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*New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* by Xiong Shili (review)

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his own writings.) These, by the way, are among the few translations into English known to me of any of al-Tawhīdī's writings, and they read very well, though I have not been able to compare the Arabic originals. (Incidentally, another English translation of al-Tawhīdī appears in Geert Jan van Gelder's excellent *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology* [New York: New York University Press, 2013], pp. 195–207, this time from the *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*.)

This is an important book, and it is an excellent one: closely argued, meticulously documented, and very well written. It not only brings al-Tawhīdī more sharply into focus by clearing away the many misconceptions that have obscured his reputation. It also brings his thought alive. It shows how intricately interwoven his ethical propositions were with those of his contemporaries, notwithstanding their frequent, and substantial, differences. Theirs was a common endeavor; all of them, whether philosopher, historian, or courtier, contributed actively to the Būyid "social imaginary," and, for all his stubborn independence, al-Tawhīdī stood preeminent among them. One of the leitmotifs of al-Tawhīdī's ethical thought, as Alshaar presents it, is his statement (from his *al-Hawāmil wa'l-Shawāmil*, co-written with Miskawayhī): "Indeed, man has become a difficult problem for man" (*inna al-insān qad ashkala 'alayhi al-insān*), an observation that is as pertinent today as it was in Būyid times. It is Nuha A. Alshaar's signal achievement to have elaborated this "difficult problem" in so lucid and subtle a fashion.

*New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*. By Xiong Shili, an Annotated Translation by John Makeham. World Thought in Translation series. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. Pp. lxviii + 341. Hardcover \$85.00, ISBN 978-0-300-19157-8.



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*New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* is an annotated translation by John Makeham of Xiong Shili's (1885–1968) major philosophical work *Xin weishi lun* 新唯識論, one of the most difficult and least understood of the crucial Chinese theoretical works of the twentieth century. In this work Xiong has integrated central concepts, problems, and themes from traditional Chinese philosophy with those representative of Sinitic Buddhist philosophy in order to create an ambitious philosophical syncretism.

On the one hand, the book is a modern Confucian critique of the Buddhist theory of consciousness introduced to China by the pilgrim Xuanzang in the Tang dynasty. Xiong criticizes the original Yogācāra pioneers of this theory, for instance the brothers Vasubandhu and Asanga as well as their numerous successors. In this critical context,

the book is mainly directed against their theory of “seeds” (*bīja* 種子), which was originally only a heuristic metaphor. In the works of the Yogācāra thinkers, however, the seeds were seen as a sort of atom forming the ontological basis of everything. According to this view, they are stored in the eight levels of consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), in which they become discrete causal agents that bring into being all mental and physical dharmas. Xiong believes that with this reinterpretation of the term “seeds,” the Yogācāra thinkers effectively substantialized their position and, consequently, also the earlier Buddhist theories on consciousness as such.

On the other hand, however, Xiong has also applied Buddhist philosophical insights to reconstructing Confucianism, considering the fact that his theory is influenced both by Buddhism and by his own interpretations of the *Book of Changes*, which he regarded as one of the most important and basic Confucian classics. Both approaches have inspired Xiong to develop his own systematic philosophy, consisting of ontology (*jing lun* 境論) and epistemology (*liang lun* 量論), although the latter is not included in the present book. (Xiong has written only a rough outline of this part in his later work on original Confucianism [*Yuan Ru* 原儒]). Hence, the central problem Xiong has dealt with in the present work is the relation between the ontological and the phenomenal within his basic understanding of the binary oppositional relation between Fundamental Reality or dynamic essence (*ti* 體) and function (*yong* 用), or contraction (*xi* 翕) and expansion (*pi* 闢). Through the application of these correlative and complementary paradigms, he shows how and why the phenomenal is not different from Reality in the ontological sense. The only difference between both realms is to be found in our human experiencing of them.

Until recently, the original Chinese work was known in the Western world as the “New Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Theory.” Makeham emphasizes that

[t]he Chinese title may well have been intended to carry a second level of meaning. Given that *Xin weishi lun* is presented as a critical response to Xuanzang’s (602–664) *Cheng weishi lun* 成唯識論 (*Demonstration of Nothing but Consciousness*), the argument could be made that the title of Xiong’s work has the additional implicit sense of a *New Demonstration of Nothing but Consciousness*. (p. xiv)

Makeham’s rendering (or correction) of the original translation of the title is based upon Xiong’s own specific elucidation of the term *weishi* 唯識, pointing out that in his context the multifaceted term *wei* 唯 means “unique” (殊特) and not “only” or “solely” (p. 53). Given the fact that such Sanskrit terms as *vijñapti-mātra* (*weishi* 唯識) and *citta-mātra* (*weixin* 唯心) mean “cognition only” or “nothing but cognition” and “mind only” or “nothing but mind,” respectively, it is important to note that we are dealing here with Xiong’s radical modification (or reinterpretation) of the original notions. Hence, with his new translation of the title, Makeham makes clear that Xiong’s book is not based on the negation of the existence of objects, but only refutes the presumption of their independent existence, because, for Xiong, cognitive objects and consciousness are not separate, but rather form an integral unity. Nevertheless, since consciousness is able to discern cognitive objects, its potent function is unique.

