate sincerity never ceases 至誠無息” (*Doctrine of the Mean*); and “heaven moves with vigor, while the Gentleman, self-strengthening, never rests 天行健，君子以自強不息” (*Book of Changes*). Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, pp. 121–22, 130.

These passages are important in three senses. First, as Confucius was commonly considered to be the author of the “Appended Remarks,” the passages at once connect this cosmic vitalism with the fountainhead of Confucianism. Second, they define the *Book of Changes*, originally a book about change, as addressing the cosmic power of procreation. Third, this theme becomes the source of an important phrase among later Confucians, *sheng sheng bu xi* (“ceaseless generation”), as mentioned previously.

Liang’s interest in ceaseless change and flow in part derived from his training in Yogācāra philosophy (known as *weishi zong* 唯識宗, the Consciousness-Only School), which was very influential in Republican China.³⁰ The impermanence or ephemerality of all phenomena was a core tenet of Buddhism. Yogācāra, a metaphysical school of Buddhism, especially showed serious skepticism about the reality of the material world. It considered everything to be constantly changing. Instead of viewing a rock as substantial or physical, Yogācāra saw it as a succession of instantaneous perceptions.³¹ Accepting this view, Liang used the analogy of motion pictures to describe movement with a successive flow of static images – an analogy that Bergson had used.³² For Liang, the Chinese had produced no ontological discourses, whereas their Western and Indian counterparts both had plenty of sophisticated discourses on fundamental reality (*benti* 本體, literally, the original body).³³ He believed this was because Chinese thinkers preferred change to stasis. Instead of spilling much ink on what reality was, as Yogācāra did, the Chinese simply skipped all discussions on being, including all ontological positions like monism or dualism, idealism or materialism.³⁴ This also explains why Liang borrowed much of the Yogācāra vocabulary in his ontological discussions. In this sense Liang addressed the West’s challenge to Chinese philosophy by elaborating the concept of reality with his knowledge of Yogācāra, as Thierry Meynard suggests.³⁵

³⁰ For Liang’s training in Buddhism, see, e.g., Ma Dongyu 馬東玉, ed., *Liang Shuming zhuan* 梁漱溟傳 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1993), pp. 35–38; Zheng Dahua 鄭大華, *Liang Shuming zhuan* 梁漱溟傳 (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 2001), pp. 27–37, 51–59; Wong, “Lun Bogesen shenming zhexue,” p. 67.

³¹ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, p. 85.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 86; Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 322–25.

³³ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, pp. 80–86.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁵ Thierry Meynard, *The Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 105.

Despite his preference for Yogācāra vocabulary, Liang found problematic the negation of life 無生, or the lack of interest in life, that was inherent to Buddhism, including Yogācāra. The first “Noble Truth” of Buddhism was that all life was suffering (in Pali: *dukkha*). Buddhism also taught that birth was the first of the four great sufferings.³⁶ Thus for the Buddhists, except for extraordinary lives such as the Buddha’s, neither life nor birth (two major senses of the Chinese character *sheng* 生) were viewed in a celebratory tone, as in Liang’s quoting of the *Book of Changes*. Thus for Liang, “life represented Confucian teachings, whereas the negation of life represented Buddhism 代表儒家道理的是‘生’,代表佛家道理的是‘無生’.”³⁷ He preferred the Confucian vitalism that valued the ceaseless procreation and fostering of lives in this world.

At the time of Liang’s writing, Confucianism was under attack from Westernizers like Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao. Confucianism had degenerated after Confucius, Liang asserted. Though the Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty constituted a serious effort to return to the source, Song scholars misplaced their emphasis on the concepts “principle (*li* 理)” and “human nature (*xing* 性),” which Liang argued had no place in Confucius’s original teachings. Song Confucians also left behind a moral orthodoxy that repressed social life.³⁸ Thanks to this sort of degeneration, nobody dared to defend Confucianism in Liang’s time, while, moreover, his contemporaries promoted Western learning and even Buddhism.³⁹

Now emboldened by Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming went ahead to validate original Confucianism, often with Bergson’s vocabulary and values. Though critical of individual elements of Bergson’s philosophy, Liang thought of Bergson as the greatest figure of Western philosophy, often comparing him with Confucius, to Liang the greatest thinker, whose true teachings were lost soon after his death. Bergson’s vitalism introduced in the West, as well as in China, certain values that recalled original Confucianism. As discussed above, Liang mixed his discussion of Chinese metaphysics with his affirmation of Bergson’s notion of change and flow; he viewed the life of the cosmos as a forward flow of generation and regeneration, which he found in both the *Book of Changes* and Bergson’s vitalism; Liang also advocated the primacy of intuition

³⁶ Christopher W. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 31–32, 119–26.

³⁷ Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, p. 122, also 88.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–50.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. ix, 21–22.

for access to metaphysical truth, which he thought both Confucius and Bergson shared. Liang considered Confucius' spiritual life to be close to the recent vitalist school in the West.⁴⁰ Since, to Liang, the West usually valued the material world and treated nature as a broken dead thing, only vitalist philosophy reunited the broken cosmos into a whole, and turned materialized cosmos into a spiritual one.⁴¹ Later in his life, in the 1930s, Liang acknowledged Bergsonian vitalism as an essential foundation for his thought.⁴² Thus one may argue that, for Liang, Bergson's vitalism shed light on or justified original Confucianism.

Liang acknowledged an intermediate source for vitalism in the *Book of Changes*. He quoted the phrase "ceaseless generation" in a recent commentary on Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), the eminent Ming Confucian thinker. Liang used it to support his thesis on China's fundamental interest in life.⁴³ Though referring to Song Confucians several times in the book, he never referred to their writings on the cosmic vitalism of the *Book of Changes*. These writings came to the attention of twentieth-century vitalists only later.

ZHU QIANZHI AND LI SHICEN

In October of 1922, shortly after the publication of Liang Shuming's instantaneously popular work, Driesch arrived in China as a substitute for Eucken. A philosopher and 1908 Nobel laureate in literature, Eucken declined an invitation to China for health reasons.⁴⁴ Just as Russell and Dewey had been received as intellectual superstars slightly earlier, Driesch, the representative of German philosophy in this series of invited international speakers, was showered with comparable attention, even though he was little known in China before his arrival.⁴⁵

During Driesch's visit, Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1887–1969) touched off a heated polemic with the advocates of unreserved Westernization. Zhang remarked in a public lecture in early 1923 that "no matter how

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 177.

⁴² Wu, *Xiandaixing de zhuiqiu*, p. 64; Dong, *Shengming zhexue zai Zhongguo*, pp. 186–87.

⁴³ This commentary comes from a collection of three articles, entitled *Wangxue zalun* 王學雜論 (1919), by Liang's contemporary Wu Chengshi 吳承仕 (a.k.a. Wu Jianzhai 吳檢齋; 1884–1939). Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua*, p. 122.

⁴⁴ For the background of Driesch's invitation, see Zhang Junmai 張君勱, "Deguo zhexuejia Dulishu shi donglai zhi baogao ji qi xueshuo dalue" 德國哲學家杜里舒氏東來之報告及其學說大略, *Chen bao* 晨報, June 2, 1921, sect. "Fukan" ("Literary Supplement").

