

Liang Qichao's Philosophical Thoughts and the Diversity of Contemporary Philosophy and Culture: An Analysis of Historical Influence from an Axiological Perspective

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Abstract: Liang Qichao is a prominent philosopher of modernity in China who encountered historical changes and events that shaped his perspectives about nationalism and cultural identity. Our main objective is to study the evolution of Liang Qichao's axiology and its influence on the development of modern China. A mixed methods approach was used involving textual, comparative text, and historical analyses of key terms and themes in Liang Qichao's writings. The findings showed dynamic axiology with shifts from emphasis in national strengthening and preservation of Chinese culture to focusing on participation of citizens in national development and constitutionalism, globalism, social reforms and individual rights. Liang Qichao's axiological framework was embraced by adaptability, balancing act between collective values and individual values, intellectual freedom and modernization of China.

Keywords: Liang Qichao, Axiology, China, Modernity, National Identity, Social Change and Individual Rights.

1. INTRODUCTION

Liang Qichao was a native Xinhui born in February 23, 1873 in the southern county of Guangdong province. Xinhui is mainly characterised by fishermen and farmers and hailed from a wealthy family of local gentry and enrolled in traditional Confucian schools (Lee, 2013). At 16 years, Liang Qichao attained a juren degree (Wills, 2012) then spent his subsequent years analysing Neo-Confucian studies with a focus on critical and detailed classical texts. However, in 1890, he failed the civil service examinations administered in Beijing after which he realized that the unlimited boundaries of the Middle Kingdom consisted of five continents and several other nations (Tang, 1996). Additionally, in 1890, Liang Qichao collaborated with reformists such as Kang Youwei and undertook studies at Wanmu Caotang (Kang's private school) located in Guangzhou that

formed a basis for his entire life (Chang, 1971). Liang Qichao lived in the last 40 years within the Qing dynasty and of the initial two decades of the Republican China (Paulès, 2023). He was known as an enthusiastic recipient and initiator of social and intellectual reforms in mainland China. According to Liang (n.d), Liang Qichao was symbol of patriotism and a frustrated individual who served as a conservative constitutionalist and his failures led to the successive revolution of the communist's party in China and prosperity (Liang et al., 1983). Ni postulated that Liang Qichao had no intention to overthrow the monarch in China, however, he believed that the powers of the emperor should be reserved before granting political rights to the general public (Ni, 2015). It is because the general public does not have the essential political consciousness and knowledge. Thus, Liang Qichao was a compromising and a wavering individual who retained illusion about the monarchy system. According to Benická, Liang Qichao was a prominent political reformer, journalist, writer and translator who advocated for the political model of constitutional monarchy (Benická, 2018). Xiao found that the works of Liang Qichao and Kang were used by the emperor Guangxu who acted on their advice to restructure the imperial system (Xiao, 2008). The restructuring of the imperial system involved introduction of modern schools, publishing western books and translations related to politics, history and modifying the 2000-year-old civil examinations system. In 1898, Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei devised Hundred Day's reform plans for the imperial court of Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) from which he escaped arrest and went to exile in Japan for fourteen years. In Japan, Liang Qichao advocated for favourable political reforms in China and initiated several journals and political organizations (Benická, 2018). At the beginning of the 20th century, Liang Qichao played crucial roles in the introduction of Western social and political ideologies such as principles of International Law and Social Darwinism.

1.1 Civic Nationality and Cultural Monism

According to Du, Liang Qichao was mainly concerned with justifications of the historical transition of China from an empire to a nation the “bianfa” (comprising of changing laws and various institutions) (Du, 2021). Liang's views of reforms revolved around the creation of new institutions, for example, railway systems, modern schools for men and women, protection of individual rights and a parliamentary system. He believed that these institutions were the fundamental and critical components of a modern nation. However, in the late 19th century, these institutions were illegitimate

and unjustified. In his first published essay in 1896 (*Bianfa tonglun*), Liang admitted difficulty in justifying historical changes to his contemporaries. His innovative solutions to this long outstanding problem were found in his essay “*Bianfa tonglun*” based on his keen reflective awareness about the underlying assumptions that must be taken by his contemporaries at the turn of the century. These assumptions constituted the framework of the cultural monism and he termed them as *lixiang* (imaginative principles). According to Liang *lixiang* defined all things that an individual could imagine and can be considered as reasonable principles (Liang, 1999). The minds of individuals of any nation consists of inherited social customs that existed for thousand of years with great philosophers who embodied these teachings and internalized them in all individuals brain and was difficult to erase. Thus, *lixiang* were powerful principles in the world capable of producing customs and various events. The opposition to existing *liang* requires giant forces to successfully replace it with a new *lixiang*. Liang defined cultural monism using a set of *lixiang* which later encouraged the development of Levenson’s culturalism (Levenson, 1970). Liang’s assumptions were based on the fundamental view that Chinese civilization or the world’s civilization were based on the Confucian ways of rituals and morals (*li-yi*) that were deemed universally true and the sovereignty of the empire (*tianxia*) was based on the emperor (*tianzi*) who was the son of Heaven (*tian*). In most of his writings, cultural monism was a significant target and by advocating for civic nationalism, he viewed China as a nation whose sovereignty lied with its citizens. He found that China’s weakness was caused by three assumptions and constant defeats in the modern world (De Bary & Lufrano, 2001).

