

Conflicting Emotions: Aspects of the Personal and Public in the Late Qing

Peter Zarrow *

Abstract

The unique conditions of the late Qing created new tensions between personal and public values. The values of “loyalty” (*zhong*) and “filial piety” (*xiao*) came under question, but the focus of this article is not on ideology or political philosophy but rather the emotional implications of such tensions, experienced as unconscious or barely conscious conflicts. Focusing on the self-writings of Kang Youwei (1858-1927), Liang Qichao (1873-1929), and Song Jiaoren (1882-1913), it becomes apparent that their activist political goals could be incompatible with the norms of personal life. This cannot be dichotomized as the rational versus the emotional, but rather both public and private display both emotional and rational aspects.

The notion of the parallel hierarchical structures of state and family was made explicit in the traditional cosmology. One aspect of this paper examines the extent to which the emperor remained an object of respect and reverence. As is well known, attitudes about the imperial system

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* Peter Zarrow (沙培德) is an associate research fellow at Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

began to change; however, ideas about family and friendship were slower to change. Still, once the process of change was begun, it was difficult to stop. The dissolution of the traditional cosmology eventually affected attitudes toward the family. Even before that point, the logic of political activism intensified the “values-anguish” faced in the late Qing.

It may well be that the ties between family and state were already breaking down before the late Qing, creating a new space for rethinking both realms. In Kang Youwei’s self-presentation, his main moral problem was that by putting himself in political danger, he was also putting his family, particularly his mother, in danger. In the end he trusted to fate to resolve this problem. In Liang Qichao case, it is evident he faced a conflict between the demands of political activism and a desire for a life of scholarly leisure and friendship. Facing up to his own problems, he prescribed a course of moral self-improvements. So, too, did Song Jiaoren. Song faced direct family pressures to abandon his political activities that caused him to feel unfilial. Nonetheless, his highest loyalty remained to the Han people (parallel to Kang Youwei’s loyalty to the Guangxu Emperor). Some of these tensions may have led to Song’s breakdown in Japan in 1906. In the details of the inner lives of these three men – insofar as we can access and make reasonable inferences about their inner lives, which are partly methodological problems – we can illuminate the obscured corners of their public lives as well. We can also see something of the interplay between public and private, family and state, rationality and emotion, and even speech and silence. Their self-writings are both revealing and a performance that hides as well as reveals but always works out the tensions and conflicts of competing values that had been internalized in childhood and, in a sense, over the centuries.

“The personal is the political” became a rallying cry of American

feminism in the 1970s when women realized that the open and hidden repressions they faced as individual women were part of a larger political system that had to be challenged as such. Their ostensibly “private problems” as wives, as workers, and as mothers were systemic and not private at all. Yet it may be that the reverse is even more broadly true: “the political is the personal.” At least, in times of widely-perceived crisis political events become the common concern of all; one must take them to heart as one reacts to personal crises. It is well known how, in twentieth-century China, New Culture Movement (1915-) thinkers explicitly related their personal circumstances (such as arranged marriages) to the broader weaknesses of the culture and nation in an attack on “Confucianism.” Such ideas had already achieved a certain prominence in late Qing radical thought as well.

This essay, however, focuses not on the explicit ideological attacks on traditional thought that emerged at this time but on the tensions between personal and public values that were created by the unique conditions of the late Qing. Certainly, this was not the first time that such tensions arose in the course of Chinese history – a genealogy might be traced across several dynasties – yet the sense of crisis in the late Qing led to a certain questioning of the very values that came into conflict. To simplify, these were the values of “loyalty” (忠) and “filial piety” (孝). Again, a long discourse on their relationship lay behind the reactions of people in the late Qing; both values, along with a great many more, may be seen in social psychological terms as being inculcated in, and finally internalized by, children through family teachings, formal education, popular culture (such as folk tales, opera stories, novels), and not least through ritual practice and embodiment. The focus of this essay, however, is not on the process of internalization but its manifestation through the self-writings of certain late Qing intellectual-activists. They had to find a way to combine their moral commitments to family, especially parents,

with their political commitments. This essay thus focuses on attitudes toward the emperor on the one hand and parents on the other as expressed in more or less autobiographical writings of the late Qing.