⁴⁵ Long, "Du Lishu dui Zhang Junmai," pp. 186, 188.

developed science is, it cannot answer questions regarding *rensheng guan* 人生觀 (the philosophy, or viewpoint, of human life).⁴⁶ Because the polemicists all agreed that the philosophy of human life was metaphysics, the debate has since been known as “*kexue yu xuan xue lunzhan* 科學與玄學論戰” (polemic concerning science and metaphysics). On this subject Zhang followed his mentor Eucken, known for his works on the philosophy of life, or *Lebensanschauung*.⁴⁷ While Eucken advocated Christianity as a remedy for the age, Zhang proposed to supplement the insufficiency of science with Confucianism.

Zhang’s position on the limitations of science unexpectedly outraged Westernizers, most notably Chen Duxiu, Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (1887–1936), and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962). They argued that China in fact needed faith in science to accomplish its social, cultural, and economic reforms. Underlying their outrage was a fear that Zhang’s position would undermine their reform efforts. Zhang Junmai several times retorted by citing Bergson and Driesch to bolster his argument. Bergson, Zhang argued, had come to his philosophical finding after five years of bedside observation in Paris.⁴⁸ A scientist himself, Driesch drew from his own experiments the conclusion on the insufficiency of mechanical sciences to account for life.⁴⁹ The West, and especially Western science, served as the guiding star for the Westernizers. Bergson and Driesch, both from the West and with strong scientific backgrounds, seemed to be the perfect authorities to admonish the Westernizers on the limitation of science.

A debate that attracted the attention of almost all intellectuals in China, the science and metaphysics polemic was crucial in the history of Chinese vitalism in three regards. First, it alienated resolute Westernizers from Bergson, Driesch, and vitalism, thus turning off Chen Duxiu’s and Li Dazhao’s interest in Bergson. Perhaps it also dampened the interest of the leftist literary theorists Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) in vitalism. Lu and Guo each de-

⁴⁶ Zhang Junmai 張君勱, “Renshengguan” 人生觀, in *Kexue yu renshengguan* 科學與人生觀 (Taipei: Wenxue chubanshe, 1977), pp. 1–13.

⁴⁷ E.g., Rudolf Eucken, *Grundlinien einer neuen Lebensanschauung* (Leipzig: Veit & Comp., 1907); *Die Lebensanschauung der grossen Denker eine Entwicklungsgeschichte des Lebensproblems der Menschheit von Platon bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Veit, 1917); *Moral und Lebensanschauung* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1917). Eucken’s philosophy of life concerned only human life.

⁴⁸ Zhang Junmai 張君勱, “Zai lun renshengguan yu kexue bing da Ding Zaijun” 再論人生觀與科學並答丁在君, in *Kexue yu renshengguan*, p. 140.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–61. More on Zhang Junmai’s use of vitalism in this polemic, see Long, “Du Lishu dui Zhang Junmai” (cited above, n. 8).

veloped a Bergsonian literary vitalism when they studied in Japan in the early 1920s.⁵⁰ Unlike their tradition-bound colleagues, Lu and Guo never looked back to Confucianism for their vision of literary creativity, and in fact discontinued their interest in vitalism soon after their return to China. Second, the polemic inspired a significant number of publications on the philosophy of human life, some of which advocated vitalism. Third, it reinforced the association of Bergsonian vitalism with Confucianism that Liang Shuming had started. Zhu Qianzhi and Li Shicen picked up this association almost immediately.

Zhu was a complicated figure. On the one hand, he had been a revolutionary – jailed for open advocacy of anarchist revolution. On the other, unlike the reformers Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, he did not forsake Confucianism. He was a dedicated student of the *Book of Changes* and studied closely with Liang Shuming at Peking University in the early 1920s.⁵¹ He also published in the 1920s and 30s on the philosophy of history, interpreting the development of human society with Driesch's vitalist view of human evolution.⁵² Compared with Bergson, who praised intuition and wrote in figurative language, Driesch often argued with scientific knowledge that was not easily accessible to his Chinese audience. Driesch's work was therefore far less popular than Bergson's in spite of his visit to China. Zhu was one of the few Chinese intellectuals who, for his own work, dwelled in Driesch's vitalism.

Shortly after the publication of Liang's *Eastern and Western Cultures* (1921), Zhu began to promote and justify a pro-“feeling” philosophy, with Confucian values. He found in the *Book of Changes* and other Confucian classics many occurrences of the character *qing* 情, which could mean nature, condition, emotion, affection, or feeling, depending on the context.⁵³ He argued that those classics accorded feeling very positive values. He proposed the equation of feeling with the ultimate value in

⁵⁰ Lu and Guo both introduced the literary theory of the Japanese author Kuriyagawa Hakuson 厨川白村 (1880–1923) that, influenced by Bergson, celebrated the power of life in the world. See, e.g. Wang Guangdong 王光東, “Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenxue de shijixing yinsu: wusi xin wenxue zhong de xiandai shengming yishi” 20世紀中國文學的世界性因素, 五四新文學中的現代生命意識, *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 中國比較文學 3 (2000), pp. 18–19; Shirai Sumiyo 白井澄世, “Goshiki ni okeru Bergson, seimeishugi ni kansuru ichikōsatsu” 五四期におけるベルクソン, 生命主義に関する一考察, *Tōkyō Daigaku Chūgoku bungaku kenkyū shitsu kiyō* 東京大学中国語中国文学研究室紀要 10 (2007), pp. 16–48.

⁵¹ Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, “He xin” 荷心 (1924), in *Zhu Qianzhi wenji* 朱謙之文集 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002) 1, pp. 14, 15.

⁵² Long and Wang, “Du Lishu dui Zhu Qianzhi.”

⁵³ Zhu Qianzhi, “Yuzhou shengming: zhenqing zhi liu” 宇宙生命, 真情之流, *Minduo* 民鐸 4:3 (1923), p. 4.

Confucius's teachings, namely, *ren* 仁 (benevolence), or the value, *cheng* 誠 (sincerity), as found in the *Doctrine of the Mean*.⁵⁴

Acknowledging the great impact of Liang's *Eastern and Western Cultures* on his thought, Zhu took up the theme of the unceasing procreation of the cosmos.⁵⁵ He published in 1923 an essay, "The Life of the Cosmos," which, included in his *Zhouyi zhexue* 周易哲學 (*Philosophy of the Book of Changes*, 1923), served as a cosmological defense for his promotion of feeling. He wrote:

The cosmos is just life *qua* movement, just as "four seasons go around, all things germinate" [*The Analects*]. It procreates one thing when it flows here, and procreates another when it flows there. Hence the passage in the "Appended Remarks," "the grand virtue of Heaven and Earth is life." ... What is the life of the cosmos? It is ceaseless change, agile circulation, continuous working without rest. ... Life is a ceaseless flow. ... Thus the "Appended Remarks" states "generation and regeneration constitutes Change." 宇宙，祇是生這一動，只是“四時行焉，百物生焉”。流行到這裡便生這物，流行到那裏，便生那物。所以繫辭說：“天地之大德曰生”... “宇宙之生”是什麼？就是不斷的變化，活潑流轉，健行不息... 生就是不斷之流... 所以繫辭說“生生之謂易”...⁵⁶

Zhu further suggested that this ceaseless flow of changes was the current of true feeling 真情之流 that permeated the universe, a current that he equated with the cosmic flow of life, and indeed with the fundamental reality of the cosmos.⁵⁷

To support his proposition, Zhu then surveyed the commentaries on the *Book of Changes* in medieval and early-modern China that discussed *sheng sheng* (generation and regeneration of life) as the principle of continuous change. The authors included the authoritative Tang-dynasty annotator of the Confucian classics Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) and two famous Neo-Confucians of the Northern Song dynasty, Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107). Zhang and Cheng interpreted generation and regeneration as the constant alternation of *yin* and *yang*. Their follower, and the greatest Song Neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), further construed it with cosmic

⁵⁴ Zhu Qianzhi, "Weiqing zhexue faduan" 唯情哲學發端, *Minduo* 3.3 (1922), p. 9.