As already mentioned, *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* was originally intended to include two parts, namely Xiong's ontology and his epistemology. Since the latter part was not included in the work, it only consists of the first part, which is titled *On Cognitive Objects (Jing lun 境論)*. The treatise, which is introduced by Cai Yuanpei's and Ma Yifu's forewords as well as Xiong's own introduction, is structured in eight chapters. These include "Explanation of the Thesis (明宗)" (*Mingzong*) and a comprehensive definition of the crucial term "*Weishi* (唯識)," followed by chapters on "Transformation (轉變)" (*Zhuanbian*) and on "Productive Power (功能)" (*Gongneng*). The last part of the book contains two chapters, "Demonstration of Material [Dharmas], A (成色上)" (*Chengse shang*) and "Demonstration of Material [Dharmas], B (成色下)" (*Chengse xia*), and it concludes with two final chapters titled "Explaining the Mind, A (明心上)" (*Mingxin shang*) and "Explaining the Mind, B (明心下)" (*Mingxin xia*). The translation also includes a comprehensive bibliography and an index of the most important terms.

The book opens with an in-depth explanation of the core problem, namely the differentiation between ontology and phenomenology, between Fundamental Reality on the one hand and cognitive objects on the other. While the former (which is identified with self-nature or the true nature) forms the basis of the phenomenal world, it is simultaneously not different from it. Here, Xiong applies his famous comparison with the sea (Fundamental Reality) and its waves (the phenomenal world). According to Xiong, this Reality exists in a continuous process of transformation and can only be apprehended through introspection, which leads to wisdom. The latter must be strictly distinguished from the concept of discernment, which is only concerned with analyzing cognitive objects and hence cannot lead to a realization of the truth, which can only be achieved through non-conceptual wisdom.

The second chapter deals with the central theme of the book, namely with the uniqueness of consciousness (*weishi*), and is divided into two parts, dealing with refutations of the attachment to external objects and to consciousness, respectively. Xiong points out that traditional Chinese and ancient Indian masters had the same insight into the nature of reality (p. 56). In this chapter, Xiong also begins developing the central parts of his critique of the Yogācāra master's reinterpretation of the doctrine of seeds, pointing out the problematic nature of their hypostatizing the doctrine of dependent arising (*yuansheng* 緣生), by which consciousness is generated (p. 61), into a doctrine of seeds (p. 63). In the context of the second part of the chapter he first explains the four crucial conditions on which relies consciousness, which is devoid of self-nature (and hence of an independent existence). On this basis is grounded his thesis that mind-consciousness is nothing but an illusion. Makeham stresses that for Xiong, "just as atomism is logically indefensible, so too is the idea that reality is constructed of aggregations of atomic-like seeds" (p. xxxvi).

In this framework, Xiong also introduces his understanding of the Confucian concept of change (*yi* 易), which was used as a helpful tool in explaining the inherent processual features of the concept of transformation (*zhuanbian* / *parināma*) in the following chapter. Here his account of transformation is also founded upon negating the view presented in the *Cheng weishi lun*, which presupposes a division of

consciousness into the sphere of perception (*nengbian* 能變), which could be identified with the subject, and the realm of imagination, which is equal with the object of apprehension (*suobian* 所變). Xiong's own view on the concept of transformation is elaborated as "a direct challenge to, and radical departure from, the seeds-based causal theory found in *Cheng weishi lun*" (p. xxxviii). For Xiong, transformation is a process generated by the above-mentioned contractions and expansions that are associated with stillness and movement in the *Book of Changes* (*Xici shang* 繫辭上, 6). He sees the former as something coming close to being matter, and the latter as something that approaches being the highest spirit (*zhi shen* 至神) (p. 98), or, in Makeham's translation, something "utterly unimpeded." This is similar to the Neo-Confucian Zhang Zai's (1020–1077) view of condensing (*ju* 聚) and dispersion (*san* 散). Xiong emphasizes that, in such a process of transformation, subject (*neng* 能) and object (*suo* 所) cannot be separated, as both the perceiving and the image part are needed for perception to occur; that is, only both parts together represent what consciousness transforms into.