1.2 Liberty and Modernisation

Liang Qichao idea of national self-determination and individuality was similar to the views of Isaiah Berlin and Elie Kedourie on the basis of nationalism (Gries, 1999; Nianqun, 2019). In China, the right of self-determination and autonomy (*zizhu zhi quan*) is linked to sovereignty and every individual has national rights based on the elements of international law (Carrai, 2019). The term *zizhu zhi quan* was widely used by various philosophers such as Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong and Liang Qichao in reference to human beings (*ren*) or rather *ren zhi quan* (referring to all human beings) (Karl & Zarrow, 2020). Thus, all humans possess a fundamental right to self-autonomy and mastery. The innovative ideas of Liang and Kang were based on the political principles of human nature

rather than on the metaphysical principles. These political principles were applicable to all social, political and legal issues as established in the doctrines of *minquan* (peoples right and popular sovereignty). Kang's utopian idea of abolishing family in the future was met with attack and criticisms from the conservatives such as Zhang Zhidong who claimed that such statements were ridiculous it was a huge mistake to belief that every human being had a *zizhu zhi quan* (Karl & Zarrow, 2020). Therefore, Kang and Liang had transformed the slogan into a political narrative and it was unsurprising that Zhang had to restructure his interpretation to a nonpolitical, religion and harmless claim about the human nature. The statement that "Human beings have a right to self-mastery" was the initial universal theorem within Kang's axiomatic system which was applied to all the five Confucian human relationships of husband-wife, parent-child, teacher-disciple, emperor-subject and elder brother-younger brother. Kang appealed to this universality theorem when questioned about the basic aspects of Confucian morality. He thought that abolishing family would require children to grow up in government run units and they would see their parents when they grow up; furthermore, children did not expect their parents to be benevolent because all humans had all rights of autonomy. Kang had a utopian and revolutionary approach to family life and viewed children as strangers equipped with rights to self-mastery. Also, Kang advocated for the imposition of intimate human relations as a moral principle applied to all strangers. In contrast, Liang did not hold similar beliefs to Kang and stated that the idea of rights was not applicable in the realm of intimate human relationships and the writings of Liang had no value to the anarchists, abolitionists and individuals who championed the eradication of marriage in the New Culture Movement (Wang, 2023). According to Liang he stated that certain individuals who heard about Kang's principles of Utopia (Liang, 1999), selectively learned nothing except treating their families as strangers. However, when they heard Locke's and Kant's teachings of liberty, they indulged in excess and uncontrolled actions on the premise of natural rights. Liang Qichao differentiated legal and political liberty from the basics of social and ethical liberty based on the ideas of Isaiah Berlin on negative and positive liberty (Liu & Liu, 2020; van Dongen, 2020). Liang responded to criticisms of liberty and equality by defending them based on the domain of application. He stated that older generations in the country would comprehend the functions of liberty and equality as applicable to politics. Outside of politics, an individual has no appeal to the two principles and their

applicability is limited to the political domain, implying that everyone has a liberty that is protected by the law and all people are equal before the law (Liang, 1999). Liang's argument was that the older generation rejection to the basic principles of liberty and equality should not be misinterpreted with the negative ideas on the legal concepts and positive concepts of equality and liberty.

1.3 Objective

Based on the previous studies, our main objective was to study Liang Qichao's philosophical thoughts and their historical influence on the diversity of contemporary philosophy and culture from an axiological perspective. The following specific research objectives were formulated;

- i.) To identify and analyse various axiological themes in Liang Qichao's philosophical thoughts
- ii.) To examine the historical influence of Liang Qichao's axiological aspects of contemporary philosophy and culture
- iii.) To compare and contrast Liang Qichao's axiology with diverse contemporary philosophical and cultural events

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

Our study was a mixed methods research design that utilised qualitative and quantitative components based on textual, comparative, historical cases and contextualization analyses.

Our primary sources of information included government documents such as official proclamations, decrees and policies delivered during Liang Qichao's lifetime, contributions from articles and newspapers such as "Qingyi Bao" and "Xinmin Congbao". Personal letters were also analysed. Nianpu consisted of chronological records and accounts of Liang Qichao involving summary of his activities and historical contexts. The Liang Qichao nianpu consisted of thousands of letters about his activities while the nianpu changbian included summary to most letters and editorials (Liang et al., 1983). Quanji contained his collected works in several editions and more than 50 volumes.

Secondary sources of information included scholarly works on Chinese history such as publications about Liang Qichao, Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China.