⁵⁵ Zhu Qianzhi, "Yige weiqing lunzhe de yuzhouguan ji renshengguan" 一個唯情論者的宇宙觀及人生觀, in *Zhu Qianzhi wenji* 1, p. 473; Zhang Guoyi 張國義, "Zhu Qianzhi xueshu yanjiu" 朱謙之學術研究 Ph.D. diss. (Huadong Shifan Daxue 華東師範大學, 2004), pp. 36–37.

⁵⁶ Zhu, "Yuzhou shengming," pp. 1–2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

vapor *qi* 氣, an important concept in his moral and natural philosophy. Zhu wrote: “the principle of generation and regeneration is natural and ceaseless. Therefore *qi* flows back and forth without interruption 生生之理, 自然不息, 所以氣有往來無間斷.”⁵⁸ The above-mentioned Wang Yang-ming of the Ming stated: “benevolence is the principle behind nature’s generation and regeneration 仁是造化生生不息之理.”⁵⁹ The Qing scholar Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) continued the interpretation of *sheng sheng* as the alternation of *yin* and *yang* and the bond between *sheng sheng* and benevolence, as he wrote: “A *yin* and a *yang* constitute *sheng sheng*. ... *Sheng sheng* is benevolence 一陰一陽其生生乎! ... 生生仁也.”⁶⁰

Instead of fighting as a rebel who ignores social norms, Zhu used Confucian authorities, though selectively, to justify his philosophy of feeling. Having reviewed the traditional commentaries and philosophical works, he argued that the Confucian tradition supported his position on the ceaseless generation of cosmic life, *qua* a current of feeling. On the other hand, he asserted that after Chinese antiquity, feeling became repressed, blaming in particular Song Neo-Confucians for conceiving of feeling as morally bad.⁶¹ For Zhu, the late-Ming scholar Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645, also known as Liu Jishan 劉戡山) was an exception who to some extent legitimized feeling by disputing reinterpreting the Song Neo-Confucians’ formulation of human nature (*xing* 性).⁶² Zhu himself went much further. For him, feeling was the cosmic vital power described in the *Book of Changes*. It was the fundamental reality itself.

Though largely justifying feeling with Confucian values, Zhu resorted to Western concepts and science. He wrote, “the cosmos is united by ceaseless flowing spirit 精神,” Zhu wrote.

Thus the only way to look for the reality of the cosmos is to look for the foundation of the effects of spirit. According to psychological studies, intellect, feeling, and will constitute the foundation of spirit’s effects. According to Schopenhauer, ... feeling is the ultimate reality of spirit. Therefore I say feeling is the fundamental reality. 宇宙是由流動不息的精神結合而成, 所以求精神作用的基礎, 便

⁵⁸ Zhu Qianzhi, “Zhou Yi zhexue” 周易哲學, in *Zhu Qianzhi wenji* 3, pp. 123–24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶¹ Zhu, “Weiqing zhexue faduan,” p. 7; *idem*, “Yige weiqing lunzhe de renshengguan” 一個唯情論者的人生觀, two parts, *Minduo* 5.1–2 (1924), p. 8.

⁶² Zhu, “Yige weiqing lunzhe,” p. 8. For Liu Zongzhou’s position on feeling or *qing*, see, e.g., Li Minghui 李明輝, “‘Qingyu jiefang hu’: Lun Liu Jishan sixiang zhong de qing” ‘情欲解放’乎? 論劉戡山思想中的‘情’, in Hsiung Ping-chen 熊秉真 and Chang Shou-an 張壽安, eds., *Qingyu Ming Qing: daqing pian* 情慾明清, 達情篇 (Taipei: Maitian chubanshe, 2004), pp. 83–125.

是求宇宙本體的唯一方法。據心理學所研究，智、情、意是精神作用的基礎。蕭本華又證明了... 情是精神的最後本體了，所以我說情便是本體。”⁶³

Publicizing his romantic relationship, Zhu also strove to justify free love.⁶⁴ Though his writings on feeling were examples of the philosophy of human life that Zhang Junmai promoted, Zhu repudiated Zhang on one point. Zhang was outspokenly critical of what appeared to him the abundance of love affairs in Western literature and feared that it would infect Chinese society and literature. Zhu openly reprimanded Zhang for his fear. Zhu's philosophy of human life, simply put, was to cultivate, expand, and develop the cosmic current of feeling in the individual to the highest degree. He wrote: “the fundamental difference between vitalism and antivitalism is that one advocates love affairs, and the other does not. 生命派與非生命派的根本論點，就是一個主張‘戀愛’，一個不主張‘戀愛’。”⁶⁵ Zhu left no doubt that he was a vitalist.

Zhu in addition filled an important category that Liang Shuming thought was missing in Chinese philosophy, namely ontology. As seen above, Liang had suggested that the Chinese lacked an ontology, for they were not interested in stasis. In contrast, Zhu asserted that the vitalism in the *Book of Changes* constituted an ontology.⁶⁶ The reality of the cosmos, in other words, the cosmic vital power, consisted in ceaseless change, as described in the *Book of Changes*.⁶⁷ Instead of being, it was becoming or change that Chinese ontology addressed. That is to say, for Liang, Chinese philosophers lacked ontology, for they concerned themselves with becoming. For Zhu, Chinese ontology existed precisely because it dealt with becoming.

Li Shicen, who knew both Liang Shuming and Zhu Qianzhi personally, published *Philosophy of Human Life* (*Rensheng zhexue* 人生哲學, 1925), a work that was first conceived during the polemic concerning science and metaphysics.⁶⁸ A well-respected scholar of Western philosophy, Li edited in 1921 a magazine's special issue devoted to Bergson, to which both he and Liang Shuming contributed. Li also communicated with Zhu Qianzhi and followed his works closely.⁶⁹ In his book, Li analyzed different schools of philosophy of human life,

⁶³ Zhu, “Yige weiqing lunzhe de yuzhou guan,” p. 473.

⁶⁴ Zhu Qianzhi, e.g., published his love letters in his “He xin” (cited above, n. 51).

⁶⁵ Zhu, “Yige weiqing lunzhe de yuzhou guan,” pp. 482–92, 494.

⁶⁶ Zhu, “Yuzhou shengming,” pp. 2–4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4; *idem*, “Yige weiqing lunzhe de yuzhou guan,” pp. 471, 473, 477.

⁶⁸ Li Shicen 李石岑, *Rensheng zhexue* 人生哲學 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1926), p. i.