An activist's (moral) political goals could clash with the norms of personal life. Conversely, the highest standards of interpersonal moral behavior could be incompatible with worthy political commitments. On the other hand, it was possible and probably necessary for individuals to attempt to steer a balanced course between these artificially false dichotomies. For over two thousand years, the emperor was central to the Chinese political tradition. Periods without an emperor and periods of conflicting dynastic claims were never fully legitimate, and whatever faults individual emperors had or were judged to have had, the institution (the monarchy or the emperorship) was virtually never challenged. It was also surrounded by a sacred, magical aura. As Li Xiaoti 李孝悌 has recently shown, the ideology of the late imperial emperorship was in no small part based on religious and supernatural elements.¹ Scholars have even suggested that the emperorship penetrated deeply into both elite and popular culture through religion and the family. In popular religion, much of the world of the gods resembled the imperial bureaucracy (the Jade Emperor (玉帝) paralleled the Tianzi (天子), the city god paralleled the magistrate or provincial governor), thus offering ordinary peasants a representation of political realities otherwise inaccessible to them.²

1 Li Xiaoti 李孝悌, “Tiandao yu zhidao: Mingchao tongzhi yilizhong de shenguai secai” 天道與治道——明朝統治意理中的神怪色彩 (The way of heaven and the way of ruling: the mystical flavor of the ideology of the Ming ruling class), unpublished paper delivered to the Lishi yuyansuo, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 2001.

2 This theory was worked out in some detail by the anthropologist Arthur Wolf. See “Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors,” in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 131-182. Of course, the analogy is not perfect: there are gods with no bureaucratic counterparts, for example, but it is supported

But how did the private lives of people reflect or support the penetration of imperial ideology into the culture, if at all? Can we find hidden, secret attitudes or psychological tendencies of which society or the subjects themselves were unaware? Structurally, if not consciously (or subjectively), what was the relationship between private life and the state? This essay is a very preliminary investigation into the more or less private feelings, attitudes, opinions, tensions, and conflicts of otherwise public figures. It less proposes a full-scale argument than works something like a thought-experiment. I take Kang Youwei 康有為, Liang Qichao 梁啟超, and Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 as case studies. We can gain preliminary impressions of how their writings revealed certain tensions between their private and public goals and personae. The key source is autobiographical texts; in the case of Kang his “chronological autobiography” to 1898, certain of Liang autobiographical writings to 1902, and Song’s diary, which was posthumously published for the period from 1904 to 1907. These sources specifically offer us a chance to see men usually defined through their public personae in more rounded ways: as sons and friends, as concerned with life’s minutiae, and as balancing desires and obligations. “Private” here refers to the matter of autobiography, letters, and diary entries. I do not intend to privilege the private as unmasked sincerity, or as somehow more reliable than public expression, but rather treat both simply as alternative modes of expression suitable for different purposes. A relatively short essay cannot, of course, offer complete biographical treatments but it can show something of how these three men, buffeted by the harsh conditions of the late Qing, defined and negotiated the relationship between the private

by further parallels between other spiritual and human realms (gods: bureaucrats :: ancestors: family :: ghosts: strangers); the spiritual bureaucracy also penetrated into local and family life (with the tudigong and the kitchen god) rather more successfully than could the imperial bureaucracy. The role of the family in emperorship ideology is discussed below.

and public.

The historical literature chiefly focuses on their public thought and action. But a look at their private concerns reveals that in all three cases, conflicts or at least tensions between the demands and values of public life and private life required complex negotiation and sacrifice. In the years preceding the collapse of the Qing dynasty, Kang, Liang, and Song each devoted his life to radical political action. Why? At what cost? And how did they conceive the relationship of their (private) lives to the (public) state?