2.2 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis was based on close readings of specific essays and works by Liang Qichao such as the collected works of *quanji*, *nianpu*, *xuanji*, *wenji* and *zhuanji*. These close readings focused on the vision of Liang Qichao for a modern citizen-based China reflecting the fundamental values of individual agency, revival of the nation and social responsibility. Furthermore, texts related to public opinions were analysed to evaluate the role of public opinion on the modern society with a focus on rationality and informed participation. Letters were analysed to reveal challenges and opportunities experienced by the young Chinese population. A visual concept map was constructed of the key concepts identified in Liang Qichao's writings examining their interrelationships and hierarchy. The main focus was on modernization, morality, citizenship, rights, renewal of cultures, self-improvement, national humiliation and national strength. Discourse analyses were conducted on various essays to examine the significance of critical thinking and intellectual freedom in China with a focus on how Liang Qichao used rhetoric persuade readers on autonomy, progress and open debates.

2.3 Comparative Analysis

Our comparative analysis involved examining philosophical trends, expressions of cultures, social movements and various case studies. Liberalism was evaluated by examining Liang Qichao's focus on individual rights and liberties to western liberalists such as Stuart Mill and how his ideas of citizenship and national identified with liberal principles. Communitarianism was assessed by examining how Liang Qichao's views on social responsibility and collective well-being of an individual compared with communitarian thinkers such as Amitai Etzioni. The cosmopolitanism view of Liang Qichao was assessed based on attitudes towards global integration and exchange of cultures compared to other views such as those of Martha Nussbaum. Cultural expressions were evaluated using prominent Chinese films such as "Farewell My Concubine" or "Springtime in a small town" and how they grappled with issues of modernization, social reforms and cultural identity. Furthermore, we evaluated how these films reflect the values of Liang Qichao such as national pride, morality and individual agency. Contemporary Chinese music was analysed focusing on issues of social inequality, political activism and environmental degradation. These musical pieces and lyrics were evaluated on how they aligned with Liang Qichao's values. Social movements were examined

based on environmentalism to analyse the axiological perspectives of environmental movements such as “Green Wall of China” and how it aligns with Liang Qichao’s ideas. Moreover, gender inequality was evaluated based on feminist movements in China, for example “MeToo” movements or campaigns and how they aligned with Liang Qichao’s philosophical thoughts on gender issues and the role of women. Political reforms were based on reforms in China and the calls for increased democratization and civil liberty. Lastly, we used case studies such as China’s one child policy, rise of Chinese nationalism, Belt and Road Initiative to examine axiological underpinnings consistent with Liang Qichao’s thoughts and ideas.

2.4 Historical Analysis

Timeline analyses involved key events such as the Opium wars, Taiping Rebellion, Sino-Japanese war, Boxer Rebellion, Hundred Day’s Reform, Xinhai revolution and the Republic of China and how these events shaped Liang Qichao’s sense and ideas. Furthermore, we evaluated intellectual trends such as the rise and fall of Gongyang school revival, self-strengthening, New Culture and Constitutional Reform Movements and how they are aligned with Liang Qichao philosophical development.

2.5 Measures

The frequency of key terms used by Liang Qichao was recorded such as the use of values, ethics, citizenship, morality, national identity, modernization and social progress. The changes were tracked over time across various texts for shifts in axiological emphasis. Themes were identified from code text passages to reveal themes such as individual rights, social responsibility, natural strength, global engagement and cultural preservation. Comparative analyses were examined based on various degrees of convergence or divergence from other thinkers, philosophers and social movements.

2.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative scales of high alignment, moderate alignment, low alignment or opposition were used in comparative analysis. In contrast, percentage of shared themes, similarity scores based on textual analysis. The historic counts of key events were recorded and correlated with significant shifts in Liang Qichao axiological idea. The strengths of each method were evaluated based on factors such as data quality, robustness of analysis and

trustworthiness. Our analysis was performed in Google Collaboratory (Python version 3.12).

3. RESULTS

Axiological considerations were drawn from various case studies such as One child policy (1979-2016) whose historical basis was derived from rapid and constant population growth, economic concerns and anxieties surrounding the national strength. The axiological debate around one child policy was based on an urge to regulate population growth and control economic development and environmental sustainability. Criticisms were raised against individual rights, social imbalances and ethical dilemma. Liang Qichao advocated for national rejuvenation and modernization of China with an emphasis on the significance of individual rights and ethical responsibility. Therefore, Liang Qichao views may have contributed to the later relaxation and abolishment of the one child policy. The policy had significant social consequences of gender imbalance, ageing population and psychological strains. Our findings showed a significant rise in contemporary Chinese nationalism increased by the sense of national pride and driven through economic prosperity and culture. Chinese nationalism is embodied in unity, historical communities and self-reliance. Liang Qichao's ideas on national identity, self-strengthening and cultural modernization was evident through nationalists who pursued the agenda of revitalizing China.