⁶⁹ On the relationships between both Li and Liang and Li and Zhu, see Li Fuqing 李伏清, “Li Shicen de Bogesen sixiang yanjiu” 李石岑的柏格森思想研究述評, *Henan Shifan Daxue xuebao* (*Zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 河南師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 43.4 (2016), pp. 10, 11.

both Chinese and Western. He had a very favorable view of Bergson's vitalism, especially his theory of *élan vital*.⁷⁰ He connected the French author's thesis on the grand current of life with passages in Confucian classics on the procreative power of the cosmos. Indeed, Li asserted, "Confucius always considered procreation (or reproduction) the holiest and greatest function between heaven and earth 孔子總認為生殖是天地間最神聖偉大的一種作用。"⁷¹

Li contributed two additions to Chinese vitalism. First was an anthropological interpretation of Confucius's notion of benevolence. For Li, a fertility cult, though not phallicism, underlay Confucius's notion that the grand virtue of heaven and earth was life. Confucius based his ethical system, its notion of benevolence in particular, on blood relations. This connected, Li argued, to a passage in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*: "life is like a current passing from germ to germ through the medium of a developed organism."⁷² The heavenly virtue of life was therefore demystified to some extent in Li's hands. It was seen as an element of primitive culture and a principle that was biological in nature.

Second, Li highlighted an intermediate figure between Confucius and Li's time, namely, Dai Zhen, on whom Zhu Qianzhi had touched. Dai's work received intense attention thanks in part to a well-publicized meeting in celebration of the 200th anniversary of his birth in 1924. For Li, Dai's was a philosophy of vitalism 生的哲學. He construed benevolence as the ceaseless procreation of the cosmos, maintaining that "generation and regeneration of life are benevolence 生生之謂仁," "generation and regeneration of life are the origin of transformation 生生者化之原," and "organized generation and regeneration of life produce the flow of transformation 生生而條理者, 化之流."⁷³ By connecting the cosmic order with moral values, such as benevolence, Li argued, Dai advocated the "fulfillment of life 欲遂其生."⁷⁴ Indeed, to Li's way of thinking, Dai had proposed to fulfill not just cosmic life but also individuals' desires and feelings.

For Li, this advocacy came close to a call for the liberation of the individual in a largely collectivist society. In this sense Dai's vitalism was comparable to Bergson's philosophy, which likewise incited calls for social revolutions in the West.⁷⁵ Dai's vitalism also seemed to herald

⁷⁰ Li, *Rensheng zhaxue*, pp. 114-16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 203-5, quote on 205.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 426-29.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 429-30.

the ultimate goal of Li's philosophy of human life, that is, the expression of life, especially the effort to reach "the infinity of life" by art.⁷⁶

XIONG SHILI IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

Like Liang Shuming, Xiong Shili had a background in Yogācāra Buddhism. In fact, Xiong was hired to teach Yogācāra at Peking University upon Liang's recommendation. In 1922–23 and 1926–27, Xiong and Liang Shuming, including Zhu during the earlier occasion, shared a house.⁷⁷ The first occasion was when Liang's *Eastern and Western Cultures*, newly published, received enormous attention and when Zhu amplified the vitalism of the *Book of Changes* in his own publications. During the second period, Xiong switched from Yogācāra to the *Book of Changes* as his intellectual foundation.⁷⁸

From the mid-1920s onward, Xiong began to shed his intellectual devotion to the medieval Indian Yogācāra master Dharmapāla of Nalanda (530–561, *Hufa* 護法 in Chinese). This development concerned the interpretation of *śakti*, a Sanskrit term for productive power, traditionally translated as *gongneng* 功能 in Chinese.⁷⁹ For Xiong, Dharmapāla was wrong to interpret productive power as the cause of phenomena. In addition, he thought that just as Western ontology created a dualism of phenomena and things-in-themselves, Dharmapāla created a dualism of phenomena and their cause.⁸⁰ Xiong preferred to see productive power as reality itself. Productive power was the life force (*huoli* 活力, *shengli* 生力) or even life itself. As a vital force in constant transformation, productive power shed the old and generated the new at every moment.⁸¹ Reality was not static.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 351–54.

⁷⁷ Wang Ruhua 王汝華, *Xiandai rujia sansheng (shang): Liang Shuming, Xiong Shili, Ma Yifu de jiaoyi jishi* 現代儒家三聖(上), 梁漱溟·熊十力·馬一浮的交誼紀實 (Taipei: Xinrui wenchuang, 2012), pp. 87–88.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Ye Xian'en 葉賢恩, *Xiong Shili zhuan* 熊十力傳 (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2010), p. 98.

⁷⁹ For the significance of *śakti* in Xiong's work, see John Makeham, "Translator's Introduction," in Xiong Shili, *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*, trans. John Makeham (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2015), pp. xlii–xlvi.

⁸⁰ Xiong Shili 熊十力, "Weishi xue gailun" 唯識學概論, in Xiao Shafu 蕭萐父, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji* 熊十力全集 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001) 1, pp. 461–62; idem, "Weishi lun" 唯識論 (1930), in *ibid.* 1, pp. 543–44. For an analysis, see Shu-hsiung Liu, "Hsiung Shih-li's Theory of Causation," *Philosophy East and West* 19.4 (1969), p. 404.

⁸¹ Xiong, "Weishi xue gailun," pp. 448, 460, 469; idem, "Weishi lun (1930)," p. 549; idem, "Xin weishi lun" 新唯識論 (1932 [literary Chinese] edn.), in *Xiong Shili quanji* 2, p. 60.

Though this life force looked Bergsonian, Xiong differentiated himself from Bergson. Xiong was aware of the similarity of his notion of life force to the French philosopher's notion of life's passing from one germ to another.⁸² For Xiong, Bergson was too biological, and his vital force was bound by the physical body. What Xiong meant by life force transcended the bodily structure.⁸³ Moreover, since plants and lower animals produced no sign of life, only higher animals, especially humans, had what Xiong called interior life – a concentrated life force. Furthermore, for Bergson, all lives began from a primordial origin. Xiong, basing himself implicitly on the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, held that all sentient beings were independent, not only in this life but also in the past and in the future.⁸⁴

Xiong would rather compare life force to human nature (*xing*), a notion central to Neo-Confucianism of the Song and the Ming. On this point, Xiong's favorite Confucian was the late-Ming to early-Qing scholar Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), who wrote that “human nature is the principle (or reason) of life 夫性者，生理也，” and “human nature is the life force that ceaselessly generates and extinguishes 性者，即生滅不已之生力。”⁸⁵ The qualities of this force included life's continuation into the future, inner life's upward movement, and the cosmos's ceaseless self-renewal.⁸⁶

Xiong further developed his notion of life force in his magnum opus first published (in literary Chinese) in 1932 – *Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論 (*New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*).⁸⁷ This was the culmination of Xiong's teaching and publications on Yogācāra since 1923. The prototypical vitalist sentence in the *Book of Changes*, “generation and regeneration constitute Change,” played a formal role in Xiong's work.⁸⁸ He explicitly formulated an integral, indivisible vital force of the cosmos, or rather “a grand current of ceaseless generation of the cosmos 宇宙生生不容已之大流。”⁸⁹ By this cosmic current of life, he thought he avoided Dharmapāla's problematic teaching that individual seeds

⁸² Idem, “Weishi xue gailun,” pp. 477–78; “Weishi lun,” p. 556.

