Original Paper

Narrating Myth with Nationalism: Liang Qichao's Role in Shaping Early Chinese Mythology

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Abstract

Liang Qichao, renowned as a social and political activist, as well as a scholar in Chinese political and intellectual history, stands as one of the foremost nationalist thinkers of his time. Despite his significant role, scant attention has been given to his profound influence on Chinese mythology in terms of its framework, motivation, and approach. This paper explores Liang Qichao's contributions to the construction of Chinese myths by examining various facets such as historical context, purpose, strategies, influence, and encountered challenges. Liang's endeavor to reconstruct a new Chinese culture emerged amidst the national turmoil of the late Qing dynasty and his personal disillusionment with political engagement. Central to his vision was the inclusion of myth in the reconstruction of a modern Chinese society, aimed at fostering social reform and nurturing a sense of nationalism. I argue that Liang proposed three interlinked strategies for this cultural rebuilding. Firstly, he advocated for adopting German and Japanese mythological frameworks to situate Chinese mythology within the contexts of modernization and nationalism. Secondly, he sought to establish a narrative of Chinese history that harmonized with Western historiography and cultural history. Liang's efforts laid the structural groundwork and established a nationalism-oriented approach for the early development of Chinese mythology. Under Liang's influence, Chinese mythology evolved along three trajectories: elucidating the origins of the Chinese race and civilization, constructing a unified national identity, and assimilating and responding to Western cultural influences. However, Liang's approach also encountered challenges. He overlooked the distinct contexts of Chinese and Western mythology, as well as the unique features of Chinese culture. His synthesis of Chinese history, culture, and nationalism formed a closed loop, neglecting the necessity of comparing myths across diverse cultures. Consequently, Liang's work leaves several issues unresolved, necessitating further revision and refinement.

Keywords: Liang Qichao, Mythology, Nationalism, Modernity

1. Introduction

Liang Qichao (1873-1929) was a Chinese politician, social and political activist, journalist, and scholar on Chinese political and intellectual history and the most prominent nationalist thinker in China. There is much study on Liang's influence on the political reformation of modern China and his introduction of Western and Japanese books. Joseph Levenson described Liang as "a brilliant scholar, journalist, and political figure who contributed heavily to modern Chinese history and helped unwittingly to reveal its meaning." [2] Many scholars focus on Liang's political thought and intellectual contribution. Little attention has been paid to his significant contribution to early Chinese mythology in terms of framework, motivation and approach.

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[2] Joseph R. Levenson. *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modem China*. 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), vii.

This paper delves into Liang Qichao's construction of Chinese myths, examining various aspects such as historical contexts, purposes, strategies, influence, and encountered problems. Liang's endeavor to reconstruct a new Chinese culture emerged from the national crisis of the late Qing dynasty and his disillusionment with political engagement. Central to this reconstruction was Liang's incorporation of myth to promote social reform, modernity, and nationalism. Liang proposed several interconnected strategies for Chinese mythology and the rebuilding of a new culture. These included adopting German and Japanese frameworks of mythology, situating Chinese mythology within the context of modernization and nationalism, using myth to bridge historical gaps and establish coherence and continuity in Chinese history, and employing social Darwinism to imbue the new Chinese culture movement with positive and progressive values. Liang laid the structural framework and established a nationalism-oriented approach for early Chinese mythology. Under Liang's influence, Chinese mythology evolved along three main trajectories: elucidating the origins of the Chinese race and civilization, fostering a sense of holistic nationality, and assimilating and responding to Western cultural influences. However, Liang's approach was not without its limitations. He failed to fully appreciate the differing contexts and purposes of Chinese and Western mythology, overlooked the distinct features of Chinese culture, and neglected the necessity of comparing myths across diverse nations. This resulted in a closed loop within his synthesis of Chinese history, culture, and nationalism, leaving numerous unresolved issues in need of revision or correction.

2. Historical Contexts: National Crisis and New Chinese Culture

Liang was born in Guangdong in 1873. He lived during the Qing Dynasty, the last imperial dynasty in Chinese history. Liang witnessed a severe national crisis in China: the Taiping Kingdom in Nanjing and the Reform Movement in 1898. Liang also witnessed great international incidents: the Franco-Prussian War, and Italy declared itself a unified kingdom in Rome. Joseph Levenson argues, "It was the contraction of China from a world to a nation in the world that changed the Chinese historical consciousness." [3] The Chinese national crisis and Western modernity thoughts made Liang become a reformist. Liang took to modernising Chinese civilization as his political commitment and lifelong calling. Liang's political views have undergone several changes to achieve this goal. I divide Liang's political career into three phases. The first phrase was Liang started his political career as a reformist until he was exiled to Japan in 1898. With his teacher Kang Youwei, he put their ideas of education, social, and institutional reforms in the paper. Liang published *General Discussion of Reforms* in 1896, proposing that China required institutional and ideological reform to eliminate corruption and remodel the state system. Confronted with constant defeats, the Guangxu Emperor (1875-1908) initiated the reform movement in 1898 and gave important positions to reformists, known as Wuxu Reform or Hundred Days' Reform. The Guangxu Emperor issued a series of edicts to restructure the bureaucracy and the education system, which gave rise to much criticism and opposition from the Qing court. The Empress Dowager arrested and executed several reformers.[4] Liang was forced to exile to Japan for fourteen years. Despite the failure of reform, Liang's advocated reformation and constitutional monarchy to change the social situation of the Qing dynasty had a significant influence on the Chinese intellectuals, and he became a spokesman for the reform movement.

From 1898 to 1911, liang continued advocating reformation among overseas Chinese and foreign governments while he stayed in Japan and visited Western countries and regimes. Liang changed from a reformist to a republican revolution to overthrow the Qing government. How to overthrow the Qing government, Liang changed from an advocator for republicanism to a constitutional monarchy. He supported constitutional monarchy as opposed to republicanism supported by the Tongmeng Hui, the forerunner of the Kuomintang. He believed the constitutional monarchies of England, Germany, and Japan were more appropriate for the history and situation in China. In 1899, Liang went to Canada, where he met Sun Yat-Sen, and then to Honolulu in Hawaii. During the Boxer Rebellion, Liang came to Canada and formed the Chinese Empire Reform Association, which became the Constitutionalist

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[3] Joseph R. Levenson, "The Genesis of Confucian China and Its Modern Fate" in Curtis, L. P., Jr., ed. *The Historian's Workshop: Original Essays by Sixteen Historians* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 288.

[4] Douglas Robertson Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies Harvard University : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1993), 35.

Party that advocated a constitutional monarchy. In 1900-1901, Liang visited Australia to raise support for a campaign to reform the Chinese empire and to learn the Western advanced technology, industry and government systems. He delivered lectures to Chinese and Western audiences around Australia. This visit coincided with the establishment of federalism in Australia in 1901. The Federation of Australia was the process by which the six British self-governing colonies of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia agreed to unite and form the Commonwealth of Australia. He felt this integration model might suit the diverse regions of China. He met the first Prime Minister of Australia, Edmund Barton.[5] He returned to Japan later that year. In 1903, Liang visited the United States for eight months, which included a meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt in Washington, DC, before returning to Japan via Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

From 1912 to 1918, Liang actively participated in social and political modernization; however, the Republic Revolution and his modernization project failed. After the outbreak of the republican revolution by the Revolutionary Alliance headed by Sun Yat-sen in 1911, Liang returned to China. Though Liang had some doubts about the republican mode, he gave support to the new republic. He joined the Beiyang government, serving as the chief justice and was in charge of the currency system bureau. In 1915, Liang opposed Yuan Shikai's attempt to make himself emperor. He convinced Yuan's disciple Cai E, the military governor of Yunnan, to launch a movement to overthrow Yuan. After Yuan's death, he served as the Duan Qirui cabinet's finance chief and the Salt Administration's supervisor. [6] Liang advocated entering World War I on the Allied side to boost China's status and ameliorate foreign debts. He criticized and condemned Kang Youwei's failed attempt to restore the Qing in 1917. After failing to turn Duan Qirui and Feng Guozhang into responsible politicians, he gave up and left politics. The failure made Liang reconsider the efficacy of a republican revolution and confirmed his idea that Chinese history and culture should be reconstructed to suit the modernisation project in China. Thus, he advocated the new culture movement to construct modernization in China. Liang thought the Chinese needed to improve civic ethos to build the nation-state.

