

*Xiong Shili's Understanding of Reality and Function, 1920–1937*. By Yu Sang. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. x + 260. €25.00/\$25.00.

The period of the thirties of the twentieth century is unique in Chinese philosophy history as it is arguably the most creative time of modern Chinese philosophy. In 1932, two ingenious works were published: Xiong Shili's 熊十力 (1885–1968) *Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論 (New treatise on the uniqueness of consciousness) (Literary Version)<sup>1</sup> and Mou Zongsan's 牟宗三 (1909–1995) *Cong Zhouyi fangmian yanjiu Zhongguo zhi xuanxue ji daode zhexue* 從周易方面研究中國之玄學及道德哲學 (A study of Chinese metaphysics and its moral implications from a standpoint of the *Zhouyi*).<sup>2</sup> Xiong was then forty-eight years old and a lecturer, while Mou was only twenty-three, a third-year student. Both were at the Department of Philosophy, Peking University. Xiong's expectation was that, along with Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978), Mou would become a major promotor of his philosophy. In 1920, Xiong started as a mature student under Ouyang Jingwu 歐陽竟無 (1871–1943) at the *Zhina neixue yuan* 支那內學院 (China Institute of Inner Learning) in Nanjing 南京 after departing from his military life—he had joined the 1911 Revolution. Two years later, he was invited to take over a teaching position formerly occupied by the renowned thinker, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) at Peking University. Then, he was amazingly able to produce his *magnum opus* within eight years. In parallel, Mou was astonishingly able to publish his *Jugendschrift* as an undergraduate. Their extraordinary contributions gave rise to a new age of talents in the history of Chinese philosophy. More specifically, their works founded New Confucianism—a second renaissance of Confucianism after the Song-Ming dynasties. Xiong has been identified as a first-generation founder, while Mou as a third-generation founder. Historically, there are only three major periods of creativity in Chinese philosophy. The first is the pre-Qin period. During this time, most major schools in Chinese philosophy were founded. The second is

---

<sup>1</sup> Xiong Shili, *Xin weishi lun* (Literary Version), in Xiao Shafu 蕭萐父, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji* 熊十力全集 (The complete writings of Xiong Shili), 10 vols. (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The second edition, published in 1988, changed the title to *Zhouyi de ziran zhexue yu daode hanyi* 周易的自然哲學與道德涵義 (The natural philosophy of the *Zhouyi* and its moral implications) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1988).

the Wei-Jin period. It is represented by the works of Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312). In these three periods, the state of the whole of China was alike in political chaos. Paradoxically, they seemed to be the best times for talents in Chinese philosophy to come forth.

As is well known, Xiong's doctrine of Reality and Function is the core of his Confucian philosophy. In a snapshot, Xiong's Confucian thought is mainly a result of his transformation of Yogācāra Buddhism. Sang's volume is the first English work on Xiong's understanding of Reality and Function in a book form. More specifically, Sang's book sets out to trace the development of Xiong's understanding of Yogācāra Buddhism that eventually gave rise to the formation of his own Confucian thought. Indeed, Xiong's studies on Yogācāra have, thus far, attracted only a few scholars. In this context, Sang identifies three developmental stages of Xiong's *ti-yong* 體用 system: (1) 1920–1923, (2) 1923–1927, and (3) 1927–1937. As she writes:

First, Xiong moved from considering Reality and Function as two distinct realms to presenting them as non-dual, with the latter being the illusory manifestation of the former. Second, he developed his understanding of the characteristic of Reality from being constant/quiescent to being transforming/active, and then to being simultaneously constant/quiescent and transforming/active. . . . [T]his reflects a move from believing that Reality has nothing to do with phenomenal activities to considering phenomenal activities as the illusory manifestation of Reality. Third, Xiong shifted from believing that consciousness is provisionally established for the sake of revealing suchness to identifying our mind with Reality. (p. 225)

