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Early Modern Imaginations of the Nation and Their Insights: An Examination Centered on Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming

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Abstract
Chinese people have formed a rich vision of the "nation," with Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming serving as representative figures, throughout the process of moving from "all under heaven" to "nation." The two Liangs' imaginations show different traits as well as consistency. The two Liangs' modern national imaginations stand out for their interaction between "people" and "country" in terms of imaginative features. Regarding continuity, Liang Shuming's rural building movement may be understood as the application of Liang Qichao's theoretical vision. Nonetheless, the opposition faced by the rural building movement highlights the challenges this imagination has in attempting to come to pass. In light of the 'national' imagination and associated practices of early modern Chinese society, what becomes clear is that, against the backdrop of historical transitions, an idealistic national imagination can, in fact, serve as a conceptual basis for national construction as well as an uplifting and guiding force. However, the challenge and secret to creating a modern nation is understanding how to organize the "people" to forge a concrete bond with the "country." Examining and considering these ideas and actual initiatives is still very significant for nation-building in the modern day.

Keywords
Imaginations of the Nation, Citizen-State Relations, Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming

1.Introduction
The paradigm of imperial China's government, which encompassed "all under heaven," was fundamentally altered in the late Qing Dynasty, forcing the Chinese to reevaluate their own identity and external environment. The "all under heaven" idea was out of date, which meant it was time to look for fresh conceptual underpinnings. The Chinese, in response, and in accordance with the situation, began to see the "nation" as an alternative to "all under heaven." During this phase, Liang Qichao became a very active figure, drawing a lot of influence from his conception of the "nation." Zhang Hao asserts that Liang Qichao was a pivotal figure in the shift of Chinese philosophy from traditionalism to modernity. It is suggested by Zhang Hao that there was a distinct shift in Liang Qichao's intellectual growth from "abandoning the notion of universal harmony under heaven and recognizing the nation as the highest entity." A number of works, including "Discourse on the New Citizen"Elementary Guide for Nationals" "Brief Introduction to Constitutionalism" and "The Political Theory of the Great Political Scientist Johann Caspar Bluntschli" clearly demonstrate Liang Qichao's conception of the "nation." A new generation established a continuity of imagination for the nation and translated it into real acts under the influence and inspiration of Liang Qichao, expanding upon his foundation. Liang Shuming and Yan Yangchu were two of the prominent individuals who started the rural building movement. Because to a number of events, including the start of the Anti-Japanese War and flaws in the organization's original aims, the accom-

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plishments of the rural development movement cannot be regarded as very noteworthy. All the same, this was a worthwhile endeavor. The modern “nation” constructed by people like Liang Shuming fully reflects the understanding and aspirations of the Chinese people during a period of tremendous change towards this new concept of the “nation,” which differs greatly from Liang Qichao’s more theoretical imagination of the “nation.” It is imperative to acknowledge, from the viewpoint of succeeding generations, that the contributions of individuals such as Liang Shuming and Liang Qichao have been significant in building the country of contemporary China, particularly in terms of conceptual groundwork.

Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming’s conception of the “nation,” as well as the nation-building procedures that followed, greatly influenced and served as a model for subsequent nation-building initiatives. But Liang Shuming’s rural development movement’s struggles also serve as a reminder that building a modern nation requires organizing the “people” to forge a concrete bond with the “nation.” Examining and analyzing the Chinese people’s creative and pragmatic endeavors related to the “nation” in contemporary times continue to be crucial for current nation-building initiatives.

2."The 'Nation' and the 'People': Characteristics of Liang Qichao's National Imagination"

Combining Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming’s national imaginations, we see that thinking about the link between the “people” and the “country” is a key element of both imaginations. Formally, “Discourse on the New Citizen” by Liang Qichao is the seminal work of his national vision, while the organizational principle of Liang Shuming’s rural building movement is its central idea. This begs the question, “Why did both Liangs attach such importance to the relationship between the “country” and the “people” in the face of external and internal challenges at the time?” Since bolstering the nation and armed forces ought to have been the first priority given the circumstances. Is there a basic relationship between national power and citizen-state relations that would explain the Liangs’ creative nation-building? To fully comprehend this, a detailed reading of particular texts is required.