⁸³ Idem, “Weishi xue gailun,” pp. 477–78.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 477, 492, 494.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 468. On Xiong's interest in Wang Fuzhi, see, e.g., Jing Haifong 景海峰, *Xiong Shili* 熊十力 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1991), pp. 46–47, 70–72.

⁸⁶ Xiong, “Weishi xue gailun,” pp. 474, 475.

⁸⁷ Makeham argues that in the *New Treatise*, Xiong Shili reinterpreted the character *wei* 唯. Instead of “only,” as usually understood in the Buddhist tradition, he read it as “unique.” Makeham, “Translator's Introduction,” p. xxxi.

⁸⁸ Xiong, “Xin weishi lun” (1932 edn.), p. 131.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 58, quotation, p. 85.

gave rise to phenomena. This teaching of seeds broke phenomena into numerous divisions without unity. The grand current of life, in contrast, provided the advantage of securing unity while also accounting for change, movement, and ephemerality.⁹⁰ Xiong considered Wang Yangming and Wang Fuzhi as his predecessors in conceiving of the notion of grand cosmic life.⁹¹

In the *New Treatise* the notion of ceaseless generations found a secure footing, and derivative phrases like *sheng sheng buxi* 生生不息 appeared in it many times.⁹² Xiong's uses of ceaseless generation were at times elusive. Going through them closely, one finds that they mean one of two senses. First, the sense of procreation or biological reproduction continued when Xiong spoke of an individual and his descendants forming an uninterrupted flow of grand life.⁹³ This is the sense in the *Book of Changes*. The second sense, metaphysical, appeared in the term *sheng sheng mie mie* 生生滅滅. Literally meaning "the births and annihilations," its dominant sense is the generation and disappearance of phenomena.⁹⁴ Xiong usually mixed these two senses without differentiating them. By so doing, he integrated the *Book of Changes* with Yogācāra.

Likewise Xiong integrated the *Book of Changes* with Yogācāra in his ontological discussions on the fundamental reality (*benti*) of the cosmos, the major subject of the *New Treatise*.⁹⁵ Reminiscent of Liang's identification of change as the defining theme of Chinese philosophy and of Zhu Qianzhi's inversion of becoming for being, Xiong's reality was, instead of the world-in-itself, ceaseless generation and transformation (*sheng hua* 生化) of phenomena.⁹⁶ That is to say, he took Yogācāra's teachings on reality as the premise of his ontology.

Around the time of the publication of the literary Chinese edition of Xiong's *New Treatise* (1932), Li Shicen gave up his favored view of Bergson after three years in Europe (1927–1930). Converted to materialism in France, Li judged that Bergson's *Creative Evolution* had already given way to materialism after the Russian revolution of 1917–1918, thus losing its appeal to Western readers. Meanwhile, Driesch's vi-

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 56–58.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 85. Xiong had resisted Wang Yangming's teachings until around 1930. Jing, *Xiong Shili*, pp. 72–74.

⁹² Xiong, "Xin weishi lun" (1932 edn.), pp. 57, 58, 72, 78, 79, 86.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 132.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

⁹⁵ Xiong also used the term *shiti* 實體. Makeham translates both *benti* and *shiti* as "reality."

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 1, 132.

talist thesis of entelechy was falsified by recent scientific findings.⁹⁷ Though seeing little more than moral philosophy in Confucianism, Li still emphasized the importance of Dai Zhen's vitalism in the history of Confucianism.⁹⁸ Overall, however, Chinese philosophy, including Dai's, could not compare with Western philosophy, as the former ignored social practice, whereas the latter led more readily to dialectical materialism, Li's new ideal.⁹⁹

FANG DONGMEI AND XIONG SHILI
DURING THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR (1937-1945)

Japan intensified its aggressiveness toward China in the 1930s. Its seizure of Manchuria in 1931 appalled the entire Chinese populace, and this aggression escalated into a full-scale war in 1937. When the nation's survival was on everybody's mind, what was Chinese and what was not were a major concern to many.

Portraying itself as the protector of the Chinese tradition, the Nationalist Party incorporated the Confucian tradition into its ideological battle with the Communists. Because the best-known Confucians of the age, Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili, had identified the vitalism in the *Book of Changes* as the core of Confucianism, the party's propagandists consequently took up vitalism, calling it "*weisheng lun* 唯生論" in their discourses and considering it the preferred alternative to Marxist materialism.¹⁰⁰ First intended to defeat the Communists, their publications, which came out in large numbers, convinced many that vitalism was distinctly Chinese.¹⁰¹ For example, in 1939 the Buddhist monk Tai Xu 太虛 (1890-1947) recommended to Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887-1975), then the head of the Nationalist government, that vitalism could serve as the foundation for the party's political and social theories, even though elsewhere he argued that Buddhism was a

⁹⁷ Li Shicen, *Zhexue gailun* 哲學概論 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1933), pp. 7, 63, 215, 219.

⁹⁸ Li Shicen, *Li Shicen xueshu lunzhu: Zhongguo zhexue shi jiang* 李石岑學術論著, 中國哲學十講, ed. Qiu Zhihua 邱志華 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 364-96.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 398.

¹⁰⁰ *Weisheng lun* literally meant "life-only theory" or "life-centered theory." See examples of the GMD vitalist publications in Chen Lifu 陳立夫, *Weisheng lun* 唯生論 (*Vitalism*) (Nanjing: Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, 1933); Ren Juewu 任覺五, *Weisheng lun yu minsheng shiguan* 唯生論與民生史觀 (Nanjing: Bati shudian, 1933). For Zhu Qianzhi's criticism of historical materialism, see Zhu Qianzhi, "Lishi zhexue" 歷史哲學 (1926), in *Zhu Qianzhi wenji* 5, pp. 7, 9-10, 27, 43-46, 60. For analyses of these GMD publications, see the references cited in n. 10, above.

¹⁰¹ Chen Lifu's *Weisheng lun* sold more than a quarter million copies before 1945. Bodenhorn, "Chen Lifu's Vitalism," p. 94. The GMD also launched a book series on vitalism and founded a national study organization, Weisheng Xueshe 唯生學社, all probably thanks to

philosophy superior to Chinese vitalism.¹⁰² Influential Daoist writers, including Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧 (1880–1969), argued that vitalism in fact characterized Daoism, both a traditional school of thought and a religion. For Daoists, this vitalism, with its emphasis on the traditional Daoist theme of “life nurturance” (*yangsheng* 養生), was superior to Buddhism, which they considered foreign and, owing to its asceticism and lack of interest in this life, harmful to the corporeal strength of the Chinese nation in the time of war.¹⁰³

New Confucian thinkers developed their vitalism in this nationalistic mood as the war raged on. Though Liang and Xiong were critics of Chiang Kai-shek, the national crisis transcended personal feuds. The Nationalist Party’s propagandists and the New Confucians both embraced vitalism. They also recruited converts such as Fang Dongmei.