Given the complexity of Xiong's Yogācāra-interpretation, Sang has done an especially great service in clarifying the changes in Xiong's understanding of the *ti-yong* system from being dualist to being monist. The author takes pains in stepwise analysing and contrasting the important distinctions in Xiong's *Denkweg*. As the author admitted, this volume aims only to investigate “the early development of Xiong's *ti-yong* philosophy” (p. 7). For her, this should cover the years from 1920 to 1937. As a conclusion, the author claims that Xiong developed his own new “philosophy of Reality and Function by drawing largely on the *Dasheng qi xin lun* [大乘起信論 (The awakening of faith)], the Neo-

Confucian School of Mind, Huayan [華嚴] philosophy, and Ma Yifu's [馬一浮 (1883–1967)] thought" (p. 214).

In general, Sang's exposition is admirably clear and subtle. Particularly, since the exact details of Xiong's different Yogācāra-interpretations have remained in darkness, the current volume is especially welcome with its brave, innovative attempt. Overall, Sang's exposition is quite faithful to Xiong's position in his *Auseinandersetzung* with Yogācāra.

From a critical standpoint, however, Sang's typology of stages in Xiong's way of thinking might be challenged. First, contrary to Sang's insistence on the year of 1937, it is rather of significance to underscore the year 1932 as a major line of division in the development of Xiong's doctrine of Reality and Function. The reasons are as follows:

- (1) Like the distinction between the pre-Critical and the Critical period in Kant's philosophy, Xiong's doctrine of Reality and Function before 1932 represents his pre-Confucian / Yogācāra period, whereas his doctrine after 1932 represents a Confucian / anti-Yogācāra period.
- (2) A major sign of this distinction is seen in that Function was identified as "deluded manifestation" in the pre-Confucian / Yogācāra period, whereas Function was gradually to be conceived as a "well-founded phenomenon" in the Confucian / anti-Yogācāra period.
- (3) What Xiong found unacceptable in Yogācāra was its thesis of "double Reality and Function" 雙重體用. On the one hand, Yogācāra sees productive power and manifest dharmas as a Reality-Function (*ti-yong*) relationship. On the other hand, Yogācāra identifies Suchness and consciousness as a Reality-Function (*ti-yong*) relationship. In Xiong's eyes, such an "ambiguity" signified the "original sin" of Yogācāra. Eventually, the discovery of such a flaw in Yogācāra points to Xiong's departure from Buddhism as whole. Hereafter, he turned to be a Confucian.
- (4) Generally speaking, the year 1937 is of no particular significance in Xiong's understanding of Reality and Function—except the publication of his *Fojia mingxiang tongshi* 佛家名相通釋 (Complete explanation of Buddhist terms).<sup>3</sup> This is only a Buddhist dictionary (as shown in

---

<sup>3</sup> Xiong Shili, *Fojia mingxiang tongshi*, in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 2.

its title). Perhaps, since this was Xiong's last work on Buddhism, Sang feels justified in identifying its date of publication as an endpoint of the so-called early development of Xiong's understanding of Reality and Function. However, this work plays no role in the birth of Xiong's own doctrine of Reality and Function.

All this shows that Xiong's departure from Yogācāra in 1932 constitutes the watershed line between his pre-Confucian and Confucian period. In this sense, Sang's identification of the year 1937 as the "end" of Xiong's "early understanding of Reality and Function" is problematic in character. Sang sees her major contribution in being the first to detect that "Xiong once had a tendency to separate ontological Reality and the phenomenal world" (p. 7). This is, indeed, a new point in the scholarship on Xiong. However, given the distinction between the pre-Confucian / Yogācāra period and the Confucian period, one must add that Xiong's 1923 thesis of the separation of Reality and Function actually belongs to his hermeneutics of Yogācāra only. In other words, this is, at best, Xiong's position in his Yogācāra-interpretation. For, during this time, Xiong's own *ti-yong* system was not yet born. That is to say, such a dualist thesis only represents Xiong's understanding of Yogācāra in his pre-Confucian period. So, in this context the legitimacy of the speech of "the early development of Xiong's *ti-yong* metaphysics" (p. 7) is also in doubt. To be precise, one should rather speak of the years between 1923 and 1932 as "the period of Xiong Shili's Yogācāra-hermeneutics." In contrast, the "non-duality of Reality and Function" is an *intrinsic* characteristic of Xiong's own *ti-yong* system. So, there is no flaw for the other scholars to characterize Xiong's *ti-yong* system as "non-dual"—contrary to Sang's complaint.