During the three main political phrases, we can see Liang's attitude towards Western civilization underwent three main phases: from the initial ultimate endorsement to a critical evaluation, then to cultural reflection. The first phase was that Liang adopted Western modernity thought as the model to carry out his reform movement and implement comprehensive education, social, and institutional reforms. The second phase was Liang's exile in Japan; Liang acquired Japanese and Western knowledge and published a series of articles in the New Citizen Journal to refine his projection of Chinese nationalism and modernization. Liang witnessed the consequences of the French Revolution. Liang changed from an advocator for republicanism to a constitutional monarchy. Liang believed China should adopt the constitutional monarchy model as its appropriate political system. During the years 1905-7. Liang debated with Min bao writers on the two competing visions of modernity: German conservative, state-oriented liberalism and French Revolution and republicanism. The debate sharpened Liang's thoughts on political and cultural strategies.[7] The third phrase was after the republican revolution headed by Sun Yat-sen failed in 1918, Liang visited Europe in 1918. After World War I, the Europeans prevailed with pessimism and devastation. It caused Liang to propose that Chinese culture may function as a reflection or critique of Western modernity. Hay argues that when Liang returned from Europe, he believed that Chinese civilization had the competence to counter the adverse effects of modern Western civilization.[8] This European visit made Liang state that Chinese history and culture might anchor China on alternative grounds. Thus, when he returned to China in 1920, Liang launched a series of educational and cultural to create a new culture.

Years of engagement with Western civilization made Liang identify a robust discourse of nationalism to

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[5] John Schauble, Australia visit shaped ideas of Mao favorite, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December 2000.

[6] Theresa Man Ling Lee, "Liang Qichao and the Meaning of Citizenship: Then and Now". History of Political Thought. 2007 28 (2): 305-327.

[7] Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Standford University Press, 1996), vi-viii.

[8] Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and his Critics in Japan, China and India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 137-40.

construct modernization in China and improve civic ethos to build the nation-state: modernization and nationalism. Nationalism is an idea that holds that the nation should be congruent with the state.[9] Nationalism promotes the interests of a country to gain and maintain the nation's sovereignty over its homeland to create a nation-state. Nationalism proposed constructing national unity based on shared social characteristics of culture, ethnicity, geographic location, language, politics, religion, traditions and belief. [10] Nations are now viewed as socially constructed and historically contingent. [11] Modernization theory adopts a constructivist approach and proposes that nationalism emerged due to processes of modernization, such as industrialization, urbanization, and mass education, which made national consciousness possible. [12] Anderson presented nations as "imagined communities" and nationalism as an "invented tradition" in which shared sentiment offers a bond of collective identity and maintains political solidarity. [13] There are mainly two divergent forms of nationalism: ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism emphasises an ethnocentric approach to various political issues related to the national affirmation of a particular ethnic group.[14] Civic nationalism, also known as liberal nationalism, stresses liberal values of freedom, tolerance, equality, and individual rights. [15] Thus, a civic nation is defined not by ethnicity or culture but by political institutions, liberal principles, and shared values. Thus, nationalism is linked to the moral values of patriotism, freedom and justice. In the 20th century, the discourse of nationalism was closely connected with modernization. Nationalism, to some degree, could signify modernization "not only because it explains the arrival of the modern world in terms of national revolution and collective progress but also because nationalist discourse mandates a new spatiotemporal regime." [16] Liang proposed Chinese nationalism, combining Western Enlightenment universalism, Chinese history, and traditional culture. The national crisis in China and Liang's personal political experience made him decide to reconstruct Chinese history, myths, and culture to fit into the project of Chinese modernity and nationalism. Liang's formation of the New Culture Movement and his proposal of Chinese nationalism history influenced intellectuals significantly.

3. Define Chinese Mythology: Function and Significance

Liang's reconstruction of Chinese new culture rose out of the national crisis in the late Qing dynasty and his personally frustrating political engagement. He proposed reconstructing a new Chinese culture to promote China's political and social reform of modernity and nationalism. Liang took Chinese myth as a part of his reconstruction of a new culture or new historiography, an extension of his political project of Chinese modernization. Thus, Liang proposed reconstructing a nationalist mode of Chinese myth. In other words, he offered to rebuild the myth and history in China to support and strengthen the discourse of modernization and nationalism. I propose Liang's proposal of reconstructing Chinese myths and history in China to serve three purposes: first, to fit into the project of Chinese modernity and nationalism and to lay the cultural foundation for implementing modernity after the revolution in China; second, to establish cultural identity and justify its historical continuity; third, to provide an alternative culture mode outside of the predominance of western countries and enable China to gain a certain position in the world fierce competition.

First, Liang took myth as a vehicle to construct a new Chinese nationality or cultural identity and correlated Chinese myth to the project of modernization and nationalism. The late Qing dynasty faced a

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[9] Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

[10] Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Polity, 2010), 9.

[11] Harris Mylonas, Maya Tudor, "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know". Annual Review of Political Science. 2021 24 (1): 109–132.

[12] Harris Mylonas, Maya Tudor, "Nationalism: What We Know and What We Still Need to Know". *Annual Review of Political Science*. 2021 24 (1): 109-132.

[13] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism (London: Verso Books, 1983).

[14] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.

[15] Stefan Auer, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe* (Routledge, 2004), 5.

[16] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 212.

national crisis in the early twentieth century. Thus, Chinese intellectuals were attracted by the words of nation and race, hoping to reconstruct a Chinese identity and construct a competitive nation in the world civilization.[17] Many scholars represented by Liang tried to examine the origin, evolution and interaction between different ethics within Chinese territory to provide a theoretical framework and legitimate basis for constructing a new political entity or cultural identity. In the newspapers and periodicals established by Chinese students in Japan, whatever *Tide of Zhejiang*, *Jiangsu*, *China in the 20th Century*, *People News*, *National People News* and *The World of Children* all discussed the topic of nationalism and the Chinese nation. Sun Fubao introduced myth in his article in the *Journal of Practical Learning* in 1897. Liang took myth as the foundation of Western civilization and proposed approaching Chinese culture from the perspective of myth. In his essay "On History and Race", published in Series Newspaper of New People (Xinming Congbao) in 1902, Liang made an insight that myth is critical in approaching the origin of civilization and human thoughts. Liang argued that since myths can be used to study cultural origins for every ethics, we could not ignore or underestimate the ancient narratives before the Qin dynasty, and we should not take these narratives merely as absurd narratives.[18] Ye Shuxian, the contemporary leading Chinese mythologist, argues that Liang was the first scholar to define Chinese mythology and identified the researching object of mythology as "absurd words" narratives before the Qin period; the research purpose was "to study origins of thoughts for every ethics". [19] I agree with Ye that Liang was innovative in applying myths to study ancient Chinese history with a strong national consciousness. Inspired by Liang, many Chinese scholars investigated the texts before the Qin dynasty and interpreted the ancient Chinese culture from a mythical perspective. Zhang Taiyan proposed that the Pre-Qin period's classics were historical works heavily tainted with mythological and religious features. However, I disagree with Ye's arguments on Liang's research purpose of myth. I think Liang proposed to study mythical narratives not because he wanted to explore the Chinese thoughts of origin but to correlate myths with the discourse of modernization and nationalism.