2.1Ideal Citizens—Liang Qichao's Imagination of the "New Citizens"

The first topic we’ll discuss is “Discourse on the New Citizen.” Liang Qichao begins by asking a question that, in modern parlance, may be rephrased as follows: “What kind of nation can stand tall among the nations of the world?” He begins by disproving the two arguments, “geography” and “heroes,” and then he highlights how crucial the “people” are to the “nation.” “Desiring the peace, prosperity, and glory of the nation, the doctrine of the new citizen cannot be neglected,” he says in ending the first paragraph. This indicates to us that Liang Qichao’s focus on the “people” problem is essentially a national security issue.

This raises the question of why we should give the “people” so much weight when it’s for the “nation.” In response to this query, Liang Qichao offers a basic explanation at the outset of “Discourse on the New Citizen,” saying, “A nation is formed by the accumulation of its people.” A nation has its people, just as the body has its four limbs, five viscera, tendons, veins, and blood circulation.” We can see from this example how crucial the “people” are to the “nation.” Stated differently, a nation cannot exist without its people; people are the reason it exists. A nation that is powerful is the product of a robust populous, whereas a weak populace produces a weak nation. These ideas are widely understood today. Thus, it is important to

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remember that Liang Qichao was fervently promoting these concepts more than a century ago. This historical parallel supports Liang Qichao's "national" imagination's influence on later generations in part. As can be seen from the above, Liang Qichao used an example to clearly convey the significance of the "people" to the "nation". But in order to fully comprehend this significance, we shouldn't confine ourselves to his concluding remarks. Specifically, we should acknowledge that he was talking about the idea of "new citizens." These "new citizens" stand in for his ideal citizens at the moment when considering the relationship between the "nation" and the "people." What then did Liang Qichao see these perfect citizens looking like? According to him, "For a nation to stand among the world, its citizens must possess unique qualities." What characteristics would these "new citizens" thus have?

Actually, the majority of Liang Qichao's "Discourse on the New Citizen" is devoted to describing the characteristics of the "new citizens." A sense of public morality, a nationalistic mindset, a spirit of enterprise and adventure, a sense of rights, a consciousness of freedom, a spirit of self-government, a progressiveness, self-esteem, the ability to cooperate, the capacity to profit and share profits, perseverance, a sense of obligation, a martial spirit, reasonable personal morality, civic spirit, and political competence are the specific attributes Liang Qichao believed his ideal citizens (new citizens) should possess. Put otherwise, those who possessed these attributes were the only ones who could possibly create a strong nation and vanquish rival nations. Thus far, we have managed to decipher the general contours of Liang Qichao's "new citizens." Let's now look at these sixteen attributes. In fact, we can see how modern Liang Qichao wished the "new citizens" to have only by glancing at their names. conceptions like "spirit of adventure," "rights consciousness," "freedom," and "progress" were all typical contemporary (Western) conceptions, especially for the Chinese people of the time. This fact clearly shows that Liang Qichao completely drew upon and assimilated the numerous foreign intellectual materials accessible at the time, notably the different political philosophies that were prominent in the West at the time, when he set out to imagine the modern country.

2.2What Kind of "Nation" and "People"?— The Dilemma of Liang Qichao's National Imagination

Liang Qichao learned, assimilated, and propagated the ideas of numerous foreign intellectuals in addition to participating in the theoretical imaginations of contemporary nations through the use of foreign ideologies. Being an expert in both Eastern and Western philosophy, he conducted in-depth analyses and assessments of several intellectuals who are today regarded as foundational members of contemporary political philosophy. Among them were Descartes, Darwin, Bacon, Rousseau, Bentham, Kant, and Montesquieu. "The Political Theory of the Great Political Scientist Johann Caspar Bluntschli" is one of his essays that is particularly noteworthy. Written in 1903, this article serves as a summation of his study of Western political theory because chronologically it occurred after most of his introductions to the political theorists described above. In terms of substance, this article explains, at least in part, why he gave the subject of "people" so much weight when imagining contemporary states.