Second, the typology of Xiong's developmental stages is, in reality, more complex than what Sang claims. According to Zhang Guangcheng 張光成, there is a further division into three developmental stages after Xiong's Confucian turn. This can be represented by the sequence of Xiong's three major works in his Confucian period: (1) *Xin weishi lun* (Literary Version, 1932); (2) *Xin weishi lun* (Vernacular Version, 1944);<sup>4</sup> and (3) *Yuanru* 原儒 (The primordial Confucianism, 1955).<sup>5</sup> According to Zhang, the difference between

<sup>4</sup> Xiong Shili, *Xin weishi lun* (Vernacular Version), in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Xiong Shili, *Yuanru*, in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 6.

the two versions of *Xin weishi lun* is shown in that the first version concerns the “Return of Function to Reality” 攝用歸體, while the second version describes the “Manifestation of Function by Reality” 會體歸用.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in *Yuanru*, Xiong’s aim was to expound the idea of “Returning to Function by Reality” 攝體歸用.<sup>7</sup>

To Zhang’s typology, one should add the remark that the first two represent Xiong’s theoretical philosophy, whereas the last one represents Xiong’s practical philosophy. That is to say, Xiong’s claim of “Returning to / Manifestation of Function by Reality” 攝 / 會體歸用 can be understood first as a theoretical-philosophical thesis, and then as a practical-philosophical thesis.

Third, one must note that there is a significant distinction between *Xin weishi lun* and *Ti-yong lun* 體用論 (Doctrine of Reality and Function, 1958; strangely enough, though this text was referred to by Sang in the “Introduction,” it was missing in the “Works Cited”). Function in the former was conceived as an “illusory manifestation”—as also underscored by Sang (p. 199), whereas Function in the latter was characterized to be “living-creative.” Now the thesis of the non-duality of Reality and Function is understood as follows: “When the appearance [= Function] is all gone, then Being [= Reality] would no longer exist anymore” (*Ti-yong lun*).<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, Xiong still had a “negative” view on the ontological status of Function in 1932—to this extent, he was more similar to the Huayan Buddhism than to the *Zhouyi*. On the other hand, Xiong gradually developed a “positive” view and, hence, an “affirmative” attitude towards Function after 1944—at this juncture, he was really able to return to the “optimum spirit” of the *Zhouyi*. That is to say, only the later position of Xiong comes closer to Leibniz’s (1646–1716) idea of *phenomena bene fundata*. Accordingly, we can understand why Xiong gave such a remark on *Ti-yong lun*: “With the completion of this volume, the

<sup>6</sup> See Zhang Guangcheng 張光成, *Zhongguo xiandai zhixue de chuangsheng yuandian: Xiong Shili ti-yong sixiang yanjiu* 中國現代哲學的創生原點：熊十力體用思想研究 (The creative source of modern Chinese philosophy: A study of Xiong Shili’s thought of Reality and Function) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2002), pp. 22–29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Xiong Shili, *Ti-yong lun*, in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 7, p. 43; see also p. 53ff: 相破盡，則性亦無存。

two versions of *Xin weishi lun* can be destroyed. They are no longer worth of preservation.”<sup>9</sup> In this way, Xiong could then really have entirely departed from Buddhism and completed his journey towards Confucianism.