Second**,** Liang argued that myth can help us to approach the cultural origin, fill the historical gap and construct a continuity of Chinese history. In *The Relations Between History and Ethnicity* (1902), Liang compared the Greek myths with those of China to explore the Chinese cultural origins and construct a continuity of Chinese history. He proposed that before the Greek culture had been fully developed, the leading culture was that of Assyria, Babylon, and Phoenicia. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all rooted in Hamitic, the origin of world religion. Ancient Greek mythology can be traced back to Assyria and Phoenicia. With the developing commerce and navigation, Phoenicia, though small in size, exerted tremendous influence on Greek, Italian, and Roman people and world history. Liang argues that world history was linked with Semitic, with Assyria and Babylon as a core and Phoenicia as a critical role.[20] Liang proposed that since Greek myths laid a solid foundation for Western civilization, Chinese scholars should explore mythical resources in China to determine the cultural origin and reconstruct a new culture. In *History of Athens* (1902), Liang used the Greek era of myth to examine Chinese ancient civilization. Liang argued that Greeks respected the mythical narratives of Gods and other metaphysical beings. The period before Homer was called an era of myth, 1795 BC in the Western calendar. [21] Liang proposed that we interpret narratives in the era of myth to reconstruct Chinese culture. Liang elaborated on the terms "remote antiquity" and "myth era" in his *Records of Remote Antiquity and Three Generations* (1922). Liang believed myths were vital to studying culture's origin for every nation. Although the myth's content seems absurd, it is loaded with profound cultural and national significance.

Third, Liang proposed to use myth to explore the race of Chinese race to identify its distinctive quality, thus providing an alternative cultural mode outside of the predominance of Western countries and enabling China to gain a certain position in the world's fierce competition. After World War I, the

[17] Feng Ke, *Racial Concept of Modern China* (Jiangsu People Publishing House, 1999). 22

[18] Ibid., 26.

[19] Ye Shuxian, Tan Jia. *Comparative Mythology in China: Reflection and Expansion* (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2016), 32.

[20] Liang Qichao, *New Study of History—the Relation between History and Race*, in *Collection of Yinbingshi* (the first volume) (Beijing: China Book Company, 1959), 16.

[21] Liang Qichao, *History of Athens*, in *Collection of Yinbingshi* (the sixth volume) (Beijing: China Book Company, 1959), 36.

Europeans prevailed with pessimism and devastation. It caused Liang to propose that Chinese culture may be a critique of or remedy for Western modernity. In *Research Method for Chinese History* (1926), Liang suggests that history is vital for the reconceptualization of modernity and stresses the importance of myth in the formation and circulation of human thoughts. Liang argues that culture is the essence of human studies. Human thoughts or ideas were circulated via languages, then myths and words. [22] Liang proposed structuring Chinese history from aspects of languages, words, myths and religions. Liang took the early blurring or ambiguous narrative of the remote antiquity era to study the outset of Chinese civilization. For example, in *Study on Flood (Hongshui Kao)*, Liang analyzed the Western flood myths narratives with that of ancient Chinese classics, such as *Lie Zi, The Verse of Chu (Chu Ci), and The Book of History (Shang Shu)*. Liang observed that flood narratives were not only confined to China but widely existed across the world. The most renowned flood narrative was the Jewish flood myth, included in Genesis of the *Old Testament.*[23] After comparing Christian and Chinese flood narratives, Liang proposed that ancient people in the West and East could not fully understand the cause of the flood; thus, they took it as a mystical phenomenon, and both had great respect or awe for Heaven. However, the difference is that most of the Chinese narrative did not blame the flood on the anger of Heaven; instead, they glorified the blessing of Heaven that took the flood away. [24] The ancient Chinese did not tend to leave the flood issue to be solved by nature; instead, they believed they might conquer it by human power. Liang extended from the flood narratives to those of geographical changes to explore the interaction between mythical history and prehistoric civilization.

Liang proposed to use myth to explore the race of Chinese people, to trace the source of Chinese civilization and to reconstruct the national spirit. From the research of early mythologists, such as Zhang Taiyan, Liang Qichao or Jiang Guanyun, we can see that early Chinese mythology introduced and borrowed the core concepts and approach from Western and Japanese mythology. Their main concern is to explore the origin of civilization and the formation of Chinese identity. Qian Mingzi argued that many mythologists stressed the ethnic issue; thus, they took the myths of their ancestors to explore their cultural origin and justify their cultural superiority over other ethnicities." [25] Many scholars used the myth to explore the issue of nation or race and focused on the type of genesis mythology. For example, in the late Qing Dynasty, Su Xuelin used comparative mythology to demonstrate that "The Nine Hymns" is a purely religious song and dance in *The Relation between 'The Bine Hymns' and Sacrifice to River God*. Su Xuelin takes myths and rites in ancient Greek, ancient Hebrew, India, Japan, South Pacific and Mexico to illustrate human sacrifice, misfortune-avoiding, gods-worship, atonement and river god in "The Nine Hymns". Su concluded that all these cultures have an origin; probably all were derived from Babylon.[26] Ye Shuxian proposed that early Chinese mythologists were preoccupied with the racial issue because the late Qing Dynasty Chinese society faced a national crisis. The scholars faced the arduous task of transforming China from a long-standing emperor-oriented feudal history to a federal entity with modern ethics. Thus, early Chinese mythology was part of the intellectual thoughts and undertook the mission of cultural and ethnic exploration. After the late Qing Dynasty, scholars tried to make myths to explore the cultural origin and reconstruct national spirits.

A good helper of Liang Qichao, Jiang Guanyun compared histories and myths in different countries and proposed that myths play a role in promoting modern civilization and cultivating national spirits. In his article published in the 36th *Series Newspaper of New People, Collection of Conversation* in 1903, Jiang proposed that myths and the history of a nation significantly influence its people; if we wanted to improve people's thinking, we must first improve education textbooks. [27]Jiang stressed that since the literary thoughts of modern Europe were influenced tremendously by the revival of myths and songs in

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[22] Liang Qichao, *History of Athens*, in *Collection of Yinbingshi* (the sixth volume) (Beijing: China Book Company, 1959), 16.

[23] Ibid.,19.

[24] Ibid.,20.

[25] Qian Mingzi, *Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2008), 2.

[26] Su Xuelin, "The Relation between 'The Nine Hymns' and Sacrifice to River God", see also *Selected Centenary Papers about Chinese Mythology* (Volume One) edited by Ma Changyi (Xian: Shaanxi Normal University Press, 2013), 73.

[27] Yuan Li, *Chinese Folklore Classics: Volume of Myths* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2002), 1.

Northern Europe, China should also explore its mystic resources to enhance its civilization.[28] In 1929, Jiang published *Research on the Chinese Race* in a *Series Newspaper of New People*. In this book, Jiang introduced the Sino-Babylonian theory by Terrien de Lacouperie, a French orientalist. Lacouperie proposed that given resemblances between Chinese characters and Akkadian hieroglyphics; the Chinese probably migrated from Mesopotamia in prehistoric times and Babylon as the cradle of civilization in these works. Lacouperie had a great interest in the origin of the Chinese race and the development of Chinese history and culture. He published books on early Asian and Middle-Eastern languages, such as *Early History of Chinese Civilization (1880)*, *The History of the Archaic Chinese Writings and Text* (1882), and *Paper Money of the Ninth Century. He supposed Leather Coinage of China* (1882), *Cradle of the Shan Race* (1885), *Babylonia and China* (1887), *The Languages of China before the Chinese* (1887), *The Old Babylonian Characters and their Chinese Derivates* (1888), and *Western Origin of Early Chinese Civilization from 2300B.C to 200A.D* (1894). Lacouperie's theory of Sino-Babylonianism found its way into Japan. The Japanese scholar Shirakawa Jiro and Kokubu Tanenori introduced the approach in their book *A History of Chinese Civilization*. Thus, it became a popular theory among Japanese intellectuals.[29] Jiang and other Chinese scholars of his time, such as Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan, and Liu Shipei, translated and introduced it to China. Thus, via Japan, Lacouperie's theory of Sino-Babylonianism and his correlating early China and the world system captured the attention of Chinese historians and intellectuals in the early 1900s. Some historians took Lacouperie's theory to support the anti-Manchu racist views, which were founded on those of Herbert Spencer and the Yellow Book.[30] Besides introducing Lacouperie's theory, Lacouperie proposed that the Chinese migrated from Mesopotamia in prehistoric times and Babylon as the cradle of civilization in these works. Jiang compared the mythical narratives of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the *Tale of King Mu*, and the myths of Brahman to explore the origin of the Chinese race and prove the validity of the Sino-Babylonianism theory.