When the Sino-Japanese War was imminent in 1937, Fang gave public radio lectures, employing Chinese vitalism to defend China’s spiritual superiority. Fang had studied Western philosophy in the United States and taught briefly at the GMD’s Central Political School before he relocated to Central University. In his lectures, Fang repeatedly quoted the *Book of Changes* and other Confucian classics as concerns cosmic procreative power.¹⁰⁴ “The cosmos,” Fang said, “is a great vitality that embraces all things. There is no moment when it is not germinating, fostering, or creating, and there is no place where it does not flow and permeate 宇宙是一個包攝萬象的大生機，無一刻不發育創造，無一地不流動貫通。”¹⁰⁵ Like Li Shicen, Fang dwelled on Dai Zhen’s glosses of Confucian classics, such as his theses of organized regeneration and of *ren* as ceaseless procreation. Following Neo-Confucians in imperial China, Fang construed ceaseless generation as the product of the interplay between *yin-yang* 陰陽 (or *qian-kun* 乾坤).¹⁰⁶ This vitalistic cosmos, Fang

Chen, the propaganda chief of the party. On the study organization, see e.g., “Weisheng xueshe zongzhang” 唯生學社總章, *Xuexiao shenghuo* 學校生活 (1933) 16, p. 11, and 17, p. 13.

¹⁰² Tai Xu 太虛, “Jimao riji” 己卯日記, in *Tai Xu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書, sect. *zazang*: wencong 雜藏, 文叢, vol. 3. (Hong Kong: Tai Xu dashi quanshu chuban weiyuanhui, 1955), p. 499. For his remark on the superiority of the vitalism found in Yogācāra Buddhism, see, e.g., Tai Xu, “Weisheng zhexue” 唯生哲學, *Haichao yin* 海潮音 15.10 (1934), pp. 13–14.

¹⁰³ Chen Yingning 陳櫻寧, “Du huasheng xu de ganxiang 11” 讀化聲敘的感想 (十一), *Yangshan* 揚善 3.6 (1935), pp. 2–4; Qian Xin 錢心, “Xian Fo panjueshu” 仙佛判決書, *Yangshan* 3.15 (1936), p. 1. On Chen Yingning and vitalism, see Xun Liu, *Daoist Modern: Innovation, Lay Practice, and the Community of Inner Alchemy in Republican Shanghai* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), pp. 17, 114, 120–21.

¹⁰⁴ Fang Dongmei 方東美, *Zhongguo rensheng zhexue* 中國人生哲學 (Taipei: Liming wenhua, 2005), pp. 102, 110, 242, 248, 258, 259, 319.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 61, 67, 79, 175.

suggested, would be very familiar to Western thinkers like Bergson if they were able to access Chinese philosophy firsthand.¹⁰⁷

Besides highlighting the notion of pervasive cosmic life, Fang connected the mind (*xin*) and human nature (*xing*), two concepts central to Neo-Confucianism, with life (*sheng* 生). He suggested that Zhu Xi 朱熹 and his followers had addressed this type of vitalism when they wrote that “the mind of Heaven and Earth is to procreate things 天地以生物爲心.”¹⁰⁸ The mind here was at most a collective mind thought to dwell in the cosmos, as Fang stopped short of giving procreative power to the individual mind. Traditional Chinese scholars, Fang noted, tended to construe human nature as life, for they took human nature to be Heaven’s endowment to the individual person.¹⁰⁹ Fang agreed with this, presumably because life, along with reproductive power, was this endowment.

In his lectures Fang recounted the tradition of Confucian vitalism. As assayed by Zhu Qianzhi (but not Liang and Xiong), Song Neo-Confucians had left behind a large body of literature that elaborated the cosmic power of procreation.¹¹⁰ Fang noted that Zhang Zai and Cheng Yi already had pioneered the theory that procreative cosmos was based on the natural animism of the *Book of Changes* and other texts, while the leader of the Song Neo-Confucians, Zhu Xi, enlarged it for later thinkers to take up. Wang Yangming continued this and aimed to observe the “Way” of life (*shengdao* 生道) and the idea of life (*shengyi* 生意) between Heaven and Earth in his discourse on the mind and benevolence.¹¹¹ Dai Zhen especially was the last champion of Confucian vitalism in imperial China.¹¹² Fang therefore integrated vitalism as a concept already extant in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties as found in the Neo-Confucian notions of the mind and human nature.

In Fang’s elaboration, this domestic Chinese vitalism meant something else in addition: it was a moral cosmology. He maintained that Western civilization was characterized by a drive to conquer nature,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰⁸ Another interpretation of this passage is “Heaven and Earth see living things as their mind (or heart).” Fang notes that traditional Chinese thinkers assumed that all things had life. Ibid., pp. 58, 176–77.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 67, 207–8.

¹¹⁰ I am grateful to Reviewer A for pointing out this literature to me. On this point, see, e.g., Zhang Yanqing 張艷清, “Lixue ‘sheng sheng’ guannian de Rudao Chanshi” 理學‘生生’觀念的儒道闡釋, *Lilun yuekan* 理論月刊 1 (2008), pp. 55–56.

¹¹¹ Fang, *Zhongguo rensheng zhexue*, pp. 57, 177.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 58.

which produced many ill effects. The Chinese, on the contrary, followed Heaven and Earth's virtue of fostering lives and sought human harmony with nature.¹¹³ Fang again cited Dai Zhen to say that this cosmos of ceaseless generation embodied the Confucian values of benevolence, propriety (*li* 禮), and justice (*yi* 義).¹¹⁴ It was therefore a cosmology that implied a certain moral superiority in Chinese culture.

While Liang Shuming and Zhu Qianzhi had suggested that Confucianism degenerated after Confucius, Fang believed that important Confucians over the ages, including Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, and Dai Zhen, had continued the thesis of heaven-human harmony.¹¹⁵ This philosophy, Fang believed, made Chinese spiritual life thrive while its Western counterpart was wasted in the pursuit of material comfort and military conquests. Fang's objective was to argue that Chinese moral philosophy, continuous over more than two millennia, served as a model for a world plagued by war. Fang's ultimate message, as a political rallying point, was that the Chinese nation, inheriting this moral tradition, would prevail through the war. Interestingly, his argument of Chinese superiority did not specifically call out an inferior Japan.

Like Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili, Fang preferred Confucian vitalism over Buddhism. For him, the interest in life, and indeed in this life, prevailed over the ultimate Buddhist goal of nirvana, which constituted an escape from this world. Confucians, who "immersed themselves in cosmic life," were thus superior to Buddhists.¹¹⁶

The Nationalist publications and Fang's work during the war, which lasted until 1945, may well have reinforced the importance of vitalism in Xiong Shili's philosophy. Xiong published an enlarged vernacular edition of his *Xin weishi lun* (or, *New Treatise*) in 1944. The theme of ceaseless procreation figured even more prominently than in the literary Chinese edition published in 1932. Its derivative phrases densely populated the later edition, including "ceaseless generation and transformation (*sheng sheng hua hua* 生生化化)," "the current (or principle) of ceaseless generation (*sheng sheng zhi liu* 生生之流[理])," and "the virtue of life (*sheng de* 生德)."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 80–81.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 61–62.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 58, 75–80.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 206.

¹¹⁷ These terms appear more than 50 times on over 35 pages, especially in the chapters on productive power 功能 (pp. 93–178) and on explanations of the mind 明心 (pp. 242–307). For the 1944 vernacular edition, I cite the page numbers in Xiong Shili, *Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論 (Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1974); hereafter cited as *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.).