The focus on selective modernization and preservation of essential cultural values had significant effects on contemporary nationalism. While the works of Liang Qichao pursued an inclusive and progressive nationalism, the contemporary expressions of nationalism can be considered exclusive or assertive. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was built on the axiological framework of promoting global connectivity and economic development through infrastructure projects and cultural exchanges between China and the world. Liang Qichao's influence is observed based on the principles of international cooperation, national development through exchange and trade and cultural influences derived from the conception and implementation of BRI. Despite its significant success, it has faced significant drawbacks on transparency, debt burdens to other countries and environmental impacts.

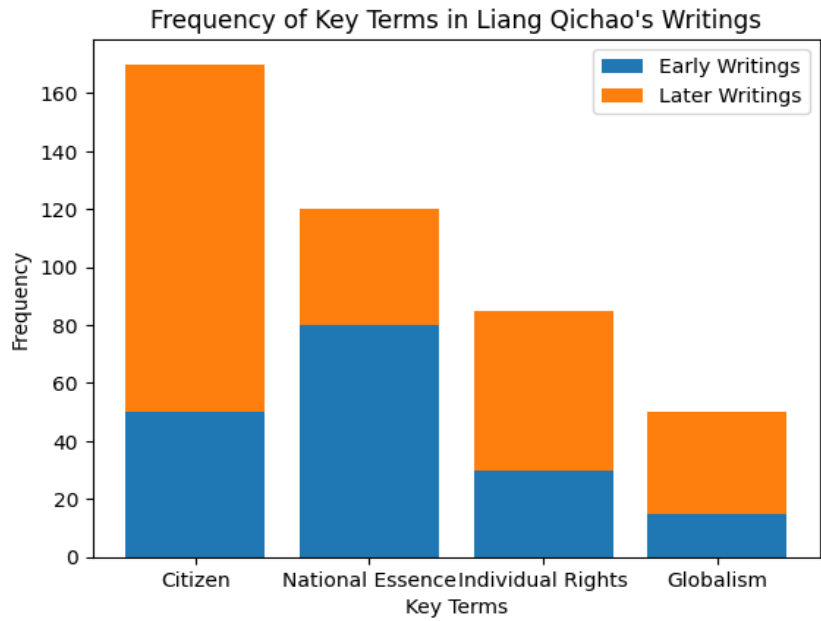


Figure 1: Frequency of Key Terms in Liang Qichao's Writings

In Figure 1, Liang Qichao’s writings increasingly focused on active participation of citizens in national development. Also, advocating for individual rights for a balance between social responsibility and individual freedom. National essence was geared towards harmony of modernization and cultural preservation. Lastly, global engagement emphasized China’s interconnections to the world.

Table 1: Presence of Themes in Liang Qichao's Arguments

Theme	Early Writings	Later Writings	Prominence Shift
Social Progress	High	High	Maintained
National Strength	High	Medium	Reduced emphasis
Cultural Assimilation	Medium	Low	Shift towards selective modernization
Intellectual Freedom	Medium	High	Increased advocacy

In Table 1, Liang Qichao’s arguments on intellectual freedom, cultural assimilation, national strength and social progress increased over time with a priority on social progress and intellectual freedom. He favoured selective modernization and less assimilation of western models to increase China’s strengths. Similarly, In Figure 2, national identity was valued at 40% preceded by modernization at 30% while in Figure 3, citizen, morality and nation was the most frequently occurring words affirming the distribution of values and key themes in Liang Qichao’s thought.