Liang argued that myth was not only helpful in constructing a new Chinese nationality or cultural identity and constructing a new Chinese culture of modernization and nationalism but also in approaching the cultural origin, filling the historical gap and constructing a continuity of Chinese history. Besides, Liang used Chinese myth to explore the Chinese race and identify its distinctive quality, thus providing an alternative cultural mode outside of the predominance of Western countries and enabling China to gain a certain position in the world's fierce competition.

4. Identify Models: German and Japanese Mythology

I will analyze a critical strategy by Liang's proposal of reconstructing a new culture: to follow the nationalism and modernization of German and Japanese mythology. The dominance of the West and the rise of Japan made Liang identify the German and Japanese models of nationalism and modernization as the suitable way for China. In the early 19th century, mythology was not only the study of the mythical theme or structure but also closely related to state-nation construction. German and Japanese mythologists examined and re-interpreted the myths in the light of modernization and nationalism. Let us look at how Liang proposed a reconstruction of Chinese culture following the models of German and Japanese.

In the early 19th century, the Holy Roman Empire disintegrated into 39 federation states of different sizes. For the newly founded state of Germany, how to form a nationalism or national identity became essential for the German intellectuals. German scholars tried to explore the cultural resources to break the linguistic barriers among federal states and to construct a unified and glorious history and culture for the new Germany. The linguists compared various North European, German and Indo-European languages to demonstrate their commonality and variants regarding vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Based on these linguistic findings, scholars proposed that Germany and Europe were not isolated continents; however, it was related to ancient Greece and Rome, India and Persia. Scholars

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[28] Ibid., 1.

[29] Ishikawa Yoshihiro, "Anti-Manchu Racism and the Rise of Anthropology in Early 20th century China," *Sino-Japanese Studies*, chinajapan.org. 2003. Retrieved 23 November 2010.

[30] John King Fairbank, Denis Crispin Twitchett, Denis Crispin eds. *The Cambridge History of China: Republican China, 1912–1949*. Vol. 12. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 355-6.

were enthusiastic to study the origin of these languages and their different modes of evolution. Due to co-efforts made by Jones, Schlegel, Grimm and Bopp, they revealed that Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language, belonged to the same linguistic family as ancient Greek, Latin, with German, Celtic and Slavic. Thus, they proposed that Crete, Germanic, Latin Greek and ancient Persian peoples who speak Sanskrit belonged to the same Aryan race. Thus, the Aryan, an ancient race living in the southern Russian Ural Mountains, was seen as the origin of the Indo-European language and cradle of ancient Greek, Latin, German, Celtic and Slavic.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, Germany underwent a severe crisis of disintegration. Thus, German intellectuals felt it urgent to address the challenge of consolidating their newly-established nationalism. In the early 19th century, European scholars proposed an anti-enlightened romanticism, which advocated the function of the local, folk and oral resources of ordinary people and rural peasants to counter the expansion of rationalism. In this way, the folk culture, viewed as the lower form of culture, transferred into a robust culture related to the values of sincerity, untainted truth, and the national spirit. Against the nationalism claim and folk-prominent culture context, some German scholars represented by the Brothers Grimm, based on the study of Germanic linguistics, used myth to propose Germany as a unified, strong nation with a glorious history. The Brothers Grimm argued that since the Indo-European states had a common primitive language, a common mode of myth should exist, that of the Aryan race. Thus, they collected and published stories, legends and folktales in their *Collection of Stories about Child and Family*, *Germanic Myth* and *Collection of Germanic Legend*, and *Collection of Germanic Legend*. The Brothers Grimm compared the myths preserved in German folk narratives with that of races in the Indo-European languages to propose that they shared a common myth of the Aryan race. Besides, the Brothers Grimm used the folk and local resources, and the mythical and other marginal remnants not only criticized the culture of reason, enlightenment and urban elites but also to construct the national spirits for the newly founded Germany and the genealogy of its cultural and historical development.

Max Muller, a follower of The Brothers Grimm, contributed significantly to comparative mythology and German nationalism. In his *Comparative Mythology*, Muller divided language development into four periods: word formation, dialects, myths and national languages. Muller studied the linguistic roots of kinship and names of domesticated animals in various races to reconstruct the social and family structure of the ancient Aryan. Muller compared auxiliary words in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French to propose that these different word forms are variants of a shared model. He suggested, "Each variant of six inflexions is nothing but the change of Latin itself." [31] Muller named the period before state formation as the era of myths. He considers that mythologists should trace mythic narratives to their origin and then identify the phylogenetic location and age according to their mythical characteristics. In this way, Muller studied myths in India, Greece, Rome and Northern Europe to propose that these myths could be traced back to a common origin, the narrative mode of ancient Indo-European. Muller presented that digging into linguistic history can help us understand myths and clarify blurring or ambiguous gaps. Besides, Muller stressed the interaction between religion and legends in the Indo-European community and viewed ancient gods as the personification of natural phenomena. Muller verified many names of myths related to the sun, thus proposing that worshiping the sun was the core belief in primitive society.

Müller's idea that linguistics linked to its belief systems and language was the precondition for approaching religion inspired Chinese scholars. For example, Zhang Taiyan applied Max Müller's theory to interpret Chinese myths and languages. First, In the *Revised Article (Dingwen),* Zhang introduced Max Müller's idea of language disease and took it to refute the long-standing bias of Confucianism against myth as an absurd narrative. Zhang argues that the classics were not the ultimate truth; they were historical narratives and linguistic representations of events. [32] Second, Zhang explained the origin and evolution of the Chinese language in light of Müller's theory. After comparing with the European languages, Zhang indicated that Chinese lacks a clear distinction between the

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[31] Max Muller, *Comparative Mythology*, translated by Jin Ze (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1989), 18.

[32] Zhang Taiyan, *Notes of Necessary Words*, edited by Zhang Bingling (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Classics Press, 2000), 394.

signified and the signifier. Thus, Zhang stressed the significance of Chinese textology, which studies Chinese phonology, characters and exegesis. Zhang valued the interaction between the cultural origins and cultural tradition, the myth's genre and contents. Zhang used German mythology to challenge Chinese study's predominant and orthodox character-oriented approach. Third, Zhang proposed the concept of "historical ethnics", which redefined the Chinese ethnics by culture instead of ancestry. [33] Zhang advocates that people with the same historical genealogy should belong to the same ethnicity. Zhang used myths to demonstrate the existence of matriarchy in the Han ethnics in ancient times. Zhang compared the mythical narratives of Fu Xi, Shennong and the Yellow Emperor with those of Chaldea to prove the similarities between Chinese and Chaldea myths. He described the features of the Queen Mother of the West from the narratives of *Tale of King Mu*, The *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Despite Zhang's application of Müller's theory to interpret Chinese myths and culture giving rise to much controversy, it demonstrates that German mythology provides the framework and approach for early Chinese mythology and cultural studies.