Theoretical issues: the “state-family”

As is well known, in classical Chinese political philosophy the state was explicitly analogized to the family. Or to put it more precisely, the two existed as social microcosm and macrocosm in the form of the state-family (國家). The classical ru (儒, Confucian) formulation of politics elided state and family by basing statecraft on personal morality. The ancient sage-kings exemplified both political and familial virtue, in particular filial piety. The “three bonds” (三綱) postulated parallel hierarchical relations between ruler and minister (or subject), between father and son (or parents and children), and between husband and wife. In the “Great Learning” (Daxue 大學), a famous rhetorical chain linked self-management to the management of one’s family and ultimately to rulership of the realm. And conversely: “Through filial piety (孝) the ruler is served. Through fraternal obedience (悌) superiors are served. Through compassion (慈) the common people are served.” When Confucius, equally famously, proclaimed that in his ideal kingdom children did not report their parents’ thieving to the authorities, he was not setting up the family as against the state but arguing that the state would ultimately benefit from the larger social order that strong families would provide. The point is not that the Classics can be equated with the lived norms of

the late imperial period but to sketch their ideological basis. That particular emperors found reason to explicitly stress the priority of loyalty over filial piety does not mean that the two could be separated in the popular imagination; indeed, the repeated ideological efforts of the Ming and Qing emperors might suggest the opposite.

The basic connection between the two thus became encapsulated in proverbial wisdom. “The emperor rules the realm with filial piety.” “Seek a loyal subject in a filial son.” If orderly and loving families would benefit the state, the state (emperor) was also supposed to support such families. The emperor not only maintained the cosmic balance in general terms, he also assured that ritual propriety (禮) emanated out from the court. This ideological construct, though subject to enormous variations, can thus be traced back in its essentials to Dong Zhongshu and Mencius. It is now clear that orthodox views and practices largely spread downward from elites to commoners in Chinese society. Lineages were led by scholars or men who adopted some of the scholar’s life-style and who taught orthodox rituals to their poorer kin. The claim to orthodoxy was a claim to status. By the late imperial era, popular guides to rituals, almanacs, and educational materials ranging from simple crafts to high culture spread orthodox knowledge with its ideological ramifications. Even peasant households came to contain and in fact center around a family altar. This may not have provided a direct link to the state, but the family altar did indicate the larger sociopolitical order: family and lineage could hardly be imagined in isolation. Hierarchy was in a sense ‘one,’ not many: a founding ancestor was a microcosmic version of the energy of the imperium and ultimately the cosmos. Essentially (though not literally) the same rituals applied both to family relations and to officialdom. The family altar embodied notions of mutual dependency and love, rank and hierarchy, and the centering of main line of descent from common ancestors. Community temples brought symbolic impe-

rial authority down into towns, and the household's own kitchen god communicated with the Jade Emperor.

It should, however, also be noted that the last of the five orthodox human relationships, that between friends, tended to be regarded with some suspicion precisely because it seemed to offer escape from the web of hierarchical relations. Although potentially friendship could be modeled on state or family relations, it literally lay outside of either.³ It was by definition voluntary and could be egalitarian. Friendship was valued for many reasons, but perhaps some of the orthodox suspicions that surrounded it were warranted. For as Joseph McDermott has argued, it did provide a basis for criticizing imperial rule during the late Ming.⁴ Still, even if good friends might band together against evil rulers, or if the loyalty of friendship should morally triumph over loyalty to a wayward emperor, it was also true that the morality of friendship was seen as akin to the morality of filial piety. In the political realm, friendship was not opposed to family, but both represented moral sites of opposition to oppression.

Even in what we might call more mainstream views, the possibility of conflicts between obligations to family and obligations was recognized.⁵

3 Norman Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context," *American Historical Review* 105: 5 (December, 2000), pp. 1615-1629. The "five relations" added elder and younger brothers, as well as friends, to the three bonds.

4 Joseph P. McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming," *Jinshi jiazu yu zhengzhi bijiao lishi lunwenji* 近世家族與政治比較歷史論文集 (Collected essays on the comparative history of the modern family and politics) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai lishisuo and History Department, University of California at Davis, 1992) vol. 1, pp. 67-96. The late Ming fostered radical thought in several respects and may be considered untypical; certainly, the early Qing saw a rigorous if arguably temporary re-imposition of orthodox thought and behavior. However, the point here is that Confucian thought, classified as "orthodox" or not, did provide resources to attack the status quo. See also Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