Liang Qichao presents "The Political Theory of the Great Political Scientist Johann Caspar Bluntschli" as an overview of the political theories of the German political scientist Bluntschli, with a focus on his ideas on the state. But when we compare it to his earlier critical writings on theorists like Hobbes and Rousseau,

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we discover that this essay truly represents his own introspection and reworking of earlier political ideas. Furthermore, the link between the "nation" and the "people" occupies a large portion of this inquiry and revision.

He argues in this article that the Rousseauist theory he supported in his "Rousseau Case" essay is exactly the reverse of the political theory of Bluntschli's political wisdom. The social contract theory—or, as Liang Qichao put it, the "contract theory of the people"—is the foundation of Rousseau's well-known theory of the state. As far as citizen-state relations are concerned, the founding of a nation serves to safeguard the freedom of the "people," that is, "the state exists for the freedom of individuals." At first, Liang Qichao was a great admirer of Rousseau's theory of state creation and wholeheartedly supported it.But his perspective changed significantly in the article "The Political Theory of the Great Political Scientist Johann Caspar Bluntschli," as seen by the adoption of Bluntschli's political wisdom thesis.

Bluntschli's critique of Rousseau's social contract theory stems from his conviction that the citizens must fulfill three requirements or have three attributes in order for the contract theory of the people to be achieved. These three requirements, however, are quite demanding and practically unachievable. According to Bluntschli, the reason why Rousseau's contract theory of the people, which gave rise to modern France during the French Revolution, is currently in disarray is exactly because Rousseau's idealized citizens are unable to really meet these three requirements. Liang Qichao appears to have been significantly influenced by Bluntschli's point of view. He moved away from his earlier appreciation of Rousseau and began to have misgivings about the republican system, which inevitably led to questions concerning the nature of the connection between the "people" and the "nation". He expressed his feelings by saying he was "utterly at a loss as to what path to take." Despite this, he could not articulate particular citizen-state connections in this article particularly well.

But Liang Qichao's reflections on the relationship between citizens and states did not end there. He continued to produce significant essays like "Politics and the People" from the end of the Qing dynasty until the War of Resistance Against Japan. "On the So-Called National Constitution Issue," "Strange indeed, this so-called issue of national form," and "Elementary Guide for Nationals" continue his fantasy of the contemporary state and its people. After reading the four works described above, it is evident that Liang Qichao's conception of the modern state has always revolved on the relationship between the "people" and the "nation". Liang Qichao poses the subject of "why love the country," which directly relates to citizen-state relations, using the most recent text, "Elementary Guide for Nationals," as an example. He feels that people should love their nation because they "truly feel that there is no hope for the security and development of one's own life and property unless the country is organized."We can infer from Liang's discussion that this statement implies that people won't be able to survive and develop unless they consciously create a nation because they won't be able to handle the numerous risks involved in surviving and the different circumstances needed to establish a better life. This theoretical political discourse appears to be really simple to comprehend. The difficulty is in fostering a concrete bond between the people and the country so that the latter may actively adore the former. Theoretically, in order to solve this problem, the "people" need be made to consciously understand the value of patriotism. However, why were individuals at that time unable to see this?

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A partial solution is given by Liang Qichao in the "Elementary Guide for Nationals" article. This response is attributed to a lack of "public spirit." Thus, how can one foster "public spirit"? The response from Liang is, "nothing better than using local autonomy as its training ground." According to Liang, three things must happen before local autonomy can be exercised: "first, to maintain local security, second, to improve roads, and third, to establish elementary schools." Only in this way can true citizen-state relations be developed and the civic spirit of the citizenry progressively fostered.