In the vernacular edition Xiong also amplified his discussion on the relationship of generation to several major Neo-Confucian notions, namely the mind, human nature, and benevolence.¹¹⁸ Like Dai Zhen and Fang Dongmei, Xiong also equated benevolence with ceaseless generation.¹¹⁹ As seen above, since the 1920s Xiong had equated life force with human nature. He maintained this position in both the literary and vernacular editions, saying, “by human nature I mean the reason why we live (or generate) 性者,言其爲吾人所以生之理也” and “human nature means ceaseless generation 性者,生生義.”¹²⁰ In the 1944 vernacular edition Xiong went further; he imparted to the mind the quality of ceaseless generation: “the mind is unstoppably generative and regenerative 生生而不容已,曰心.” In both editions, he identified the mind with human nature,¹²¹ a position well known to have been held by Wang Yangming and the even earlier Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193). It is thus evident that Xiong sided with the School of Mind (*xinxue* 心學) that Lu and Wang represented, in particular regarding the relationship of the mind and human nature. Xiong went further than Lu and Wang by identifying both mind and human nature with fundamental reality.¹²²

A different sense of generation appeared in Xiong’s identification of ceaseless generation with the mind. Here *sheng* (in *sheng sheng*) could not possibly mean procreation, as the mind cannot procreate through sexual means. Xiong explained the generative power of the cosmic mind figuratively. For him, reality consists of constant transformation 恆轉 that exhibits itself in two modes, expansion 闢 and contraction 翕. The mind is the expansive power that develops, advances, and ceaselessly generates 生生不息, while contraction causes material phenomena to condense.¹²³ The cosmic mind thus is a grand, generative power. Xiong elucidated the individual mind as generative power, placing it in the hierarchical scheme of plant, animal, and human. The plant in

¹¹⁸ For the difference between the 1932 and 1944 editions, see, e.g., Guo Qiyong 郭齊勇, *Tiandi jian yige dushuren: Xiong Shili zhuan* 天地間一個讀書人: 熊十力傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1994), pp. 89–90.

¹¹⁹ Xiong asserted: “benevolence is just ceaseless generation 仁只是生生義.” See Xiong, *Xin weishi lun*, p. 243.

¹²⁰ Xiong, “Xin weishi lun” (1932 edn.), p. 142; Xiong, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), pp. 244–45.

¹²¹ Xiong Shili, “Xin weishi lun” (1932 edn.), p. 96; Xiong, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), p. 198.

¹²² Xiong, “Xin weishi lun” (1932 edn.), pp. 96, 83–88; Xiong, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), pp. 244–45, 259.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 242–43. This is the collective mental power of the cosmos. The individual’s mind takes part in this collective mind. See *idem*, “Xin weishi lun” (1932 edn.), p. 96; *idem*, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), pp. 244, 249, 260–61.

this scheme is the most material of the three due to its immobility, while the human, endowed with a developed nervous system, is able to transform matter instead of being transformed by it.¹²⁴ For Xiong, then, the mind is the ruler 主宰 of the body, which is its vehicle.¹²⁵ The mind's generative power denotes its ability to use the material body to produce things and physical effects.

Several themes in Xiong's work had precedents in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, although the Chinese metaphysician's explicit references to his French colleague were almost always critical. The theme of expansion and contraction as generative forces, as scholars who research Xiong have pointed out, recalls Bergson's analogy in which life was compared to an ascending movement of steam coming out of a kettle, and materiality to the descending movement that gives rise to condensed drops.¹²⁶ Bergson, moreover, had also elaborated the hierarchy of plant, animal, and human to show the strength of the human's developed nervous system (as mind or intellect).¹²⁷ In spite of these possible sources of inspiration, in the 1932 edition of the *New Treatise*, Xiong found fault with Bergson's omission of continuity through "instant upon instant of arising and disappearance 剎那生滅相續."¹²⁸ In the 1944 edition Xiong suggested that Bergson missed the true constancy of creative evolution, because transformation was supposed to be both moving and still at every instant.¹²⁹

Xiong's criticisms of Bergson show his reliance on Yogācāra metaphysics, presuming thereby both arising and disappearance, or movement and stillness, at every instant. Xiong's view of the mind, rather than things-in-themselves, as the fundamental reality was also the evidence of his roots in Yogācāra. On the other hand, as seen above, Xiong criticized the Yogācāra theory of seeds.¹³⁰ In addition, he upheld Confucianism's celebration of birth, growth, and the flourishing of life in this world over Yogācāra's insistence on tranquility 寂靜.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Xiong, "Xin weishi lun" (1932 edn.), p. 84; idem, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), pp. 225-28.

¹²⁵ Xiong, "Xin weishi lun" (1932 edn.), p. 84.

¹²⁶ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 261, 263. Wu, *Xiandaixing de zhuiqiu*, pp. 76-77; Dong, "Xiandai Xinrujia," p. 51.

¹²⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 159-76.

¹²⁸ Xiong, "Xin weishi lun" (1932 edn.), p. 48.

¹²⁹ Xiong, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), p. 122.

¹³⁰ Xiong's criticism engendered a fierce debate with Chinese Yogācāra believers, especially Ouyang Jian 歐陽漸 (1871-1943) and his disciples. See, e.g., Yan, *Dangdai xinruxue yinlun*, p. 195.

¹³¹ Xiong, *Xin weishi lun* (1944 edn.), pp. 81, 106, 109, 152, 265. There is much more on Xiong's relationship with Yogācāra. See, for instance, Jing, *Xiong Shili*, pp. 75-129.

CONCLUSION

This survey has traced the renewal of a Chinese vitalism in light of its Western counterpart in the Republican Period. Liang Shuming played a leading role in connecting the Western notion to its Chinese version. Relying on Bergson to revalidate ancient Confucianism, Liang discovered a comparable vitalism in the *Book of Changes* and other Confucian classics. Quoting the passages “generation and regeneration constitute Change 生生之謂易” and “the grand virtue of Heaven and Earth is life 天地之大德曰生,” he portrayed a cosmos that ceaselessly procreated and fostered life. He and the scholars who followed him in this cosmic vitalism – Zhu Qianzhi, Li Shicen, Xiong Shili, and Fang Dongmei – took it to represent the core of Confucianism.

The proponents of domestic versions of vitalism each placed a different emphasis in their interpretations. The *Book of Changes* was the supposed source: *sheng sheng*, with the repetition of the character, meant generation and regeneration of life, or an amplifying power of life. Besides this original meaning, Liang Shuming highlighted the liveliness or vigor of the procreative cosmos. Zhu Qianzhi connected the current of life with feeling. Li Shicen read it as biological reproduction. Xiong Shili added phenomenal generation and the mind’s power to produce through the body, two notions that originated in Buddhism. Fang Dongmei stressed the fostering quality of the cosmic life. These different interpretations were made possible by multifarious meanings of the Chinese character *sheng* 生. It seems that in English only the term “generation” covers all these meanings, hence the translation of *sheng* as “generation” in the title of this paper.