5 See Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (Cambridge,

Recently, Hsiung Ping-chen has suggested that the assumption of an “immediate relationship” between the family system and the political order of China is itself a product, in part, of a twentieth-century discourse on modernity that dismissed both family and state as “feudal.” In actual Ming-Qing social practice, she argues, family and state functioned non-analogically.⁶ Many close family relationships were based on emotions not applicable to the public realm. Norman Kutcher has also raised the possibility that ritual changes in the Qing broke the state:family analogy. He points to significant changes in Qing policies concerning mourning rituals. Since mourning was the main form that ritual expression of filial piety took, and since filial piety was the bedrock virtue that linked duties and love for parents to duties and love for emperor, official policies in this regard are highly revealing. The Kangxi emperor habitually allowed high officials to remain at their posts and ignore their traditional mourning obligations to return home for an extended period of time. Conversely, in mourning his own beloved grandmother in ways that went beyond the bounds prescribed by orthodox ritual, Kangxi also represented a “privatization of grief” reflecting traditional Manchu values and also arguably reflecting late Ming notions that rituals should reflect, not form, emotions. These notions were never fully accepted in the Ming period but may have been part of larger secular changes that were giving greater emphasis to the individual, legitimating “desire” and perhaps separating the political realm of professional officials from mainstream non-official gentry society. At any rate, in regard to mourning practices,

Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 3, 16-17.

6 Hsiung Ping-chen [Xiong Bingzhen 熊秉真], “The Other Side of Filial Piety: Reflections on Compassion versus Loyalty in Late Imperial Chinese Family Relations,” in Huang Kewu 黃克武 and Zhang Zhejia 張哲嘉 eds., *Gong yu si: jindai Zhongguo geti yu qunti zhi chongjian* 公與私：近代中國個體與群體之重建 (Public and private: reconstructing individual and collective bodies in modern China), (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2000), pp. 313-318, 356-359.

although rhetoric did not change much, bureaucratic practice did, and even Qianlong's attempts to shore up filial piety, in Kutcher's view, "were mere gestures."⁷ Of course, mourning rituals were but one aspect of a complex and multifaceted set of relations postulated between state and family. Whether this postulate was once strong but began to break down in late imperial discourse awaits further research, but it is clear that we cannot assume the existence of an unchanging discourse.

As well, even if we do not entirely accept Kutcher's argument, late imperial social forces were beginning to further a separation of family from state, including the commercialization of the economy, as well as its commodification and the rise of great wealth, and also demographic change that resulted in increases in the numbers of educated men (and women) and exam-certified gentry but not in the numbers of officials. Thus on the one hand, increasing numbers of gentry had no hopes of official employment and would separate family from state in order to give ultimate devotion to family (and more attention to local communities), while those men who did become officials would pursue their ambitions by displaying their ultimate loyalty to the state (or the emperor), and thus separating family from state as well. That is to say, for most, the family's function as a site of sentiment and even escape from the world would be accentuated over a state:family that was enmeshed together in ways marked by public symbols and performances (symbols of office, birthday functions and funerals, schooling of children, etc.). This was not, perhaps, a discursive rupture but it does seem, at least in retrospect, to have been preparing the way for the ruptures of the late Qing and early Republic. Conceptual resources were becoming available that could prove destabilizing to the old order.

If filial piety was part of a larger cosmology that also supported

⁷ Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China*, pp. 9-10, 73-119 *passim*.

the emperorship or to put it more crudely, if filial piety was a pillar of imperial rule then any decline of filial piety should lead to attacks on the emperorship or other forms of ‘constituted’ authority. The social scientist William Skinner attempted to prove this precise point through survey data.⁸ Questionnaires were given to about 1,700 high school seniors in Java in 1956-58, designed to look for acculturation by comparing indigenous Indonesians, Peranakan Chinese (fairly assimilated and creolized Chinese) and Totok Chinese (more recent, unassimilated immigrants). Some of the questions probed attitudes toward family responsibilities and political attitudes. Up to a point, Skinner’s conclusion that among the Totok Chinese older sons and sons with fewer brothers (and older daughters) were more filial and also more politically conservative is convincing. Skinner’s sensitive approach to gender and birth order, as well as total number and spacing of siblings, is remarkable, but we do not need to go into detail here.⁹ Suffice it to say, Skinner observes that parents invest more in older sons. Younger sons receive a less intensely filial education, a smaller share of property (within the rules of partible inheritance), less family investment in their educations, and less desirable wives (and younger sons’ marriages may be postponed). This treatment produces less filial attitudes, which, according to Skinner’s data, correlate to radical politics. He explains some of this correlation in

8 G. William Skinner, “‘Seek a Loyal Subject in a Filial Son’ Family Roots of Political Orientation in Chinese Society,” *Jinshi jiazu yu zhengzhi bijiao lishi lunwenji* 近世家族與政治比較歷史論文集 (Collected essays on the comparative history of the modern family and politics) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai lishisuo and History Department, University of California at Davis, 1992) vol. 2, pp. 943-993.