Besides German, Liang proposed that Chinese mythology should follow the Japanese academia. China was shocked at the rapid development of Japan, especially after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. Japan has risen to a mighty nation, and Japanese scholars wanted to demonstrate that Japan could become another mode of modern civilization. Many books on world religion, literature and ethnology were widely circulated in Japan. Thus, Chinese scholars accessed Western knowledge via the translation of Japanese. According to the *Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese Translation of Japanese Books* edited by Yue-him Tam, the number of Chinese translations from Japanese history and geography books was around 240 before 1911. [34] There were only ten Chinese translations of Japanese texts before 1900; the number of translations increased significantly to over 120 from 1901 to 1903. The most popular translation works on history and civilization were *Historical Essays of Chinese Civilization* by Nakanishi Ushio, [35] *History of Chinese Civilization* by Taguchi Ukichi [36], *Chinese Civilization History* by Shirakawa Jirou and Koudera Tanetoku. [37] These translations provided Chinese scholars with new ideas on history and civilization, emphasizing cultural integration, racial competition and national consciousness.

In Japan, civilization became a popular topic in history since the late Tokugawa Bakufu regime (1603 to 1868) and enjoyed great popularity in the early Meiji government (1868-1912) because governors believed that knowledge of civilization could promote Japanese social reformation. Some Japanese historians, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Taguchi Ukichi, proposed that modern political systems replace Japanese feudal and political institutions. [38] Thus, Japanese mythology was part of the intellectual movement on modernization. Takayama Chogyuu first used the terminology of myth in his *Study on Myths of Kojiki* in 1899. In *Comparative Mythology*, Takagi Toshio systematically introduced European mythology to Japan. Japanese mythologists took Japanese myths to identify their distinct qualities and construct a cultural identity. Given the intimacy between Japanese and Chinese culture, Chinese scholars accepted and translated the terminology, ideas and approaches from Japanese mythology. In Japanese, the word "myth" (し ん わ) is composed of two parts: "Shen Hua". "Shen" (し ん) is also written as "か み" and is equivalent to the God. "Hua" (わ) is equal to "tale" and "story"; "Shen Hua" (し ん わ) is about the action of gods. It is consensus that the term myth was imported to China from Japan. However, there are some disputes on who was the earliest importer of myth. Yuan Ke proposed that the earliest came from Jiang Guanyun's article "Figures in Myth and History", published in The New Citizen Newspaper (Xinming Chongbao) in 1903.[39] Ye Shuxian proposed that it should be Sun Fubao's article in the *Newspaper of Practical Learning* (Shixuebao) on

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[33] Ibid., 394.

[34] Yue-him Tam, *Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese Translation of Japanese Books* (Hongkang Chinese University Press, 1980).

[35] Nakanishi Ushio, *Historical Essays of Chinese Civilization* (General Learning House Publishing House, 1901).

[36] Taguchi Ukichi, *History of Chinese Civilization*, Liu Tao trans. (Shanghai Publishing House, 1902).

[37] Shirakawa Jirou and Koudera Tanetoku, *Chinese Civilization History* (Shanghai Jinghua Publishing House, 1903).

[38] Touyama Shigeki, Satou Shinichi, *An Introduction of Research History in Japan*, translated by Lv Yongqin (Beijing: SDX Joint Public Company, 1999), 1-2.

[39] Yuan Ke, *History of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1988), 25.

4 December 1897. Ye argued that in Sun's article, there was a paragraph with explicit reference to myth: "Phoenicia (Japan) has a place called Bu La Si, where many writers wrote national history. Many articles about theology and mythology were scattered and lost."[40] Sun not only introduced the word myth from Japan but also some Greek myths. [41] However, the introduction of Japanese mythology to China also gave rise to some controversy or even undermined Chinese mythological and cultural significance and global influence.

Compared with Japanese mythology, Chinese culture seemingly lacks religious traditions like Shintoism, nor political and religious canons like *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. Japanese mythologists stressed its distinguished religion, Shinto, which laid a spiritual foundation for Japanese Yamato-damashi natural spirits and cultural identity. Japanese mythologists took the Shinto and its mythical resources to enhance national moods and cultural identity. Influenced by the Japanese approach, many Chinese scholars in the 1920s, including Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan, Liang Qichao, Jiang Guanyun and Xie Liuyi, agreed with Japanese academia that China lacked a myth system, even criticizing ancient Chinese culture and tradition. Xie Liuyi published many books on Japanese literature, such as *Japanese Literature*,[42] *A History of Japanese Literature*[43], *Japanese Literature*[44] and A *History of Japanese Literature*[45]. Apart from translating Japanese literary thoughts, Xie compiled several critical literary works. Zhao Jingshen said that "Xie was the authority of Japanese literature."[46] Xu Tiaofu noted that "Xie was the only one who systematically introduced Japanese literature." [47] Xie introduced Japanese myths in his complied book, *Mythology ABC* (1982), which includes mythology's history, theory and methodology. The book's first half is based on Japanese anthropologist Shinji Nishimura's *Outline of the History of Japanese Civilization*, and the second half is based on Japanese mythologist Toshio Takagi's *Comparative Mythology*. The introduction of Japanese mythology provides many resources to Chinese mythology; however, it also led to underestimating the significance of cultural history in ancient China and prejudice of Chinese traditional civilization. China enjoys thousands of ancient civilizations, with a vast territory and multiple ethics, and has multi-ethical mythical materials or resources. Chinese mythology enjoys a significant function in exploring cultural identity and national construction.

Liang valued German and Japanese mythology because it aimed to construct nationalism and modernity for the newly founded Germany or rising Japan. German linguistics and mythologists explored the word homology or the origin across different races to identify a shared cultural source or a prototype structure. Japanese mythologists took Japanese myths to carry out social reform and enhance their cultural and political impact. Liang proposed that German and Japanese mythology provides the framework and approach for China to construct a national community, identify modes of cultural transmission, and build the nation-state discourse.

5. Locate Framework: Nationalism and Modernization

After Liang identified, German and Japanese mythology should be the models for Chinese mythology. I will investigate Liang's second strategy for reconstructing a new culture: to locate Chinese myths within the framework of modernization and nationalism and to reconstruct a continuity of Chinese history from the Western discourse of historiography and cultural history. Liang's advocacy of a new culture was not a purely cultural project but a cultural reconstruction of his political thoughts and his project of Chinese modernity and nationalism.

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[40] "History of Phoenicia (Japanese Economic Journal)", translated by Sun Baofu, the 11th volume of *Journal of Practical Learning*, December 4, 1897.

[41] Liu Xichen, *Chinese Folk Academic History on Literature and Art in the 20th Century* (He Nan University Publishing House,2006), 18.

[42] Xie Liuyi, *Japanese Literature* (Kaiming Book Company, 1927).

[43] Xie Liuyi, *A History of Japanese literature*（volume 1 and 2）, (Beixin Bookstore, 1929).

[44] Xie Liuyi, *Japanese Literature (*The Commercial Press,1929).

[45] Xie Liuyi, *A History of Japanese Literature*（volume 1&2&3）, (The Commercial Press, 1930).

[46] Zhao Jingshen, *Xie Liuyi*, *Memories on Chinese Literature* (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore. 1983) 94.

[47] Xie Liuyi, *Collection of Articles of Xie Liuyi* (Beijing: The Commercial Press), 390.