This indicates, accordingly, that all together there are actually “six” stages in the development of Xiong’s understanding of Reality and Function: (1) 1923–1926: represented by *Weishixue gailun* 唯識學概論 (A general account of Yogācāra learning, 1923);<sup>10</sup> (2) 1926–1927: represented by *Weishixue gailun* 唯識學概論 (1926);<sup>11</sup> (3) 1927–1932: represented by *Weishi lun* 唯識論 (Treatise of Yogācāra, 1927);<sup>12</sup> (4) 1932–1944: represented by *Xin weishi lun* (Literary Version); (5) 1944–1955: represented by *Xin weishi lun* (Vernacular Version); and (6) 1955–1968: represented by *Yuanru*. Regrettably, this important distinction escaped Sang’s sight.

As far as the problem of the relationship between Xiong and Yogācāra is concerned, Sang sees her major task in uncovering how Xiong’s different understandings of Yogācāra led to the formation of his groundbreaking new *ti-yong* system. Sang’s main contribution lies in showing the details of such changes in the development of Xiong’s *ti-yong* system in terms of his critical receptions of Yogācāra. So, her goal is not to discuss whether Xiong’s Yogācāra-interpretation is faithful or fair to this Buddhist school. This approach is similar to that in the current scholarship on Heidegger’s (1889–1976) Nietzsche-interpretation. In such a context, one does not care much about the correctness of Heidegger’s Nietzsche-interpretation; rather, one focuses on seeing what role Heidegger’s Nietzsche-interpretation played in forming his later thought. So, it is necessary for us is to emphasize that Xiong’s understanding of Yogācāra is not an *immanent* interpretation. This also explains why such a ferocious attack, or even collective-unfriendly criticism, was raised by the Buddhist scholars against Xiong’s work. In hindsight, one might say that Xiong’s Yogācāra-interpretation belongs to the “hermeneutics of application.”

In traditional Yogācāra, there was a split between the Old School represented by Sthiramati (470–550) and Paramārtha (499–569), on the one hand,

<sup>9</sup> Xiong Shili, *Ti-yong lun*, p. 7: 此書既成，《新論》兩本俱毀棄，無保存之必要。

<sup>10</sup> Xiong Shili, *Weishixue gailun*, in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Xiong Shili, *Weishi lun*, in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 1.

and the New School represented by Dharmapāla (d. 561) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), on the other hand. Since Ouyang’s Yogācāra belongs to the lineage of the New School, Xiong was mainly trained along this line. Nonetheless, Xiong was also able to relatively appreciate Paramārtha’s ideas. Given the traditional attribution of Paramārtha as the translator of the *Dasheng qi xin lun*, it was natural for Xiong to make use of some of Paramārtha’s ideas in criticizing the New School’s position. To this extent, the Old School helps Xiong develop a critical attitude towards Xuanzang’s lineage. For Xiong, as Sang writes, “From the perspective of ultimate truth, however, consciousness does not truly exist, either” (p. 93). At this juncture, Sang merely speaks of the “divergence between Xiong’s view and the Xuanzang-Kuiji [窺基, 632–682] tradition of Yogācāra,” but without noticing Paramārtha’s cardinal thesis of the extinction of both object and consciousness 境識俱泯 (p. 94). Instead, this volume only focuses on the contrast between the New School and the *Dasheng qi xin lun*.