9 Having more sisters seems to enhance the filiality of even younger sons; Skinner suggests that perhaps daughters act to modify the tension-filled father-son relations, though direct evidence for his Freudian-inspired analysis is lacking. This and aspects of sibling order such as the difference made by odd- or even-numbered sibling sets are discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 959-962, 962-973ff.

terms of family education as well. “The more crucial the structural position of the child with respect to continuity of the descent line, the more highly s/he would be valued by parents and the greater pains they would take in socialization to ensure adherence to traditional political values as well as to traditional family values.”¹⁰

If Skinner’s finding were historically generalizable, they would be highly important. He hypothesized: “since Confucian doctrine, ancestor worship, and traditional Chinese kinship are wholly congruent and mutually reinforcing, one expects departures from any part of the total complex to weaken the relationships found.... Thus, the principles would seem to apply a fortiori to [the] pre-modern situation when Confucian principles were relatively unchallenged and ancestor worship very nearly universal.”¹¹ In other words, we can expect that filial sons were loyal subjects, and conversely, that unfilial sons might be rebels (and reasoning the other way around: that disloyal subjects would be unfilial). Skinner himself proposed that the proposition be tested in terms of successful examination candidates (who should be filial older sons) and rebels (who should be unfilial younger sons). Yet a key problem with the historical data is that even if we had enough examples to generalize about birth order, it would be difficult to determine filiality.¹² We might

10 Ibid., p. 975. On the other hand, even if Skinner’s data is valid, an alternative explanation might be that siblings who essentially possessed the same political and family values would “specialize” in separate realms, the younger turning to social activism while the eldest took care of family support – as an outcome of shared values, not differences in socialization.

11 Ibid., p. 978.

12 Of course, practical difficulties abound. Although genealogies might provide sufficient information on male siblings in many cases of degree-holders, I suspect that the wealthy households capable of producing them would be able to invest in all their promising sons (Skinner does not take class into account). Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) emphasizes the material resources generally necessary to produce examination success but does not consider sibling order in this otherwise exhaustive study; see chap-

assume that rebels were unfilial in jeopardizing their lives and their families while scholars, simply as scholars, were fulfilling filial duties, but that would be circular reasoning. A deeper problem is that although in his survey the Guomindang and the Communists provided a convenient measure of political attitude, we should be cautious in mapping this measure onto imperial China; furthermore, the political options and modes facing Java's Totok Chinese obviously did not apply to "Confucian China."¹³

Above all, historical context needs to be taken into account. Unlike the convenience of choosing between the Guomindang and the Communist Party in the twentieth century, the avenues of political protest open in, say, the eighteenth century were considerably more limited even while being less clear-cut. Rebellion was hardly a convenient option for most Chinese.

In terms of the late Qing, at least, two fundamental factors limited the old association between filiality and loyalty in addition to the

ter five for what can be known of family background.

13 Other problems: Skinner seems to be assuming the only family relations that matter are limited to the nuclear family; but in close quarters, even if organized into separate households, uncles, aunts, and cousins may have seemed like siblings. Skinner's survey did not measure filial piety in any direct way; he determined "filiality" based on responses to the specific question whether one expected one's parents to choose a good marriage partner for one. In other words, he was not measuring behavior; I am not even convinced he was measuring attitudes. Skinner himself notes that parents did not (could not afford to) arrange to marry younger sons to wives as good (wealthy, educated) as those married to older sons. Therefore, the responses he cites may simply reflect a realistic grasp of the situation rather than doubts in regard to parental wisdom or a lack of filial piety. Similarly, he asked about political views, not actions. Any challenge in theory or practice to the fundamental value system remains to be shown. As well, of course, there is the perennial question of statistical findings: how do they apply to the individual situation? In the end, an old maxim of George Bernard Shaw might be just as useful: revolutions attract both the best and the worst people. If we apply Shaw's law to late imperial China in terms of "Confucian morality," we might then expect to find both the most filial and the most unfilial sons joining rebellions.