Liang proposed that constructing a national history is helpful for China to overcome the social crisis and rise as a powerful nation. Liang significantly impacted the writing and acceptance of Chinese history and culture. To some degree, modern Chinese historiography and modern Chinese mythology began with Liang's *New History,* published in *Series Newspaper of New People* (Xinshixue, 1902). In this book, Liang proposed reconstructing Chinese history and culture to support Chinese nationalism and modernization. How to support Chinese nationalism and modernization, Liang proposed that we should establish a continuity of Chinese history, a coherent Chinese nationalism, and a mighty imaginative community. Liang divided Chinese history into three stages: ancient, medieval and modern periods, with an underlying subtext of social Darwinism. Among the three periods, Liang valued the ancient and modern ones since it was feasible to correlate history and culture in the two eras and to construct a continuity of Chinese history. Liang belittled the middle period, the history from the first Qing Dynasty to the last Qing Dynasty in China because he thought the middle period obscured this connection and weakened the continuity of Chinese history.[48] Liang's Chinese nationalism history, just like Mudimbe analyzes modern African thought, was "a mirror and consequence of the experience of European hegemony."[49] Liang used Western discourses, such as the New Historiography, to give the new Chinese culture historical consciousness, critical reconceptualization and theoretical innovation. For Liang, myths play a vital part in establishing a synthesis between the mythical and modern eras to fill the historical gap and construct a continuity of Chinese history. Liang argued that myth could approach the origin of civilization and provide the medium and means to make up the gaps in Chinese history and culture. In this way, Liang proposed reconstructing myth in light of his political practices and his project of modernity. Liang highly selected sources from Chinese myths, history and culture to justify and implement his project of Chinese nationalism and modernity while ignoring the counter sources that might undermine or weaken the project.

Liang's nationalist reconstruction of Chinese history and culture was his recreation of the ti-yong dichotomy or the 'East versus West' binary, which depicted the East as the source of spiritual culture and the West as material or scientific culture. The 'East versus West' binary was an extension of the Qing court's ti-yong dichotomy, that is, to confine Western learning to practical matters, while Chinese education was reserved for essential issues. Liang had a radically different attitude towards the East and the West. He envisioned the West as the source of material or scientific culture and the framework of nation and state establishment. Liang viewed the East not only as the source of spiritual culture for Chinese people but also as a restorative power to redeem the crisis of Western modernity.

It should be noted that in the same year of the publication of Liang's New History, the Qing court issued *Presented School Regulations*, called the "Education System of Ren-yin" in 1912. It is the first education system administered by the government in modern China. Qing court wanted to make an educational innovation to deal with its national crisis while maintaining its governance. Qing court adopted the ti-yong dichotomy, that is, to confine Western learning to practical matters, while Chinese education was reserved for essential issues. According to this new system, history became compulsory in primary and middle schools, and higher primary school is set with Chinese history. For the teaching sequence, the school should first provide the subject of Chinese history and the history of Asian countries, then European, American and other Western countries' history. The two subjects of Chinese and world history should be set at universities.[50] Since then, history has become a popular subject, and many history textbooks have been published. According to Regulations, eight main disciples or subjects would be set in the university: classics, politics and laws, literature, medicine, physics, agriculture, engineering and business. In this classification, the subject of classics was put into the priority. This discipline division conformed to Qing courts' intention to confine Western learning to practical matters, while Chinese learning was reserved for essential issues. This educational system gave rise to much-heated discussion or criticism. In 1906, Wang Guowei criticized that *Presented*

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[48] Liang Qichao. "Xinshixue" (New History), in Yinbingshiwenji, edited by Lin Zhijun, reprint of 1932 ed (Taibei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1970), 10-11.

[49] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 184.

[50] Shu Xincheng, *Materials of Education History in Modern China* (Beijing: People's Education Press), 562-564.

School Regulations failed t*o* set philosophy as a disciple.[51] Wang argued that philosophy had an excellent capability of integrating the Eastern and western cultures. With regards to the classification of the subject, Wang argued the subject of classics should be included within the school of literature; the school of literature should be classified into five subjects classics, philosophy, history, Chinese literature and foreign literature; third, the subject of history could be subdivided into twelve items, including comparative linguistics and mythology.

Liang made nationalism and modernization the dominant narrative mode of history narratives and research. Before, many history books in China followed the Japanese periodization of Chinese history until 1918. Influenced and inspired by Liang, many historians wrote Chinese history within the nationalism framework and traced the origins of Chinese civilization.[52] Fu Sinan argued that the Japanese narrative of Chinese history emphasised conquest dynasties such as Mongols or Manchus and paid less attention to mainland dynasties, thus obscuring the continuity of Chinese history.[53] Many Chinese historians made great efforts to construct the continuity of Chinese history or included the ancient age of the Yellow Emperor and sage kings in Chinese history to create Chinese national historiography. Some other historians, like Gu Jiegang, attacked these nationalistic assumptions. [54] Despite some opponents, the nationalistic approach has been the dominant narrative of Chinese history since the mid-twentieth century.

Liang used social Darwinism to justify nationalistic history and gave ethical consciousness and moral value to his reconstruction of Chinese nationalistic history. Liang constructed Chinese nationalism with positive values of progress, righteousness and prosperity. However, Liang's modernization-oriented new culture movement led to a simple linear narrative of history, which does not clarify the complex responses to modern discourses that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[55] Under the influence of Liang's Chinese nationalists, the dominant narrative of Chinese history since the mid-twentieth century has been the narrative of modernization. This modern consciousness was constructed with the implication of progress, righteousness and prosperity. The narrative of Chinese history since the mid-nineteenth century usually began with the Opium War of 1840, and the Qing imperial state first attacked, then recognized the challenges posed by the West. Then, the Qing court wanted to strengthen the weak empire while maintaining its governance. Thus, the Qing court decided to adopt the ti-yong dichotomy. However, the Qing court could not successfully strengthen its empire and could not deal with the ever-increasing challenges from the West in the late nineteenth century. Some literati and progressive bourgeoisie advocated institutional reform without challenging the basic principles of the Confucian imperial system. The exemplary representative was the 100 Days of Reform, led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. The 1911 Republican Revolution challenged the traditional political system, but it was left to the May 4th Movement of 1917-21 to attack the cultural underpinnings of the old system. Duara proposed that this simple linear narrative does not clarify the complex responses to modern discourses that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[56] I would like to extend Duara's question of the narratives of modernity in China to my questioning narratives of mythology in China.

Liang over-stressed the significance of modernization and progress while underestimating or denying conservatism's efficiency. Benjamin Schwartz argued that those who questioned the modernisation project in China or were opposed to the tendency of progress and modernization have been labelled

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[51] Wang Guowei, Wang Guowei, *Written after Presented School Regulations of Confucian classics studies and literature,* see also *Compilation of Modern Education in China—Higher Education,* edited by Chen Yuanhui (Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 2007), 11-12.

[52] Chow Kai-wing. The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China: Ethics, Classics, and Lineage Discourse (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 47-49.

[53] Fu Sinian. "Zhongguo lishi fenqizhi yanjiu" (Researches in the Periodization of Chinese History), Beijing Daxue Rikan, 17–23 April 1928 (reprinted in Fu Sinian quanji 4:176-85).

[54] Gu Jiegang. *An Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*, translated by Arthur W. Hummel (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966).

[55] rasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[56] Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, 2.

negatively as conservative; however, their ideas are very modern.[57] Furth made a distinction between the two types of conservatism. The first type that separated culture from politics and was often subordinated to the politics and technology. The second type does not distinguish culture from politics; instead, it exalted spiritual culture over materiality or stressed the power of spirit on political and material life. [58] According to Furth, the scholars of the National Essence School (guocui), such as Zhang Binglin and Liu Shipei, belong to the first type of conservatism. They advocated to subordinate or adapt Chinese to suit the modernity movement. [59] This school was not opposed to modernity but doubted modernity was insufficient not to bring well-being to the nation. Furth argues that the second type of conservatism was represented by neo-Confucianism such as Liang Shuming, who were not opposed to modernity; however, they gave religion and spirituality priority, and perceived value or wisdom embedded in Confucianism could not evaluated and judged by modern science. However, I think Confucianism has been deeply grounded and intersected with politics. Confucianism could not be separated from politics since the religious and moral values of Confucianism has already become part of the foundation of political institution. Just like the School of National Essence, which highly selected the cultural resources to suit the modernisation requirements, Neo-Confucianists also selected Confucian values to serve the political purpose.