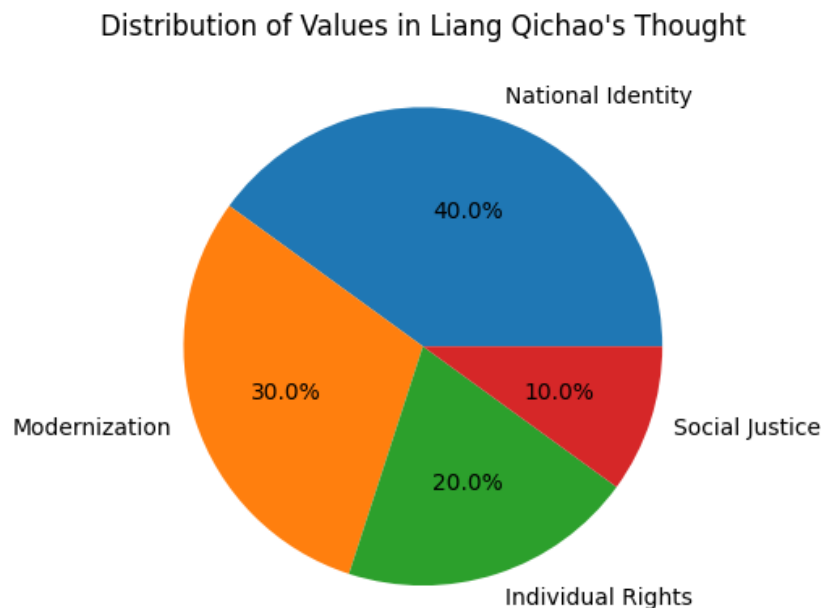


Figure 2: Distribution of Values in Liang Qichao's Thought

Word Cloud of Key Themes in Liang Qichao's Writings



Figure 3: Word Cloud of Key Themes in Liang Qichao's Writings

Table 3: A Comparison of Liang Qichao's Axiology with Liberalism

Value	Liang Qichao	Liberalism	Degree of Alignment
Individual Rights	Emphasized but balanced with social responsibility	Central tenet	Moderate alignment
Freedom of Speech	Conditional on promoting national unity and progress	Unrestricted within legal limits	Low alignment
Market Economy	Seen as a tool for national development	Core principle of individual choice	Moderate alignment

In Table 3, Liang Qichao's axiology with liberalism focused on key values of individual rights, freedom of speech and market economy. His conceptual network involved China's future, renovation of Chinese

Table 4: Comparison of Liang Qichao's Axiology with Contemporary Environmentalism

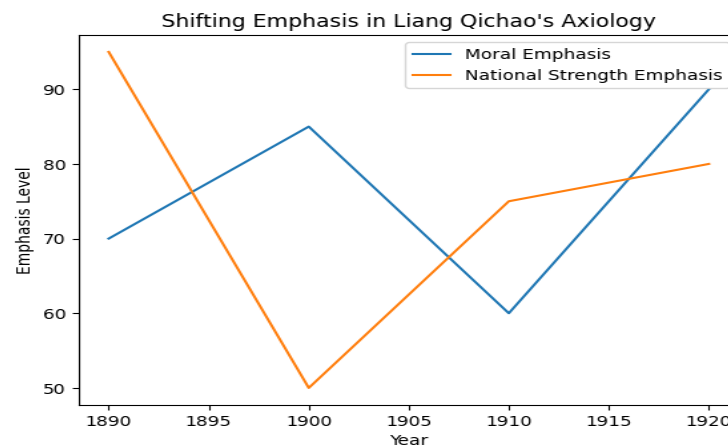
Value	Liang Qichao	Contemporary Environmentalism	Degree of Alignment
Environmental Stewardship	Promoted for national strength and resource security	Focus on global sustainability and ecological balance	High alignment
Scientific Understanding	Seen as crucial for environmental solutions	Essential for developing environmental policies	High alignment
Public Education	Advocated for promoting environmental awareness	Key strategy for fostering conservation behaviour	High alignment

In Table 4, Liang Qichao shared similar thoughts with contemporary environmentalism by viewing environmental stewardship as a critical element. Liang Qichao prioritized it for national strength and security of its resources with diverging views on public education and scientific understanding. His environmental advocacy led to formation of NGOs, and increased participation of women in public education.

Table 5: Timeline of Key Events and Shifts in Liang Qichao's Axiology

Year	Event	Axiological Shift
1898	Hundred Days' Reform	Increased emphasis on constitutionalism and citizen participation.
1900	Boxer Rebellion	Re-examination of cultural identity and emphasis on self-strengthening.
1905	Sino-Japanese War	Growing focus on national rejuvenation and modernization.
1911	Xinhai Revolution	Shift towards republicanism and social reform.

In Table 5 and Figure 5, Liang Qichao's axiological shift aligned with historical events from 1898 to 1911 with shifts in participation of citizens, self-reliance and introspection, modernization and national renewal and social reforms.

**Figure 5:** Shifting Emphasis in Liang Qichao's Axiology

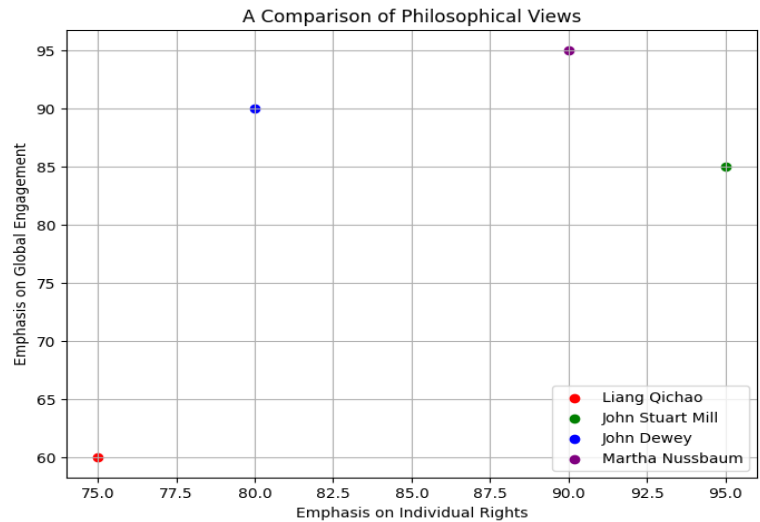


Figure 6: A scatterplot of the philosophical views comparing emphasis on global engagement and individual rights.