sociopolitical separation of family and state that we have noted above. First, as radical ideals spread after the turn of the century, entire families might well fall into the radical camp. At least, many parents were sympathetic with the radical activities of their children. It might even have seemed unfilial to oppose radical measures or the demand for political participation supported by parents. Second, revolutionary ideology borrowed freely from the vocabulary of filiality. It may be that the Revolution of 1911 was a political action directly motivated, in part, by a larger sense of filial piety. In other words, if talk of the “Han race” or “Han nation” (漢族) as the “descendents of the Yellow Emperor” (黃帝之子孫) can be taken literally, the (Han) Chinese were all kin. The term “Zu” (族) referred to lineage groups, reinforcing the filial imagery.¹⁴ The revolutionary nationalist Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 examined hundreds of genealogies to find China’s pure descent groups: he thus centered a modern “racial” identity and a call for national unity around ancestry (rather than primarily language, religion, ‘color’ and the like). The point is that if all Han shared a common ancestry, then to die for the Han was to die for one’s family. Don Price has thus suggested that taking revolutionary risks became a matter of fulfilling one’s duties to ancestors.¹⁵

The questions then emerge, was risky political activity unfilial? Was it, instead, the ultimate filial behavior? Or was it behavior the moral basis of which was to be negotiated between one’s immediate family and one’s national family? The historical problem is not for us to map an

¹⁴ The importance of surnames and a sense of Chinese identity as “a giant patrilineal descent group” can be traced unusually far back. See Patricia Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese Identity,” in Melissa J. Brown ed., *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1996), pp.19-36.

¹⁵ Don Price, “The Ancestral Nation and China’s Political Culture,” Centennial Symposium on Sun Yat-sen’s Founding of the Kuomintang for Revolution, Taipei, 1994; “Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Autonomy, Family and Nationalism,” *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*, vol. 2, pp. 1315-1353.

arbitrary definition of “filiality” onto late Qing Chinese but to grasp how they themselves understood their actions. Beyond filiality, what of friendship? And what of competing ties and values of the private life as opposed to political action?

We can begin to answer these questions by noting that the myth of kinship, which marked Europe’s “organic nationalism” at least from the late eighteenth century, has been a powerful marker of identity in the West. The effort here is not to find a universal thrust behind such biologisms, nor, certainly, to impose an outside framework on Chinese realities (though that is not necessarily a bad thing), but to point to ways in which Chinese cultural practices could come to terms with the nationalist rupture of the late Qing. Han identity in this sense was less a matter of extending primordial sentiments and more a means of resolving certain tensions that the traditional ideology (and everyday cultural practice) had held together but that had begun to unravel. A kind of “value rationality,” parallel to the Weberian instrumental rationality, may have been driving a critique of the dynastic system that nonetheless still operated largely within a traditional vocabulary.¹⁶ Let us look at these questions more specifically, beginning with Kang Youwei.

Kang Youwei

Kang Youwei largely composed his “chronological autobiography” from time to time, perhaps like an occasional journal, to 1898, with additions made in 1927.¹⁷ He began conventionally, situating himself in

16 See Arjun Apadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 14, for value rationality.

17 Background on Kang’s chronological autobiography is given in Jung-pang Lu, ed., *K’ ang Yu-wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967), pp. 17-20; translation of the work is pp. 21-174; hereafter “CA”. References to the Chinese version are to Kang Nanhai ziding nianpu 康南海自訂年譜 (Taipei: Wenhui chubanshe, n.d.); hereafter “ZDNP”.