More importantly, from the standpoint of Western philosophy, Xiong was influenced by Bergson (1859–1941) in revolting against Yogācāra Buddhism on the way to forming his own *ti-yong* system. Indeed, such a connection was already mentioned—though without any deep analysis—by some scholars in China before.<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, Xiong gave some brief remarks on Bergson’s philosophy.<sup>14</sup> Since Bergson identified his doctrine as a cosmology, it is of significance to understand his role in turning Xiong into a cosmologist. Although, as Xiong claimed, his cosmology must be seen as a successor of the *Zhouyi*, it might be safe to say that Xiong’s return to the *Zhouyi* was mediated by his exposition to Bergson’s philosophy of life. (This was confirmed by Mou in a private talk with me.) Indeed, a year after Xiong’s enrolment into the *Zhina neixue yuan* in 1920, Lu Cheng 呂澂 (1896–1989) published an article entitled “Bogesen zhexue yu weishi” 柏格森哲學與唯識 (Bergson’s philosophy and Yogācāra).<sup>15</sup> In this short paper, Lu strongly criticized Bergson’s philosophy. As

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jing Haifeng 景海峰, *Xiong Shili zhexue yanjiu* 熊十力哲學研究 (A study of Xiong Shili’s philosophy) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247–66.

<sup>15</sup> Lu Cheng, “Bogesen zhexue yu weishi,” *Mingduo* 民鐸 (The people’s Tocsin) 3.1 (1921): 1–6.

a favourite disciple of Ouyang, Lu's view should have represented the official position of the whole *Zhina neixue yuan*. Given the overwhelming popularity of Bergson's philosophy in the twenties of the last century in China, such an event might have drawn Xiong's attention to Bergson's philosophy. Especially, as William James observed, Bergson's theories have such a charm that when people read them, "[t]here is a sudden change of attitude, the standard of philosophical values is found to have altered, and in the new light all things take on a different aspect."<sup>16</sup> In seeing Xiong's doctrine of Reality and Function as a modern version of the *Zhouyi*, one might still be puzzled by the fact that instead of employing the more popular pair concept of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, Xiong primarily spoke of *pi* 辟 (expansion) and *xi* 翕 (contraction). This fact reminds us of Bergson's construing the movement of *durée* (duration) in terms of the shift between *tension* 收緊 and *se détente* (放鬆, extension).<sup>17</sup> In short, both Bergson and Xiong are similar in seeing their respective philosophical system primarily as a cosmological doctrine. Interestingly enough, Lu's criticism against Bergson can be seen as an anticipation of his later critique of Xiong's Confucian thought. But this does not imply that Xiong's doctrine was merely an imitation of Bergson's philosophy. There are evidential distinctions between these two. More importantly, overcoming Bergson's metaphysical dualism might become a mark of the triumph of Xiong's *ti-yong* system. In particular, Xiong undermined Bergson's concept of instinct by comparing it to the Yogācāra notion of "habituated tendency" 習氣.<sup>18</sup> Methodologically, Xiong characterized his approach as "intuitive." As is well known, "Bergson contends . . . that the construction of a metaphysic should be the work of intuition rather than of intellect."<sup>19</sup> In fact, in the same special issue on Bergson of the journal, *The People's Tocsin*, Liang—Xiong's good friend and mentor—gave a detailed discussion on Bergson's concept of intuition in his paper entitled "Weishijia yu

---

<sup>16</sup> See G. N. Dolson, "The Philosophy of Henri Bergson, I," *The Philosophical Review* 19.6 (Nov. 1910): 579.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1941), p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Xiong Shili, *Xin weishi lun* (Vernacular Version), p. 534.

<sup>19</sup> See Dolson, "The Philosophy of Henri Bergson, I," 579.



Bogesen” 唯識家與柏格森 (Yogācārin and Bergson).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, despite the influences from Bergson, as Jing Haifeng reported, Xiong emphasized that his understanding of intuition was different from intuition as *élan vital* in Bergson’s sense.<sup>21</sup> As a whole, in criticizing Bergson for missing the idea of Reality 體, Xiong goes beyond Bergson in achieving an onto-cosmology 本體宇宙論—rather than a cosmology only. As a running remark, one should note that Mou’s term “onto-cosmology” is, indeed, an appropriated expression in showing the *topos* of Xiong’s *ti-yong lun*. Regrettably, Xiong’s Bergson-connection was entirely overlooked in Sang’s volume.