It is evident from this that Liang Qichao's conceptual endeavors in envisioning the contemporary nation have left a lasting impression on succeeding generations. Liang Shuming's rural development movement, for instance, might be considered as a concrete realization of Liang Qichao's ideas.

3.Rural development Movement: Liang Shuming's Practical Efforts Based on National Imagination

When it comes to his efforts for rural development, Liang Shuming is undoubtedly more pragmatic than Liang Qichao was in his scholarly pursuits. Nevertheless, this practicality is nevertheless based in the nation's theoretical imagination. The majority of Liang Shuming's creatively devised practical techniques may be found in the second half of the book "Theory of Rural Development," which addresses problem-solving. Below is a summary of Liang Shuming's practical efforts, which are mostly based on this body of research. Even though the second part of the book "Theory of Rural Development" is titled "Problem-solving," Liang Shuming does lay out the core practical tactics for the rural development movement in this section, which yet has a strong theoretical character. This theoretical aspect alone demonstrates how Liang Shuming's practical ideas are based on theoretical imagination.

3.1Launching Rural Development Movement to Address National Issues

According to Liang Shuming, "the goal of the second half of 'Theory of Rural Development' is to discuss how to solve problems—namely, how to construct new social organizations." It would be reasonable for him to discuss how to proceed with construction after that. However, he abruptly shifts the topic and adds, "But I still have something to say here." Then, using a friend's melancholy prediction about the future of the country as a jumping off point, he conducted a highly theoretical analysis of the problems the friend had pointed out, coming to the conclusion that the rural development movement was the key to finding solutions.Why does Liang Shuming take the time to discuss the significance of the movement for rural development in this particular situation? This text's objective role, whether due to writing style considerations or other factors, is, in my opinion, to reiterate the idea that the rural development movement works to address issues facing the country.

Once again, it is emphasized since Liang Shuming first outlines the reasons for initiating the rural development movement in the "Understanding the Problem" section of "Theory of Rural Development." He lists the following four reasons: （1）To improve the rural regions; （2)To encourage the self-sufficiency of the rural areas;(3)To actively construct Chinese society; and (4)To reconstruct China's new social structure. He notes that the last item embodies the true purpose of the rural development movement. Following that, Liang Shuming forthrightly states, "Therefore, rural development is not simply about developing the

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countryside, but aims at the construction of the entire Chinese society, or it can be regarded as a kind of nation-building movement."

That makes sense, and helps us to understand why Liang Shuming brought up the importance of the rural development movement as a solution when talking about "solving problems." In conclusion, the goal of the rural development movement is to solve national challenges rather than local ones, even if it will undoubtedly have an impact on local issues. It's important to find out what issues the nation was dealing with at the time. Why, in Liang Shuming's opinion, may these issues be resolved by the rural development movement? From a theoretical standpoint, one needs first understand one's vision of the state in order to comprehend the national challenges that one hopes to solve. In instance, it is not very hard to comprehend Liang Shuming's perspective on the state. Liang Shuming makes it clear that a state must adhere to a minimum standard of conduct, saying that "the state must prevent external aggression, not allow outsiders to kill or commit arson, and internally not allowing anyone to kill or commit arson; not permitting individuals to resort to violence to resolve disputes, with all issues needing to be resolved according to the law."Liang Shuming thought that modern China could not be regarded as a true country based on this criterion. According to him, "The fact that individuals resolve disputes through violence fully demonstrates the absence of a nation." Later generations will find Liang Shuming's assessment to be highly significant. In his judgment, the most pressing national issue at the time was the absence of a nation, therefore it makes sense to launch the rural development movement with the goal of creating a nation. This is in line with his earlier assertion that the struggle for rural development was one of nation-building.

What type of nation is the new nation that the rural development movement aims to construct is the next question. This has to do with the perfect nation as envisioned by Liang Shuming. In "The Rural Development Movement," Liang Shuming does not explicitly offer a methodical declaration about the ideal nation in his vision. Still, there are a few facets of this perfect country that we might infer from his intended design for rural building.