terms of (patrilineal) descent traced back to the Southern Song, with closer and proud attention paid to both maternal and paternal ancestors of the previous four generations or so. He was the first son, after two daughters. Kang termed his father “filial, virtuous, humane, and generous.” His father was ill, and Kang reports that at ten sui he would carry his father’s cane and his basin and generally attend to him all of which he remembers “as a dream.”¹⁸ Kang briefly described three reactions to his father’s death: he accepted his father’s dying charge to study hard, respect his elders, and take care of the younger members of the family; he wept from sorrow; and he took charge of the funeral arrangements “like an adult.” He continued his education with his grandfather and regularly read the “Capital Gazette” (*Dibao 邸報*) to keep up with news from the court and his heroes, Restoration leaders like Zeng Guofan 曾國藩. Most of Kang’s earliest memories seem to revolve around his education and family rituals such as the funerals of the older generation. He remembered the pleasures of being praised for his work and intelligence (though reprimanded for his failure to master the eight-legged essay), and he reports that he sought to emulate the great men of the past, Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist.

As for his grandfather’s death, Kang presents his filial mourning as, if anything, excessive:

...From the age of eight sui I was brought up by my grandfather. He gave me daily admonishments and taught me earnestly, and I had been close to him for more than a decade. When I heard the news, I was so grieved that for three days I ate and drank nothing and for a hundred days I ate only pickled vegetables. My uncles brought his remains back, and, weeping, we buried him at Xianggang, as recommended by a geomancer. After the funeral service the coffin was not interred but

18 ZDNP 2, 4; CA 23, 26.

was left on a hill. My uncles and I constructed a grass hut close by, wore mourning garments, and abstained from eating meat for a year. At that time I had read the mourning ceremonials and had studied the three rites [the sacrifices to Heaven, earth, and the ancestral temple], and I carried out the rituals without an iota of deviation. Although many people scoffed at me, later my clansmen and fellow villagers respected me for this. In my youth I was firm in my purpose, and, as in this instance, I may have been too zealous in upholding my views. In the winter we buried my grandfather.¹⁹

The point here is not what Kang may have been feeling but that he strictly followed the outer forms of filial piety including the recording of his filiality. It was better to err on the side of excessive ritual than insufficient attention. There is a boasting note to this account that is only accentuated when Kang discusses his scholarly accomplishments. Here, however, we should note not only Kang's good opinion of himself but also his concern with how he appeared in the eyes of others. Kang was, in fact, frequently ready to defy the opinions of others and act in his own eccentric way, but he never ignored the impression he was making. At the same time, he sought self-improvement, as his self-criticism here makes plain.

Filiality, then, was a kind of performance; it should not surprise us that Kang also reported feeling freed by his grandfather's death nor do we need to assume this sense of freedom contradicted his grief or his love. Ritual served as a kind of bodily practice confirming, here, social norms. Yet it also led directly to Kang's well-known "rebellion" against book learning in general and taking the exams in particular. In his early twenties Kang returned to his village after his grandfather's death to live with and "serve" his mother, continue his studies, and sometimes

19 ZDNP 9; CA 32 mod.

teach his cousins. He also helped arrange the funeral of his teacher, Zhu Ciqi 朱次琦, in 1882. Although Kang subjectively experienced a sense of awakening and high ambition in the 1880s, his moods were also affected by China's defeat in the Sino-French War and by the ongoing corruption and decadence of official Beijing. He even fantasized about teaching in America or establishing a "new China" through colonization in Brazil but was prevented by lack of resources and the fact that he could not leave his mother.²⁰

Kang's filial piety seems beyond reproach; his family relations did not have a direct effect on his radical ideas or political activities. It is certainly true that Kang did not turn to radicalism out of unfilial behavior. On the other hand, perhaps we should emphasize that Kang did not see himself as disloyal to the Qing regime and certainly not as disloyal to the Guangxu 光緒 Emperor so that the hypothesis of the connection between filiality and loyalty possibly still holds. In other words, Kang's political daring was experienced, or at least expressed, in terms of moral orthodoxy. Yet Kang knowingly offered a radical challenge to the status quo, which must also be explained. Furthermore, Kang himself felt a real conflict. In 1887 and 1888, he reported, his criticisms of high officials and of the Empress Dowager for using public funds to rebuild the Summer Palace led him to fear for his life. He worried that he would be leaving his mother alone. In other words, he was possibly behaving unfilially in his own lights for the sake of his political ideals. "But then I thought, life and death are predestined. If I am to save the world, how can I withdraw now? "²¹ Similarly, a decade later in the wake of the debacle of the reform movement, Kang fled to Hong Kong under British protection while his mother managed to make it to Macao. In 1898 Kang told his mother how unfilial he felt to have risked her life for nothing. The

20 ZDNP 21; CA 51.

21 ZDNP 18; CA 47.

autobiography also records that Kang's relatives and friends were persecuted. Kang reported the agony he felt over his brother's fate (though he kept it a secret from his mother, an act that Kang left unmentioned in his autobiography).²² Yet he reminded himself finally that in spite of the odds against him, he had not been fated to die.