In Figure 6, the views of Liang Qichao, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and Martha Nussbaum were plotted on global engagement and individual rights. John Dewey promotes a balance between these values compared to Stuart Mill and Nussbaum. Liang Qichao emphasizes individual rights over global engagement.

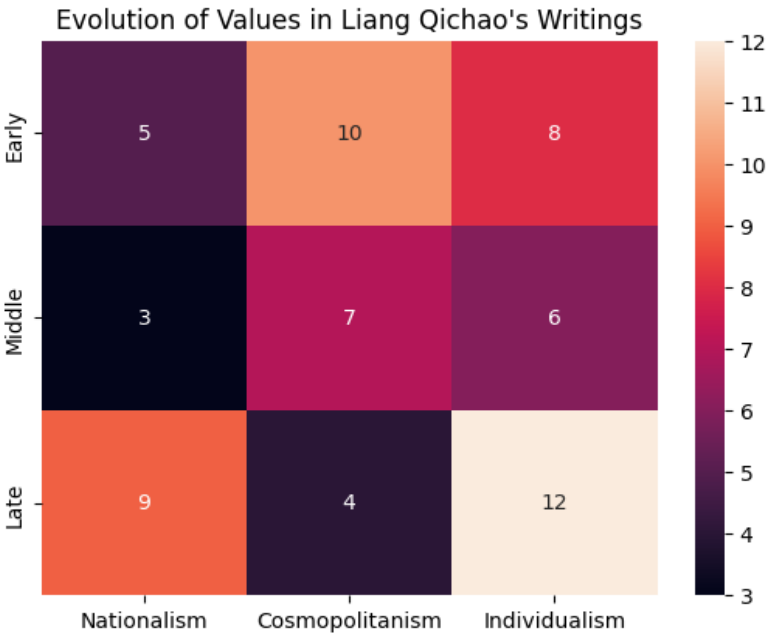


Figure 7: Evolution of Values in Liang Qichao's Writings

In Figure 7, Liang Qichao's historical evolution on nationalism, cosmopolitanism and individualism changed from the late, middle and early times. Yellow indicates higher commitment to these values while black shows low levels of commitment.

4. DISCUSSION

Our comparative text analysis on the “New People” vs. John Stuart Mill’s “on Liberty” showed differences in individual rights and the role of state. In individual rights, they both advocated for individual liberties consisting of freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of pursuing knowledge in the society. However, as Liang Qichao emphasized on collective responsibility and social duties accompanied by individual rights stating that “New People” should have equivalent contributions to social reforms and national strength. In contrast, John Stuart Mill emphasized individual autonomy and protection from unnecessary governmental interference (Eisenberg, 2018). Liang Qichao and Stuart Mill believed that the state should offer legal frameworks and required education to allow individuals to express themselves and encourage social progress. Liang Qichao envisioned a strong state that actively guided and shaped societal development through morals and policies. However, Mill advocated for a limited state that focused on safeguarding individual liberties and eliminating excess social interventions. The findings showed that Liang Qichao’s approach to modernization had similar aspects to Yan Fu’s “On learning” because they both recognized the essence of selective modernization through the adoption of western technology and knowledge while maintaining the core Chinese values and cultural practices. While Liang Qichao emphasized the significance of active adaptation and selective integration of western elements in revitalizing the Chinese culture and strengthening the nation. Yan Fu promoted critical learning and emphasized the comprehension of existing principles of western knowledge to avoid cultural dilution and imitations (Wang, 2009). Liang Qichao and Yan Fu shared similar views on western learning by prioritizing the acquisition of scientific knowledge, technology and political theories geared towards national development. The main difference on western learning was that Liang Qichao placed stronger significance to the adoption of social and ethical values of citizenship, individual rights and democracy geared towards modernization in China. Yan Fu focused majorly on the learning and adoption of scientific and technology advancements in strengthening the economic and military power of China. The findings showed that Liang Qichao’s approach to national rejuvenation had similarities with the Meiji revolution in Japan (Mitani, 2020) because they were both driven by the fears of the western imperialism and a strong sense of restoring national pride and independence. Liang Qichao advocated for extensive and comprehensive societal reforms that covered modern forms