In retrospect, one could possibly say that this vitalism focusing on *sheng sheng* came along with a revival of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism. The examination in this article, however, shows that to be a bit simplistic. It is true that the cosmic vitalism of *sheng sheng* had an important place in Neo-Confucianism. Philosophical in nature, Neo-Confucianism became subdued during Qing times (1644–1912), when evidential philology (*kaozheng* 考證) replaced speculative philosophy as the dominant trend in learning. In the early-twentieth century, Westernizers further attacked Confucianism of all kinds, holding it responsible for China’s outdated society and culture. Though opposing unreserved Westernization, Liang Shuming and Zhu Qianzhi likewise blamed Neo-Confucians for their repression of the self and of social life. Often hailed as a leading New Confucian of the twentieth century, Liang advocated a return to Confucius’ original teaching. In addition, Liang found the

cosmic vitalism in original Confucianism to be a mirror of Bergson, so to speak. Neither Zhu nor Li Shicen were followers or advocates of Neo-Confucianism, even though Zhu rediscovered many of the intermediate Neo-Confucian figures for *sheng sheng* vitalism. It was not until the 1930s that Xiong and Fang incorporated core Neo-Confucian concepts, such as the mind and human nature, into their vitalist discussions. Fang in particular retraced the genealogy of vitalism in Song, Ming, and Qing Confucianism to show the continuous strength of Chinese culture. Instead of embracing all past Confucian vitalists, Xiong sided with Wang Yangming and Lu Jiuyuan on the identification of the mind and human nature. The central place of the procreative cosmos in Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism was substantially reinforced in the second half of the century by Mou Zongshan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) and Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978), among others.¹³²

While these authors were consistent in locating the origin of their vitalism in the *Book of Changes*, they differed in how they treated vitalism as a response to certain intellectual, social, and political realities. Reconceptualizing ancient Confucianism as vitalism, Liang offered a non-Western solution for the future of the post-World War I world. For him, Bergson's philosophy served as a reminder of original Confucianism. Zhu Qianzhi used cosmic vitalism to legitimize his open pursuit of free love. Li Shicen praised Dai Zhen's vitalism to support the liberation of the individual. Xiong Shili fashioned a Chinese ontology, premised on Yogācāra Buddhism, that was filled with vitalist language. Deliberately providing a war-time rallying cry, Fang amplified the spiritual supremacy of Chinese philosophy by pointing out that Chinese discussions of natural and social harmony were hinged on the notions of cosmic vitality and benevolence.

Republican China's development of a domestic vitalism experienced successive expansions. First, it expanded as more and more thinkers published their ideas about Chinese vitalism. Second, Republican thinkers' responses to new social, cultural and geopolitical realities appended new meanings to it: the idea of a revival of a degenerated China, free love, self-expression, phenomenal generation, mental power, and social and cosmic harmony. Third, Chinese vitalism expanded by being applied to other philosophical categories. It started as a plain statement about change and generation. It then became moral philosophy,

¹³² Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun: Daolun pian* 中國哲學原論, 導論篇 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1986), chap. 13–15; Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xinti yu xingti* 心體與性體 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2003), part 1, chap. 2, 5; part 2, chap. 1, 2; part 3, chap. 1, 2; part 4, chap. 2–4, 7.

cosmology, ontology, a theory of humanity, and even psychology, as Xiong called it in his discussion of the mind.¹³³ These expansions suggest that the domestic vitalism of Republican China was more than the revival of an old idea. It came close to a twentieth-century invention.

Liang Shuming was the originator of the rediscovered Chinese vitalism. No nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese thinkers before him had given so much weight to the cosmic power of procreation, let alone made it the core of Confucianism. Oddly, Zhu Qianzhi, Li Shicen, Xiong Shili, and Fang Dongmei never acknowledged Liang as their source. For these thinkers, the true source was Confucius, the Supreme Teacher and the founder of Confucianism, as Liang claimed. When Liang's claim was accepted, the credit for it bypassed him. His credit further diminished when more and more intermediate sources in the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties were rediscovered.

Understandably, when the Chinese character of this vitalism ascended, the importance of Bergson descended. Although none of these Chinese thinkers just copied Bergson's vitalism, all of them had him in mind. Bergson was of primary importance for Liang. As more and more sources were rediscovered, the domestic version became self-sufficient as standing inside Chinese tradition. Then, Bergson existed as a mere point of reference.

Though the New Confucians Liang, Xiong, and Fang accepted fundamental theses of Yogācāra Buddhism, their acceptance of it was selective. While they embraced the Yogācāra thesis of the ephemerality of all things in the world as the foundation of their ontology, they did not follow strictly the Buddhist teaching that life and birth were fundamental suffering. Following Confucius and his Song and Ming followers, they would rather celebrate life and birth. Paradoxically, at the hand of Xiong Shili and his students Tang Junyi and Mou Zongshan, *sheng sheng* (ceaseless generation) came to describe the qualities both of worldly ephemera, a Buddhist thesis, and of life and birth, which Confucians celebrated.

Of course, not all Chinese intellectuals accepted or even discussed vitalism. Westernizers kept a distance from Bergson and Driesch after the polemic concerning science and metaphysics, since they detested Western vitalists' reservations on the reach of science. Even Zhang Junmai, Driesch's host in China and the opponent of the Westernization side of the polemic, openly stated that he was not a believer in vitalism, even though he admired the works of Bergson and Driesch on the free-

¹³³ Xiong, "Xin weishi lun" (1932 edn.), pp. 82, 88, 106, 107, 110, 122, 146.

dom of the mind.¹³⁴ The other New Confucians, such as Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990), gave vitalism little importance in their defense of Confucianism. Understandably, Chinese vitalism was never to the Communists' liking. Ai Siqi 艾思奇 (1910–1966), a leading communist theorist, saw Liang Shuming as a hopeless idealist who praised conservative Confucian ethics. For Ai, Liang's vitalism rebuilt the material cosmos as a spiritual one and misidentified the organic world, only a small part of the cosmos, as the whole.¹³⁵ The most intellectually accomplished of Monk Tai Xu's Buddhist disciples, Yin Shun 印順 (1906–2005), pointed out in his review of Xiong Shili's *New Treatise* that Confucians, when paying exclusive attention to the benevolent, procreative power of the cosmos, ignored the brutality of nature that Laozi had observed.¹³⁶ For Yin Shun, vitalism did not represent reality.

The vitalism that came to fruition during the Republican Period of China constitutes a rich, important, and complicated chapter of Chinese intellectual history. When the anti-traditionalist Communist Party seized power in 1949, it in effect banned Confucianism and associated studies in China. Those who were dedicated to Confucianism and who managed to leave the People's Republic had a stronger incentive than ever to sustain or revive their beloved tradition. For example, Mou Zongshan and Tang Junyi, based in Hong Kong, worked laboriously to reconstruct a Chinese philosophical tradition that placed the procreative cosmos at the heart of reconstructions of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism. The formation and successive expansions of China's domestic vitalism prepared the way for their work.

¹³⁴ Zhang Junmai, "Qiaote 'xin yu wu' yi xu" 喬特 '心與物' 譯序, in idem, *Zhong Xi Yin zhexue wenji* 中西印哲學文集 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1981) 1, pp. 103–6.

¹³⁵ Ai Siqi 艾思奇, *Hu Shi, Liang Shuming zhexue sixiang pipan* 胡適梁漱溟思想批判 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), pp. 92–99.

¹³⁶ Yin Shun described it as "天地不仁" (lit., "Heaven and Earth show no benevolence"). There can be different interpretations of this passage. Yin Shun deliberately highlighted the inhumanity of nature's workings. Yin Shun 印順, *Ping Xiong Shili de xin weishi lun* 評熊十力的新唯識論 (Taipei: Huiji jiangtang, 1963), p. 9.