

Preface

My own initial entanglement with Liang Shu-ming was a slight tragicomedy. In 1977, for the first time in my life, I learnt there was someone called Liang Shu-ming in China, but I could not affirm definitely whether he was still alive or not. In that year, all of us teenage middle school students were required to read the newly published fifth volume of the *Selected Works of Mao Ze-dong* for at least one hour a day, and to take one page of notes each day during the semester. It is in his speech on Liang, which is included in this volume, that Mao burst forth “I think you stink!” The editor’s footnote described Liang as a “reactionary scholar” (反动文人), something akin to poisonous weeds in the socialist garden or a witch in peoples’ images in the Dark Age. Anyway, that is all I learnt about Liang Shu-ming for quite a long time. I made a mental note to find out more about why this scholar had provoked such a strong reaction from Mao.

Skepticism remained in my heart. As time went on, I came to know more of Liang Shu-ming as an advocate of Confucianism, which the official ideology was attacking as the spiritual symbolism of the “feudalism” of the “horse and buggy” days. While “Marxism-Leninism and Mao’s thoughts” were propagated in China as the most advanced “world outlook and methodology”, Liang Shu-ming’s views were thought to be synonymous with an iron-clad backwardness. He was not only a *persona non grata*, but also an anachronism. With few exceptions, this stereotyped portrait of Liang Shu-ming still remains among Chinese intellectual circles today, perpetuated by critics of both Marxist persuasion and those who profess themselves to be of a liberal persuasion. My book questions this stereotype, based upon an intensive analysis of Liang Shu-ming’s scholarship.

But the basic question is still unresolved. Has “Marxism-Leninism and Mao’s thoughts” saved China and brought it to the Communist Heaven as proclaimed by the Communists? Is it possible that the people who live their life in a seamless (the words of Maitland) web of history can escape from it? If not, henceforth, can groups of humans who were bounded with home-grown traditions survive by totally shifting to those of others, after they have destroyed their own traditions? Specifically, can the Chinese construct their ideal new life by placing it upon a

ruined site? If the answer is no, what is the correct path? What is the way forward, and how can we achieve national rejuvenation?

It is for these concerns that I cannot dissuade myself from an appreciation that Liang Shu-ming is a truly intellectual figure and a great human being. His basic concerns, his intellectual and emotional response to his historical situation, are vitally related to our own present concerns and problems. And it is also for these concerns and problems that the efforts at constructing a new ideal life in China, as times have already shown us, cannot be as successful as expected if the legacy of Confucianism and its modern wave New-Confucianism is cast away in an iconoclastic way culturally. This basic personal motive impels me to undertake this task. This is also my personal belief resulting from the general theme of his writings and a personal response to that bitter experience of reading Mao's denunciation of him twenty two years ago.

In the book *A Letter to Greco*, the Greek writer Niko Kazantzakis mentioned a story: during a dream, a grandson asks his grandfather: "Please, give me an order and I will obey". The old man, putting his hand on the child's head, said: "Try to reach as far as you can, my son!" The boy was not particularly impressed, so he insisted: "Please, give me a more difficult task", and the elder gentleman, after a while, said: "well! Try to reach farther away, above and beyond your own possibilities... !" And the boy awakened terrified... !¹ This precisely expressed what I have had to do during the last four years under the impelling presence of Liang Shu-ming's great life. As is said by a French Maxim, *Vogue la galere* ! I completed this book with gritted teeth. During this journey I often could not help imaging what *Hierodule* laboured with. For the book presented here, neither arguments nor conclusions are likely to escape criticism. I believe that if the descriptions and analysis of this dissertation succeed in accomplishing nothing more than to focus the attention of scholarship on this fact: that the mind always accommodates a certain sort of life, that *Nomos* originates in *Physis*, a locality of people's popular attitudes towards, and their presumptions and expectations about, life of a certain kind in the context of human self-cultivation and self-transformation, as speculated upon by Liang Shu-ming, then, I will have served an useful purpose.

Nearly two hundred years ago, Edmund Burke said: "Nothing tends more to the corruption of science than to suffer it to stagnate. These waters must be troubled before they can exert their virtues. A man ... though he may be wrong himself, yet he clears the way for others, and may chance to make even his errors subservient to the cause of truth."² In the light of this observation, I hope my argumentation, even possibly errors, will contribute to the cause of finding the truth: what kind of life the Chinese have already had, and will and could have in the realm of law. Although this book is not to display myself, but to examine Liang Shu-ming, I have grappled

¹Cited from Israel Drapkin, "Victiminology: The Jewish and the German People", in Hans Joachim Schneider (ed.), *The Victim in International Perspective*, at 9.

²Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1823), at 71.

with Liang Shu-ming partly as a means towards learning the truth for myself, because my whole self belongs to that land—my motherland.

“The great stream of time and earthly things will sweep on just the same in spite of us”, said W.G. Sumner. “Every one of us is a child of his age and cannot get out of it. He is in the stream and is swept along with it. All his science and philosophy come to him out of it. Therefore the tide will not be changed by us. It will swallow upon both us and our experiments. ... That is why it is the greatest folly of which a man can be capable to sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world.”³—As a child who cannot escape from his age, Liang Shu-ming has already been regarded as the Knight of the Rueful Countenance, or the last Confucian. Is it new evidence of folly that I laboured myself for four years in writing this book about him?!

Beijing, China

Zhangrun Xu

³William Graham Sumner, “The Absurd Effort to Make the World Over”, quote in Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thoughts*, at 60–61.

The Confucian Misgivings--Liang Shu-ming's Narrative
About Law

Xu, Z.

2017, XXXII, 220 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-4529-5