of political, educational and cultural practices while Meiji revolution focused on significant military and economic modernization while maintaining a semi-feudal social structure and a political system based on hierarchy. Liang Qichao and the Meiji revolution used traditional cultures to motivate the essence of national unity and patriotism. The main focus of Liang Qichao was on critical examinations and reforms within traditional cultures and the elimination of outdated practices while preserving the ethical and historical values. In contrast, the main focus of Meiji restoration was conservative geared towards preservation of traditional cultures and using it to legitimize the current order of political and social hierarchy. Our analysis showed a shifting emphasis in Liang Qichao's writings with an increase in the idea of citizen and national development. Moreover, he embraced selective modernization of western values while preserving China's cultural values. Liang (1999, p. 657 -736) noted that there was no awareness on the clarity between nation (*guojia*) and empire or world (*tianxia*). Several Chinese were not informed that the *guo* was a single nation or one state among the numerous nations and states that existed in the world. This lack of information was attributed to the Chinese unity since the ancient times or the presence of "little barbarians" in its surroundings or neighbours who were not civilized or did not have any existing governments and were not valued as states or nations. Thus, the Chinese people did not view them as equivalents and for several years, China was isolated and viewed as a world and not a nation. Additionally, there was no awareness on the clarity between dynasty or court and a nation or state. He stated that the major problem of the Chinese people was the lack of knowledge on what a nation was and confused the essence of a nation and a court. Therefore, the Chinese people mistook the nation as a property of the court. Lastly, there was no awareness of the relationship between state (*guo*), nation and the citizens (*guomin*). Liang believed that a nation consists within the people and the people were the master of the nation. In contrast to western philosophies who believed that a nation was shared between a king and its people. He stated that although there were more than 40 million people in China, there was only a dozen of human beings (*ren*). Therefore, when China with its dozens of human beings encountered other nations of the world (in the West) with millions of human beings it was always defeated (Liang, 1999). Previous studies (Bol, 2022; Xiao, 2008, p. 21; Zhang, 2020) observed that Liang voluntarily chose to speak about political learning (*zheng-xue*) instead of clarifying the differences between Chinese and Western learning. Liang emphasized the importance of both Chinese and Western learning which permitted him to

observe that for China's transition into modernization and appear strong, it would be necessary to both western and Chinese political ideologies (Buzan & Lawson, 2020; Fröhlich & Schneider, 2020; Ip, 2023). He constantly changed the subject by altering the question. Prior to Liang, the main question was "Why would we study western learning?", however, Liang started asking a different question of "Why and how should we study political learning?". In his response, he stated that "If we really want to think about self-strength in China, then it was crucial to promote self-learning" (Liang, 1999). Furthermore, he observed that there was no difference in politics (zheng) between the West and China because all the laws and rules were the same in the ancient and present in the west and in China. Thus, the west and China were bound by common principles of all nations (Liang, 1999). Our analysis showed that in 1899, Liang shifted attention from focusing on civilization to focusing on nation and from the difference between western and Chinese learning to the universality of laws of all nations. He stated that the Westerners including the Hobbes and Grotius (Gu, 2022) were ordinary people who wrote the universal laws of all nations (wanguo gongfa) which was obeyed by the whole world. Similarly, the Chunqiu which was written by Confucius was deemed the universal law for many decades. Therefore, Liang believed that Confucius had the same level of intelligence as Grotius and Hobbes (Liang, 1999). Furthermore, in 1899, Liang believed and asserted that Confucius was the source of all truth and claimed that Confucius already knew the universal laws of all nations. However, in early 1900's he discarded this assumption and believed that an individual knew the universal causal laws of history by extensive examination and study of history and stopped reference to Confucius. Our findings were aligned with previous studies (Leung, 2023; Liu & Liu, 2020) in showing that Liang's significant law was on the causal relationship between the growth and rise of western nations and nationalism. In 1902, he stated that Europe had risen and the world was progressing since the 16th century due to the growth of nationalism. Nationalism was referred to as people from distinct places who had the same race, language, customs and religion and deemed each other as fellows, advocated for independent self-rule and organized governments aimed at seeking common good and conquering other races. In the late 19th century, nationalism had developed into a robust national imperialism (Liang, 1999). The universal laws allowed Liang to justify his position on the historical transition and development of new institutions. The creation of civil associations and parties in China was based on the premise that stronger nations in the East and West had parties and many individuals

wanted to join these associations (Liang, 1999). He justified the development of national religion based on the premise that there were no ruling people who did not have religion and there were no nations without a religion (Liang, 1999). Moreover, he justified the creation of local self-governments by alluding that cultivating a fashion of local self-governments was the basis of the strength of a nation. If we ought to build a stronger nation on the planet, the essential art was through self-governments of the citizens (Liang, 1999). In his later life, in 1920's, Liang transitioned from a political activist to history and his views derived from the "historians' virtue of truthfulness" led him to believe that there were no existing universal causal laws in history. Thus, he rejected his earlier beliefs on universal laws. In early 1900 despite believing in universal historical laws, he had different opinion regarding certain aspects of Universal laws. For instance, he argued against Kang's views that the rise of western nations was due to religion (Christianity). Nonetheless, he argued that the growth of western nations was due to the freedom of thought and opposed Kang's views of establishing Confucianism as the national religion based on Christianity. Liang valued freedom of thought as an instrumental value and a way of strengthening the nation. He viewed truthfulness as an intrinsic virtue that does not change its position. Our findings were consistent with previous studies who showed that Liang introduced civic nationalism and the historic concept of nation and nationalism (Schneider). In his belief, there was a causal relationship between sovereignty and the people's rights and reasoned on both levels. He stated that the reason a nation had independent sovereignty was due to the people having independent sovereignty. These dual rights were derived from independence and self-mastery, the placement of sovereignty within the people and recognition of fundamental equality was the basis of civic nationalism and democracy. He viewed nationalism as the most just and grandest doctrine where no nation was allowed to violate another nation's liberty and vice versa. Thus, the application of this doctrine to any nation, implied the independence of humans; also, its application to the world implied independence of all nations. Liang's established that nationalism was derived from a combination of history and had a beginning and an end into the future; therefore, there was no belief that a Chinese nation had existed. However, he believed that Chinese nation had to be created by trying to link the historic nationalism with modernity. Nationalism was mainly born in the 18th and 19th centuries fuelled by the French revolution. Civic nationalism was introduced based on the idea of the people (min) before linking it with nationalization and used the term "guomin" to refer