According to Liang Shuming, the movement for rural development has one clear goal in mind: creating a new organization (or new organizational structure, new traditions). From the standpoint of organizational spirit, this new organization ought to combine the best aspects of Western and Chinese culture.

His perspective may be summed up as follows: The main characteristics of Chinese culture that he recognizes and hopes to incorporate into the new organization are: a universal spirit (having a broad cultural perspective, caring about the interests of all humanity, unlike Western civilization, which is selfish and mostly concerned with national interests, hence culturally superior); prioritizing the interests of others (selflessness, not starting from one's own interests when discussing benefits but considering others at all times); managing interpersonal relationships with great warmth (respecting the virtuous and honoring teachers, caring for the face of others, etc.); and inspiring people to continuously pursue the meaning and value of life ("upward in life").Liang Shuming succinctly enumerates the virtues of Western civilization as follows: respect for the person, socialization of property, unity without dispersal (willingness to join organizations), and active engagement in collective life rather than inactivity.

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This organization, which combines the best aspects of Western and Chinese culture, is highly anticipated by Liang Shuming, who said, “I believe that such an organization is the normal culture of humanity, the civilization of the future world.” Now let’s get back to the original query: What kind of new nation is built around this new organization? This calls for an analysis of the connection between the founding of a new country and this new structure.

Liang Shuming came to the following conclusion after thorough discussions on how the rural development movement creates a new organization: “The organization we have just discussed is indeed a rural organization, or we may call it a rural autonomous organization; however, we think that our future national political system will also be developed based on such a framework, such a spirit, and such a scale.” This basically indicates that the future nation is seen by him as an extension of this organization. He feels that this is precisely the foundation and fundamental idea that he is presenting, and that the new nation should progressively and naturally arise on this basis. He declines to specify the precise shape of the imagined new country.

To sum up, Liang Shuming carefully outlined the “new social organization” he believed would act as the cornerstone for nation-building rather than imagining the nation in its entirety. Liang Shuming’s method shows a certain maturity in recognizing modern nationhood as opposed to naive direct imagining. It is noteworthy that Liang Shuming also had great expectations for the “people” in his notion of state building, which is consistent with Liang Qichao’s passionate yearning for the “new citizens.” By contrast, his rural development plan paints a better picture of the “people,” calling them the “rural populace.”

3.2Organizing and Mobilizing the "Villagers" - The Core Tenet of the rural development movement

Let us first take a quick look at Liang Shuming’s particular rural development strategy. As previously said, one of the main objectives of the rural development movement is to form the new organization specified above. Liang Shuming notes that the creation of this new organization is essentially a revamp and addition of the traditional Chinese “village covenant,” i.e., a new village covenant. But this new village covenant, which he refers to as “rural agricultural schools,” is more of a spiritual presence that must materialize via certain organizational structures.

There are four components to the “rural agricultural school”: the principal, the teachers, the board of directors, and the villagers, or students. The teachers are among them, and they are not locals. In addition to teaching, the rural agricultural school also solves problems using the tenet of “learning to encompass all matters.” Because Liang feels that only people with expertise, insight, fresh understanding, and new techniques can fulfill this role—qualities he feels are lacking in rural areas—the professors of the remote agriculture school are outsiders. It is the responsibility of educators to “identify problems, discuss solutions, and inspire action.”Liang thinks that in order to successfully solve issues, the rural agriculture school has to be integrated with the broader external “system of social movement organizations”. Teachers also need to build direct ties with this system and quickly pick up fresh information from it. Then Liang Shuming said that another organization called the “village-school organization” has to be founded in order to settle issues and attain organizational harmony. The village assembly, council, head