The next chapter, "Productive Power" (*Gongneng/śakti*), is also crucial for understanding Xiong's constructive theory. In this chapter, Xiong explains his view on the emptiness of phenomena, which are devoid of self-nature (p. 128). In this context, Makeham claims that this view is based on a Prajñāpāramitā-like perspective and is congruent with the idea of Suchness (*zhenru* 真如 / *tathatā*), as presented in the classical work of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論), namely with the ontological basis of everything. His explanation of the Productive Power is based on his critique on Xuanzang's (or Dharmapāla's) interpretation of the concept. In Xiong's view it is not an individuated potential pertaining to the seeds, but rather implies the totality of all things. He distinguishes it sharply from the habituated tendencies: while the productive power is continuous and pertains to heaven (*tian* 天), the habituated tendencies are a fixed feature of the form-and-vital-stuff (*xingqi* 形氣), that is, the physical body and the physical world in which it is embedded (p. 138). Xiong illustrates this difference with the Chinese concepts of heaven (*tian*) and human beings (*ren* 人), respectively, but also with the relation between pattern (*li* 理) and vital potential (*qi* 氣).

In the next two short chapters Xiong deals with material dharmas, which he identifies with physical phenomena, including the body. In these short chapters, he elaborates on his thesis that although to us the world appears as being constituted of particular distinct phenomena, all things are, in fact, interconnected and mutually penetrating, forming an inseparable unity. The last part of these passages provides an analysis of the perception of phenomena through the lens of the human central nervous system and the sensory organs.

From this illumination of the material dharmas, Xiong proceeds in the last two chapters to a detailed description of the mind dharmas. In the first of these two final chapters, Xiong provides a detailed explanation of the concept and the fundamental features of the mind. For him, the Reality of mind does not possess self-nature and is in constant transformation, which means that it is "absolutely still yet moving"

(p. 177). He tries to explain the relation between mind and Fundamental Reality by returning to the concepts of contraction (*xi*) and expansion (*pi*) on the one hand, and dynamic essence (*ti*) and function (*yong*) on the other. Similar to the material dharmas, the mind does not possess any individual self-nature. It comes into being through the self-nature or Reality of constant transformation. In this context, Makeham's introduction points out that "in relation to contraction, constant transformation is expansion, and in relation to things, it is mind" (p. xlix). And while the Fundamental Reality can be identified with the concept *ti*, the mind pertains to the function, that is, to the concept *yong*, although, ultimately, they are two sides of the same coin. Hence, later in this chapter Xiong also explains that mind is everywhere and cannot be limited to the body; therefore, it can be identified with nature (*xing*), which is, again, a "synonym for Fundamental Reality" (p. lii). Then Xiong provides a detailed description of the eight levels of consciousness, criticizing the mechanistic view of the seeds and their relation to the mind, as posited by the Yogācāra School. In this regard, he also draws attention to the problematic nature of applying the analytical methods of "breaking down" (*fenxi* 分析). The chapter concludes with an elaboration of the relation between the mind and mental associates or "that which belongs to thought" (*xinsuo* 心所 / *caitta*).

A detailed description of these mental factors, summing up the mental activities that accompany and assist all mental processes, is offered in the last chapter. Xiong distinguishes between thirty-eight mental associates that can be categorized into four groups. In contrast to the mind, which is innate and pertains to nature, mental associates are acquired and grounded in experience. Without them, however, the mind would remain in its pristine, original state; therefore, its cultivation is necessary in order to enable human beings to live. Hence, in Xiong's view, learning and cultivation are by no means different from nature, because without such practice nature could not be revealed. In a genuinely Confucian way, Xiong hence stresses the fact that the Fundamental Reality or the inherent mind has no meaning without its individual, personal realization in the concrete phenomenal world.

Indispensable to the understanding of this difficult treatise for a Western reader is Makeham's own fifty-seven-page introduction. It is not limited to descriptions and summaries of each chapter, but, more importantly, also includes in-depth explanations of numerous problematic terms and expressions, as well as analyses of the inherent logic and fundamental conceptions that form the framework of the *New Treatise*. In this sense, Makeham's introduction is more than a collection of explanatory notes or annotations to difficult notions, but can rather be seen as a profound philosophical work in itself. The author follows the main structure of the original work, explaining the essence and elaborating on the most difficult parts of each chapter, without losing the common thread of the essential, inherently connected, and causally structured contents of the sometimes highly condensed text. Thus, this introduction does not just consist of explanations of various difficult issues that can be found in the original work, nor is it limited to particular interpretations of individual textual and linguistic structures, categories, concepts, and methodological provisions that differ depending on their semantic contexts.