Liang made nationalism and modernization the dominant narrative mode of history narratives and research. Liang used social Darwinism to justify nationalistic history and gave ethical consciousness and moral value to his reconstruction of Chinese nationalistic history. Liang constructed Chinese nationalism with positive values of progress, righteousness and prosperity.

6. Influence and Problems

I will evaluate the influence and problems of Liang's Chinese nationalism mythology. Influenced by Liang, early Chinese mythology aimed to explore the origin of civilization and national identity, reconstruct ancient history, and establish the link between Western and Chinese mythology. These early studies laid a solid foundation for Chinese mythology but gave rise to many problems or issues that need further reflection or correction. The scholarship focuses on Liang's political thought and intellectual contribution; however, the rhetoric of Liang's Chinese nationalism demanded a critical rethinking. Some key components of Liang's Chinese nationalism need to be demythologized. I think there are three problematic flaws in Liang's Chinese nationalism mythology.

First, Liang proposed to follow modes of European, German and Japanese academia; however, he failed to realize that Chinese and Western mythology differ in historical contexts and purpose and that Western demarcation between the sacred and the secular did not fit well with the Chinese mythical narratives. Early Chinese mythology lacked the local theoretical approach theory; thus, it intensely relied on Western mythology and framework. A typical case was that in 1933, Lin Huixiang, according to the Western myth classification, divided Chinese myths into several categories: the creation myth (flood myth), nature myth, gods and spirits myth, dead soul myth, animal and plant myth, folk myth, history myth, hero myth.[60] It shows that early Chinese mythology entirely copied the framework of Western mythology. However, Liang and other early Chinese scholars failed to realize that Western and Japanese mythology grew from different contexts and served different purposes. Western mythology At the beginning of the 19th Century, the Brothers Grimm and Mark Muller, in German, used myth and folklore to construct nationalism for newly founded Germany and to challenge the Enlightenment and reflect on modernity. In the mid or late 19th century, Japanese mythology used myth to strengthen their national identity and promote their political and cultural influence. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Chinese intellectuals, such as Zhang Taiyan, Liang Qichao and Jiang Guanyun, resorted to myth to undermine imperial authority and divine religious faith, solve the national crisis, and construct a solid and unifying nationalism for China. Thus, myth, including folklore, mythology and other non-orthodox cultural resources, was considered the peripherical narrative, serving social and political purposes.

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[57] Charlotte Furth ed. *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 4.

[58] Ibid., 39-41.

[59] Furth, *The Limits of Change*, 31-32.

[60] Lin Huixiang, *Cultural Anthropology* (Commercial Press, 1933), 335-337.

Besides, Liang failed to realize that Western demarcation between the sacred and the secular did not fit well with the Chinese mythical narratives. He did not consider the peculiar characteristics of Chinese civilization, such as the sacristy of Chinese rites and music, the paradoxical coexistence of diversity and unification within Chinese culture, and the close relationship between sage and Confucian classics. Influenced by Liang, many early scholars at that time simply borrowed Western theory to interpret Chinese cultural phenomena without considering the peculiar characteristics of Chinese civilization. Western mythical theory and practice provided valuable tools and materials for the Chinese scholar to explore their Chinese mythology. Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren and Mao Dun introduced, transformed and absorbed the theoretical hypothesis and methodology of Western mythology. Mao Dun's *Chinese Mythology ABC* laid a theoretical foundation for Chinese mythology, making it a recognized independent discipline. These scholars were influenced by Western mythology and made a significant contribution to Chinese mythology. [61] The most common practice for the scholars was to apply the Western theory of history or mythology to interpret the history and myths of ancient China. They adopted the Western classification of logos and mythos, the dual opposition of facts and fancy, to reconstruct history and myths in ancient China. They tried to find the mythical Chinese resources in the era of the pre-Qin Dynasty and to separate mythic narratives from ancient history. It can be seen from the approach of Liang Qichao, Mao Dun and the School of Gushi Bian. However, as William Hansen, an American scholar of classics and folklore, pointed out, Chinese scholars tended to exclude magical elements from myths and historicize myths.[62] These scholars took the Western approaches to explore the origin of the Chinese civilization; they did not realise that Western demarcation between the sacred and the secular did not fit well with the Chinese mythical narratives since the mythological and historical are mutually dependent and closely incorporated. It was difficult for Chinese mythology to rely solely on Western hypotheses and mythology to reconstruct a coherent myth system in ancient China.

Second, Liang failed to address one key issue of mythology: the precondition or fitness of comparing different myths of a diverse nation. In other words, on what condition or premises should one type of myth be compared to others? The most common practice of mythology was that many scholars adopted historical and linguistic evidence to explore the Chinese cultural origin and migration situation and used Western theoretical premises or analytical structures to compare national and cultural materials of different regions. It raises a question of the fitness of myth comparison.

The distinguished archaeologist and anthropology, Kwang-chih Chang, in *The Chinese Creation Myths: A Study in Method,* took the creation myth to discuss the comparability of different myths.[63] Chang proposed his understanding of how myths of varying cultures could be compared and the significance of these comparisons. Chang argued that the first step of a myth study was to identify the primary unit and category. Chang suggested that Thompson's motif index works better to study Chinese folktales and myths' type and structural analysis than Levi-Strauss's structural analysis for folktales. American folklorist Stith Thompson composed the type analysis and motif index of Folktale. Thompson compiled, classified, and numbered the traditional motifs of European folktale types in the tale-type index. Thomson divides folktales into two categories: the kind and the motif. Tale types are recurring, self-sufficient plots or motif groupings. Motifs are persistent, indivisible and defining narrative elements or story details. In the index context, a motif was defined by Thompson as: "the smallest element in a tale having the power to persist in tradition. It must have something unusual and striking about it to have this power." [64] For Thomson, the motif was myth's smallest unit and fundamental element. Chang valued Thompson's motif index for folktales. Chang insists that the basic units or mythological motifs are the critical premises of myth comparison. Chang proposed that only two myths of different cultures were identified as the basic unit or motif; they could be compared with each other; otherwise, the two myths could not be compared. Chang gave an example to illustrate his argument. Chang said that the myth of Nv Wa is a basic unit or mythical motif in Chinese myths if similar mythological narratives recounting a hero or god's fixing the broken sky in another country were not

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[61] William Hansen, *Handbook of Classical Mythology* (ABC-CLIO 2004).

[62] Yang Lihui, *Myth and Mythology* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2009), 198-200.

[63] Kwang-chih Chang*, The Chinese Creation Myths: A Study in Method* (Academia Sinica, 1959).

[64] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (University of California Press, 1977) ,415.

deemed a basic unit or mythical motif. These two myths could not be compared despite their similar plot and characters. Chang held that identifying the basic unit or myth motif is the foundation of myth comparison. Chang emphasized that when we compare identical myths from different nations or take these comparisons as evidence of cross-cultural interaction, we must investigate the relationship between these mythical materials and their geographic distribution and historical context. [65] For Chang, myth was not an imaginative and fictional narrative; It was deeply rooted and closely connected with historical reality and cultural complexity. Chang provided a helpful way of substantializing the seemingly fictional myths and demonstrated that studying ancient Chinese civilization and mythology could be rewarding if it de-emphasizes traditional disciplinary barriers. However, Chang focused on the thematic motif and the structural mythology of myth and tended to take the myths as materials or resources to approach history. We need to continue his thoughts on the reliability and suitability of myth comparison.