to the citizens. Thus, the life and death of any nation is based on the life and death of its citizens. The axiology of Liang Qichao was shaped by historical events such as the Hundred Day's Reform (Karl & Zarrow, 2020) that ignited his beliefs in participation of Chinese citizens in national development and elements of constitutionalism which was in contrast to the Qing's dynasty of autocracy and formed a fundamental basis for his emphasis on educating citizens and a strong belief in constitutionalism. The Boxer Rebellion (Harris, 2018) increased his cultural introspection due to the extensive humiliations that led him to question the cultural identity and essence of modernization in China. After the rebellion, he shifted his focus to a complete understanding of the national strength and encouraged selective modernization with components of western nations. The Sino-Japanese war increased his desires of national rejuvenation after the devastating defeat to the Japanese. He had a vision of scientific and technological advancements, modernized military and economic growth in China. This was in contrast, to some of his contemporaries who embraced blind imitation of western values because he maintained a strong sense of retaining China's unique culture. In the later stages of the Qing dynasty and its fall coupled with the rise of republicanism and development of republic of China was a significant shift in the axiology of Liang Qichao. He advocated for social reforms and republicanism towards a more equitable and democratic society with a focus on intellectual freedom and individual rights. In the Rawls of political liberalism in 1993 (Rawls, 2018), Liang embraced communitarian emphasis on the fundamental nature of intimate human relationships and retained a liberal focus on political and legal ideas of equality and liberty. Liang did not change the five fundamental Confucian human relationships, instead he recognized an additional two fundamental relationships including private individuals and strangers from different countries and a relationship between state and citizens. In his view, he stated that these relationships were formed within the realms of rights and legal regulations and constitute the sixth and seventh relationships. Additionally, Liang proposed that the traditional Chinese legal system was flawed due to absence of private law (*sifa*) governing the sixth relationship and absence of a constitution as part of the public laws to control the seventh relationship (Liang, 1999). Liang argued that civil law established the rights and responsibilities of strangers while the constitution established the rights and responsibilities of citizens in relation to the state. Furthermore, he observed that the valuable aspect of the Roman law was the its civil law was extensive and modern civilization was heavily borrowed from the Roman law due to its great influence that makes

countries right-based rather than duty based. From 1988, China has seen tremendous increase in “right-based law movements” that was initially constituted in the First Conference on Basic Legal Categories with a focus on whether law was a duty or a right. The seventh relationship defined by Liang was based on constitutionalism which formed the basic law and the foundation of protection. In early years of Mao Zedong, he admired the works and writings of Liang and gave himself a name derived from one of Liang’s characters. He was heavily influenced by Liang’s works and transformed into a civic nationalist and constitutionalist who believed in the principles of democracy, local self-governments and institutional reforms. Mao Zedong was impressed with Liang’s statements such as the state was more like a company, the court referred to the management and the head of the court was deemed as a just manager of the department. Mao Zedong believed that when a nation is founded on legitimate means, then it is based on constitutionalism where the constitution is developed by the people and the crown is appointed by the same people (Mao, 1990). The selective modernization in China is attributed to the distinct and evolution in the spheres of life which is consistent with previous works of Max Weber, Jurgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. These findings align with Liang Qichao’s philosophical thoughts that led to massive revolution and modernization in China. Thus, the essence of modernity in China is based on understanding Liang Qichao’s philosophy.

5. CONCLUSION

The evolution of Liang Qichao’s philosophical thoughts and axiological perspectives created a balance between traditions and modernity in China. Textual and comparative analyses revealed that he blended cosmopolitanism with nationalism and emphasized the participation of citizens in national development and constitutionalism. Furthermore, he embraced social responsibility, social reforms and individual rights from his experiences with historical events such as Hundred Day’s Reform and the Xinhai revolution. The axiology of Liang Qichao is a reflection of the complex and dynamic interconnections between historical changes and philosophical thoughts that created a revolution and legacy in China.

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