In this sense, it is important to stress that Makeham's translations of difficult Sanskrit notions via their Chinese "synonyms" (which are sometimes highly problematic in themselves) are not only grounded in rendering one language into another, but also involve broader and more complex "translations" or transpositions of different discourses. In this way, it becomes much easier for a Western reader to gain a more authentic insight into Xiong's constructive philosophy. Makeham's introduction enables a better understanding of the themes and problems Xiong was dealing with when trying to incorporate complex notions derived from traditional Chinese philosophy into the framework of Sinicized Buddhist philosophy in order to illuminate a coherent, logically consistent, and philosophically convincing syncretic system.

Makeham's task was even more ambitious since, in elaborating on the above-mentioned discursive translations, he naturally had to deal (and to be intensively familiar) with three different paradigms underlying three different philosophical systems: the Indian, the Chinese, and the Western (or Euro-American). He was confronted with several difficult issues pertaining to the latter in his search for proper English terms that could denote classical Buddhist and/or Confucian notions. Besides, he clearly shows how and why Xiong's thought was profoundly influenced by both classical Confucian as well as Buddhist philosophy; even the overall analytical framework of the *New Treatise*, which still is often defined as being derived from "Western" philosophy, was, in fact, an (almost exclusive) heir to the Indian Buddhist cognitive tradition. This clarification is *inter alia* of utmost importance for the general evaluation of the contemporary Confucian revival, because Xiong, who was a pioneer of the Modern Confucian intellectual movement, created his ideational system on the basis of Neo-Confucian reform, and the latter was deeply influenced not only by Daoist, but also and foremost by Buddhist thought.

Regarding Makeham's brilliant and comprehensive study, however, we must still ask ourselves whether speaking of radical ontological monism (and phenomenological dualisms) is based on the proper terminology for describing certain basic paradigms of classical Chinese (or Confucian) philosophical reasoning. In the classical Confucian framework, *ti* and *yong* (dynamic essence or Fundamental Reality and function) or *xi* and *pi* (expansion and contraction) belong to the so-called binary categories (*duili fanchou* 對立範疇). The mutual interaction of such binary oppositional notions that form a unity of differences is conditioned and carried out by the principle of correlative complementarity. It is by no means (as is the case in the classical Indian and in the prevailing traditional European models of duality) marked by an exclusive contradiction between affirmation and negation (or thesis and antithesis). This bipolar or dual (but hardly dualistic) model underlies a particular form of dialectic reasoning that does not include separate syntheses; in such models, syntheses are being part of the continuous interaction between the two particular bipolar notions composing the binary category. Hence, in my view, Xiong's Reality is certainly an all-encompassing unity; however, it cannot be viewed as a monistic entity, because monism attributes not only oneness, but also singleness to existence.

This view is also in contradiction with Ma Yifu's explanation (p. 9) and with most of the contemporary Confucian interpretations, such as those, for instance, of Cheng

Zhihua or Guo Qiyong, who believe that Xiong's ontology is rooted in the basic principle of original creativity (*qianyuan* 乾元), a dynamic and relational paradigm derived from the *Book of Changes*. The concept of transformation that underlies and conditions this ontological model, and which has been described in detail by both Xiong and his translator John Makeham, is rooted in continuous dynamic change, which prevents the static vision of any (separate moments of) singleness, not only in the realm of experience but also in the sphere of existence. Hence, it is also questionable whether Reality can truly be described with the Western term "absolute"; although Xiong sometimes identifies it with the notion of "absolute truth" (*jueduide zhenli* 絕對的真理), his application of the term *juedui* refers solely to a kind of holistic perception that cannot be relativized. Hence, while Reality is a continuously transforming ontological unity, which cannot be grasped through cognitive differentiating of some particular "characteristics," or through any kind of subject-object distinctions, it is still, in essence, a unity of changeable and changing differences. One should take into consideration that only on such a basis can the dual (but not dualistic) nature of phenomenological experiences be embedded in a wholeness of existence and its perception.

In spite of this minor terminological (but implicitly also methodological) question, which remains open to further discussion, it is beyond any doubt that John Makeham has created an indispensable source not only for experts and students of Buddhist and Confucian philosophy, but also for specialists in Western philosophy, who may not be familiar with either of the two ideational systems. In its profound essence, his annotated translation of the *New Treatise* offers us a proper and rich foundation for studying Chinese thought. A significant value of the present work can hence be found in the fact that it is grounded not only in the recognition of a "different theoretical model," but also in the relativization of the underlying structures of logic and perception. Makeham's explanations of these fundamentals—which also inevitably influence the basic theoretical approaches, comprehension structures, and conceptual frameworks—constitute a platform that permits a much more complex and coherent understanding of Xiong Shili's philosophy at its deepest levels.