Third, Liang proposed using the myth to correlate the ancient and modern eras to construct the consistency and continuity of history or cultural identity; however, Liang's synthesis of Chinese history and traditional culture and Chinese nationalism formed a closed loop. Liang's cognitive map guides many scholars to bridge China in the past and China in the present in two ways. Either to interpret Chinese history and traditional culture within the framework of Chinese nationalism or to justify the legitimacy of Chinese nationalism with the historical and literary narrative. These practices formed a closed loop. Many scholars take nationalism as the normative mode of interpreting Chinese history and traditional culture. These practices ignored the historical contexts and peculiar characteristics of historical and literary narratives. It might easily lead to the distortion and misinterpretation of the real intention and actual contexts of historical incidents and cultural representation. In terms of modern historicity, "the controlled use of reflection upon history as a means of changing history," [66] Liang reflected on Chinese history and traditional culture as a means of changing Chinese history and traditional culture to establish a national history. In other words, Liang's Chinese nationalism was not a pre-conditioned entity but a reconstructed historical discourse.

Two reasons are contributing to Liang's reconstruction of Chinese nationalistic myth that was widely circulated in China: first, out of the national crisis and political pursuit of modernization; second, it was based on Confucianism reconstruction of myths in China across the history of China. Confucian scholars of different dynasties were confronted with the ever-degrading scarcity of Chinese myth and lack of coherent mythic narratives. Ironically, the more efforts they make to construct their discourse of myth, the more damage they will be caused to the fragile and fragmented mythical resources. At the outset, there should exist bountiful myths of different local cults attached to various ancestral clans. Because mythological narratives were not a personal random choice, instead they played an essential role in helping the people in the primitive society to live and survive, to understand the world and themselves. Since the Qin dynasty, the first dynasty in China, the preserved fragments of the previous dynasty were distorted, historicized and passed through the filters of the latter dynasty. Especially when Confucian school was securely established as a dominant tradition during the Han dynasty. Most ancient mythological and historical narratives had been systematically edited, filtered and constructed to fit into a pseudohistorical schema. What was left was only the fragmented and aphoristic texts, such as in Ch'u Tz'u; we can see some fragmented pre-Han mythological materials and lack any consecutive recounting of coherent mythic units. Therefore, the mythical narratives in ancient China were decomposed entirely, degraded, and consciously constructed to conform to the poetic claim and Confucian ideology.

Due to the constant construction of myth by the political and ideological censorship across Chinese history, many scholars on mythology observe that China lacks coherent mythic narratives and religion. As Werner noticed: "There is no hierarchy of gods brought in and inhabit the world they made, no conclave on Mount Olympus, nor the judgment of the mortal soul by Osiris, no transfer of human love and hate, passions and hopes, to the powers above; all here is ascribed to disembodied agencies or

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[65] Ibid., 25.

[66] Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 212.

principles, and their words are represented as moving on in quiet order. There is no religion, no imagination; all is impassible, passionless, and uninteresting. " [67] Western scholarship tended to view China as an exceptional case in the history of world civilizations, a particular culture of absence of religious and mythological nature. Werner proposed that the scarcity of Chinese myth developed because Chinese "intellectual progress was arrested at a comparatively early stage." [68] I disagree with his idea because I think the absence of Chinese myth resulted from constant edition and reconstruction by the Confucian ideology, in terms of Laurence Thompson, the "myth of Confucian China". What was left was the fragmented reconstruction vision of myths in China based on Confucian philosophy and ideology. One problem of Chinese mythology is that it is difficult to access authentic historical incidents or mythological messages because there is extreme scarcity and fragmentation of fictitious accounts and almost no coherent mythic narratives dating to the early periods of Chinese culture.

Lastly, Liang's Chinese nationalism was not 'people-nationalism' or an American mode of civic nationalism; instead, it was close to radical imperialist nationalism or Germanic and Japanese modes of nationalism. Liang's national history writing tended to separate the nation from the people and distance the discourse of nation from the doctrine of citizen rights. Why Liang did not adopt the Western idea of 'nation-people', but rather the idea of 'nation-imperialism'. It had something to do with the historical context. The Western idea of a nation was closely linked with the notion of rights for its citizens. The idea of the 'nation-people' fueled nationalist movements in Eurasian empires and East Asia in the nineteenth century. For instance, Japan witnessed the jiyūminken undō movement (movement for liberty and people's rights), combining nationalism and people's liberty. When the notion of modern nationalism or the idea of 'nation-people' reached China by the early twentieth century, World War I broke out. The idea of nationalism became the goal and the means of competition for global resources among nation-states. The new emergent Germany, Italy, the USA and Japan discovered nationalism as a powerful means to challenge the supremacy of Great Britain and France. Nationalism allowed these states to mobilize resources and discipline the population for competition with the promise of imperial glory and national rewards. As Hobsbawm argued, "calls to maximize production, rein in consumption and ban strikes during World War I were rhetorically aligned with national loyalty in Europe." [69] Thus, modern nationalism has changed from nationalism, closely linked with people's liberty and egalitarianism, to state strategies for imperialist nationalism. Nationalism was loosely connected with citizenship liberty; instead, it was closely related to imperialism. Nationalism has been viewed as a powerful strategy or means of survival and expansion in a fiercely competitive world. For example, the Japanese Meiji government adopted the interpenetrated model of nationalism and imperialism to transform its older empire into an imperialistic nation-state. The Meiji government even consulted an experts on social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer, who advised against interbreeding Japanese with Europeans.[70] The Japanese interpenetrated model of nationalism and imperialism exerted significant influence on China. Witnessed the incredible rise of Japan, Liang hoped that the weak China could use the same strategy of nationalism to rise as a competitive imperialism nation. In 1906, when Liang reflected on the Chinese heroes who had colonized lands in Southeast Asia, Liang noted that "if in the future our country could expand her imperialism outward, people of these two provinces would remain useful."[71] Thus, the realistic political claims of a weak China and the conceptual change of nationalism made Liang adopt the nation-imperialism dimension of nationalism.

To conclude, this paper investigates Liang Qichao's contribution to constructing Chinese myths from aspects of historical contexts, purpose, strategies, influence and problems. Liang proposed including myth in his reconstruction of a new Chinese culture to promote Chinese social reform of modernity and nationalism and overcome the national crisis since the late Qing dynasty. Liang believed that the new culture movement played a vital part in fitting into the project of Chinese modernity and nationalism

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[67] E. T. C. Werner, *Chinese mythology---Myths and Legends of Chin*a (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1922).

[68] Ibid., 61.

[69] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 239.

[70] Michael Weiner, "The Invention of Identity: Race and Nation in Pre-war Japan", in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, edited by Frank Dikotter. Honolulu (HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 108.

[71] Liang Qichao. "Zhongguo zhimin ba da weiren zhuan" (Eight Great Chinese Colonists), Xinmin Congbao, 15(1906):81-88."

and laid the cultural foundation for implementing modernity after the revolution in China. Liang defines Chinese mythology as exploring the "absurd words" narratives before the Qin period. He identified the German and Japanese frameworks as the models of Chinese mythology. Liang located Chinese mythology within the framework of modernization and nationalism and used the mythical resources to reconstruct a continuity of Chinese history. Liang established the structural framework and nationalism-oriented approach for early Chinese mythology. He wished to use Chinese myths to provide an alternative cultural mode outside of the predominance of Western countries and enable China to gain a certain position in the world's fierce competition. Liang has made a significant contribution to Chinese mythology. The topics he proposed still work on today, such as the origin of the Chinese race and civilization, the holistic study of Chinese nationality, the reconstruction of the Chinese myth system, and reflection on Chinese and Western culture. However, Liang left many problems that needed to be revised or corrected. First, Liang failed to realize the different contexts and purposes of Chinese and Western, the distinguished features of Chinese culture, and the precondition of comparing various myths of a diverse nation. Liang's synthesis of Chinese history, culture and nationalism formed a closed loop. And Liang's national history writing tended to separate the nation from the people distance the discourse of nation from the doctrine of citizen rights. Liang left a cultural legacy that needed to be carried on and many problems that needed to be corrected.

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