In reflecting on Xiong’s doctrine of Reality and Function, Sang raises two questions:

- (1) Why is Xiong’s philosophy of Reality and Function unique?
- (2) Why did Xiong continue to modify and develop his conception of Reality and Function?

Sang answers the first question mainly in terms of Xiong’s different accentuations in his critique of Buddhism, whereas she answers the second question by a focus on working out the implications of Xiong’s thesis of identification of the mind with Reality. However, it is necessary to point out that only when one appreciates that Xiong’s eager search for a way out to help the Chinese rid themselves of the political turmoil in promoting their philosophical spirit constitutes the primitive motive of his works on *ti-yong* system, is one able to develop an “ultimate” answer to the first question. In fact, Xiong announced:

Only when people depend themselves upon the other, then there is someone to rule them. Only when people try to win a favour from the other, there is someone to beat them as slaves. How can this be a good government? What our fellow Chinese actually need are “independent thinking,” “academic autonomy,” and “spiritual autarky.” All people must be self-determined for themselves and never subject themselves to the

---

<sup>20</sup> Liang Shuming, “Weishijia yu Bogesen,” *Mingduo* 3.1 (1921): 1–6. Reprinted in Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan xueshu weiyuanhui 中國文化書院學術委員會, ed., *Liang Shuming quanji* 梁漱溟全集 (The complete writings of Liang Shuming) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 644–49.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jing Haifeng, *Xiong Shili* 熊十力 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1991), p. 246.

other. Everyone has to exist with high self-estimate and poetically dwell on the wide-spreading earth under the broad sky.<sup>22</sup>

This important message enables us to give a more satisfactory answer to the second question as well. Originally, Sang's answer is also able to refer to the fact that "Confucians advocate vigour (*gangjian* 剛健) and creativity (*chuangxin* 創新) without fearing mortality (*sisheng* 死生) and delighting in extinction" (p. 227). In Xiong's case, this is clearly seen in his self-description: "[M]y way of study focuses on creating [something new]."<sup>23</sup> At this juncture, one should also note that Xiong's publication of *Yuanru* after the founding of PRC in 1949 signified his practical-philosophical turn. In contrast to the literary version of *Xin weishi lun* as Xiong's New Confucian ontology, and the vernacular version of *Xin weishi lun* as his New Confucian cosmology—to this extent, Xiong is a Confucian counterpart of Bergson—*yuanru* represents his New Confucian socio-political philosophy. In brief, with his strong advocacy of the idea of creativity, Xiong sees the goal of his ethico-political thought as setting his fellow Chinese free from "slave morality," and then moving towards "master morality" in the Nietzschean sense. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche's philosophy was also well-received by the Chinese scholars in the first three decades of the last century. Xiong's final position in his understanding of Reality and Function is, indeed, affined to Nietzsche's "saying yes to this world." This gives him impetus to continuously modify and develop his conception of Reality and Function. So, it is interesting to investigate the possible influence of Nietzsche upon the development of Xiong's *ti-yong* system as well. To be sure, for the future explorations of Xiong's philosophy, Sang's volume will function as a necessary stepping stone.

WING-CHEUK CHAN  
Brock University, Canada

<sup>22</sup> Xiong Shili, *Shili yuyao chuxu* 十力語要初續 (The first sequel to *Selected letters and speeches of Xiong Shili*), in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 5, p. 25: 有依人者，始有宰制此依者，有奴於人者，始有鞭笞此奴者，至治惡可得乎？吾國人今日所急需要者，思想獨立、學術獨立、精神獨立，一切依自不依他，高視闊步而遊乎廣天博地之間。

<sup>23</sup> Xiong Shili, *Shili yuyao* 十力語要 (Selected letters and speeches of Xiong Shili), in Xiao, ed., *Xiong Shili quanji*, vol. 4, p. 494: 吾之為學也，主創而已。