Mr. Fei Xiaotong has set out the precise reasons why he chose this topic for discussion.\(^1\) I see his way of thinking as comprehensive and all-embracing. Compared to economic recession in America and the West and social chaos in Russia and Eastern Europe, China in recent years has upheld social stability whilst at the same time maintaining relatively high economic growth. Against this backdrop two tendencies have appeared in the international arena: the first is an exaggeration and overly high estimate of the growth and development of the Chinese economy; the second is excessive apprehension of China’s future development. The latter tendency is epitomised by the book *The Clash of Civilisations* written by the prestigious Harvard professor Samuel Huntington. He foresees that international conflicts in the coming century will no longer be led by national states. The coming conflict faced by the West is with Islamic civilisation and with Confucian civilisation represented by China. These two tendencies are such as to put us on our guard. The Chinese economy is starting from a low point, China’s population is huge and problems many, so even though the economy is beginning to develop rapidly yet there is no room for complacency. In the past people held that the foundation of governance is ‘in fear and trembling’. In fact the stability and development of the last three to four years is precisely because there is a factor of fear and trembling present. In other words, ultimately, there is a sort of hardship mentality.

Of course, in the wake of the healthy growth of the economy, national cultural self-confidence has necessarily increased as well. In recent years the impatient disparagement of traditional culture has gradually faded away, which is itself a reflection of social and economic development. In 1990 I replied to the request of a journal and wrote an article entitled

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\(^1\) On Professor Fei Xiaotung’s suggestion, *Qun Yan* editorial board invited several scholars to meet on 4 December 1993 for a seminar on “Traditional culture; reform and opening-up; a new pattern for the world”. This paper is my contribution to the seminar.
A Propitious New Start. In it I said that Chinese civilisation represented by Confucianism has already undergone its most critical period. It has already walked through the trough and has begun to face new developments. Not only that, but thinking people have begun to reflect on what Chinese culture can contribute to modern society, including the contemporary world. Last year Mr. Fei wrote *Thought on the Confucian Forest*, in which he said that our era needs Confucius. There should be more young people who understand Confucius. I was very happy to read his article. I think that today’s topic is in line with that article of Fei’s. Below I present some opinions and thoughts about this topic.

1. Benevolence as Substance and Harmony as Means

Fei’s article and discourse remind me of Liang Shuming. Liang was the first person who wanted to embody Confucius in twentieth century China. In 1949 he wrote a book in 14 chapters entitled *A Compendium of Chinese Culture*. The question he sought to reply to was precisely that raised by Fei, namely given such a vast territory and mass of people, so great a harmony of peoples, such a long history, what kind of strength and cause was it that could maintain this Chinese culture so? Liang’s conclusion was that it was due to the rational element of Chinese culture. It was because this traditional element matured very early on. Liang’s understanding of ‘reason’ was rather peculiar. He distinguished reason from intellect. By reason he understood a calm and comprehensive mind. Recently I wrote an article about Liang, in which I pointed out that I understand Liang’s reason, when put into classical Chinese terminology, as none other than ‘benevolence’, or to use the language of western scholarship, it can be said to be very close to the ‘communicative rationality’ of the modern European sociologist Habermas. In this context, we can say that the communicative rationality propounded by modern western sociology had already begun to be developed several thousand years before in China. So Liang’s thesis that in Chinese culture “reason emerged early, culture was mature early”, holds that these two points led to the formation of important characteristics of Chinese culture, and were bequeathed to us as a great and valuable patrimony.

From here I think I can go on to reply to Fei’s question, that is to say, the sources uncovered by Liang are not only the cause of Chinese cultural development over several millennia. They are also a resource