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of the rural agricultural school, and village head make up this body. The rural agricultural school is not the same as the "village-school organization". The mission of the rural agricultural school in this more intricate organization is "promoting design." Liang thinks that cultivation was required since farmers at the time lacked the fundamental capacity for self-organization. The village head's (school head's) duties include oversight and instruction. The village chief is in charge of overseeing and instructing the villagers and those working on certain chores; he or she does not tackle particular issues.This keeps the village head (school head) in their position of "respect" and "teacher" by preventing them from being directly involved in conflicts over interests. Furthermore, the village chief's (the school principal's) monitoring and instruction have to be carried out in private and with consideration for others' feelings. The village assembly has legislative authority, but decisions are reached by consensus after debate rather than one person, one vote. The village council, or school board, is in charge of particular implementation. The rural development movement of Liang Shuming is based on this fundamental idea. We can see right away that the "villagers" are the main emphasis of this notion. The headmaster of the school, the head of the village, and other jobs do occur in the new social structure he envisions, but none of these roles are the major players (despite having high threshold requirements in and of themselves), and they all exist solely for the sake of the "villagers." That is, with regard to the "villagers," the purpose of these jobs is to organize and mobilize the "villagers."

In Liang Shuming's dream, everyone might someday hold a position as a village chief, school principal, or board member following such organizational growth and mobilization. Crucially, he brings up the development of "rules" and "habits" again and time again. "By forming habits and following rules, anyone, not necessarily a sage or saint, can serve as a school principal or board member and perform well." Moreover, "It doesn't really matter who the individual is after the rules are set. Being the leader of the community doesn't always need one to be incredibly intelligent and gifted." under summation, the organization and mobilization of the "villagers" is the central job of the rural development movement, which serves as the primary way to accomplishing national construction under Liang Shuming's concept of nation-building. According to this paradigm, the "villagers" are entrusted with the crucial responsibility of serving as the main agents of nation-building.

4.conclusion

At that time, Liang Shuming's ardent national imagination, articulated with a practical tint, and Liang Qichao's energetic and enthusiastic national imagination, principally conveyed through theoretical hues, both had a great influence. It is challenging to determine the full scope of this impact. Even though their contributions to the national construction of modern China may not have resulted in tangible results, it is clear that they both made significant contributions given that their ideas are still being discussed and interpreted today.

Liang Qichao was a well-known character in the intellectual circles of their day, and his passionate national imagination was always bringing fresh ideas and ideological materials to the public's attention. Interestingly, he actively altered his ideas in direct relation to the always shifting world rather of being static. With titles like "The Theory of a Young China," "The Argument of China in the World," "The Theory of the New Citizen," "The Theory of National Character," and "The Doctrine of the New World Order," he successively

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put forth a variety of "national" imaginary scenarios that continuously introduced new ideas and ideological resources into the time period and greatly aided in enlightening and directing the populace.

Subsequently, Liang Shuming acknowledged the great inspiration Liang Qichao had provided him in his work "In Commemoration of Mr. Liang Rengong," expressing the impact Liang Qichao had on him. He summed up Liang Qichao's accomplishments "In summary, the achievements of Mr. Liang Qichao lie not in academics or deeds, but solely in his embrace of the new era, initiating new trends, shaking the hearts of the entire nation, and bringing about a necessary transformation in Chinese society throughout history."

Liang Shuming's own experiences with resistance in his rural reconstruction movement highlight the challenges faced in translating national imaginings into actual nation-building, if we take his assessment as representative of the contributions made by the national imaginings represented by Liang Qichao amidst significant historical changes.

After the People's Republic of China was established, Liang Shuming wrote an article titled "What Changes Have I Experienced in the Past Two Years" in which he discussed the difficulties he had encountered in his campaign for rural rehabilitation. At first he thought the problems were caused by the farmers' inaction. But after some thought, he saw that this was because he didn't know what the farmers' genuine worries were. He himself said that he was unable to understand the farmers' "true pain and itch."

In conclusion, Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming both viewed the interaction between the "people" and the "nation" as a central concern in the development and application of contemporary nation-imagining. But as Liang Shuming's experiences demonstrate, creating a real and meaningful link between the "nation" and the "people" is a very difficult and complicated undertaking. It's difficult to go from theoretical fantasy to practical reality. Even if Liang Shuming's endeavor was not totally effective, it nonetheless provides us with important space for thought.

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