Kang first referred to the Guangxu Emperor in terms of his conviction that the emperor had been tricked and coerced into agreeing to the 1895 peace terms with Japan.²³ Due to his success in the metropolitan exams, Kang was among those who had a formal audience with the emperor; he also believed that finally the emperor read one of his memorials (which he had been fruitlessly submitting for nearly a decade). In 1898, Kang praised Guangxu's memory, reporting that the emperor referred to his old memorial during the reform movement. Yet Kang also recorded in 1895 that until his conversations that spring with Weng Tonghe 翁同龢, he had not understood the emperor's powerlessness.²⁴ Kang's one significant meeting with the emperor came at the beginning of the Hundred Days in 1898. It seems to have been naturally understood that the emperor could not openly associate with a man so deeply distrusted by so many Manchu nobles and leading bureaucrats; Kang thus worked largely behind the scenes.²⁵ Nonetheless, Kang had every

22 ZDNP 74, 72-73; CA 138, 135-136.

23 ZDNP 30-31; CA 65-66. Kang believed that Sun Yuwen 孫毓汶 "coerced" the emperor into agreement; yet Kang implied the emperor was also tricked by lies about the helplessness of northern China. Of course, Kang acquired these stories second- or third-hand. According to Kang, Weng Tonghe rebuked Sun's defeatism and cowardice, saying that the nation (國) must come before their own safety.

24 ZDNP 33; CA 69.

25 Kang's exact role in the Hundred Days has been subject to considerable historical debate that need not concern us here. For overviews, see Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖 (Young-tsu Wong), Kang Youwei 康有為 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1998), and Kong Xiangji 孔祥吉, ed., Jiuwang tucun de lantu: Kang Youwei bianfa zouyi jizheng 救亡圖存的藍圖：康有為變法奏議輯證 (Blueprints to preserve the nation: the evidence from the reform memo-

faith in the emperor's good will, intelligence, and determination.

Kang recorded that their conversation on that occasion continued for some two and a half hours, considerably longer than most audiences. Kang began with dire warning of the fate awaiting China. The emperor agreed, blaming conservatives, to which Kang replied: "Your majesty's intelligence has grasped the cause of the disease." Kang recorded that he stressed the need for fundamental reform: a whole new foundation, not patching up the walls. Kang also recorded that he asked why, if the emperor understood this, had no reforms been carried out. The emperor looked outside the window and cited "obstructions." Kang understood that the Empress Dowager represented a check on reform policies, but the two men continued to discuss a range of specific issues from the eight-legged essay and translation projects to railroads and banking systems.²⁶ During the reform period, then, Kang and the emperor communicated indirectly. Kang submitted memorials through various officials, and the emperor occasionally sent a message to him. Guangxu rewarded Kang with 2000 taels for his "Record of the Partition and Fall of Poland" (波蘭分滅記). Kang recorded that he refrained from going to personally thank the emperor lest the Empress Dowager be angered. He presented an extended picture of the emperor as pushing through reforms against great odds, working with whatever personnel he could. Kang's Guangxu was so open-minded that he read memorials from everyone, even rustics even reactionaries. Even in the absence of a parliament, Kang felt this resembled the utopia of the Three Dynasties.²⁷

The point here is not whether Kang's memories were accurate but what they reveal about his attitudes when he recorded them at the end

rials of Kang Youwei) (Taipei: Lianhebao xi wenhua jijinhui, 1998). The point here is what Kang himself made of his relations to the emperor.

26 ZDNP 48-50; CA 93-95.

27 ZDNP 64; CA 120.

of 1898. It does seem fair to conclude, as many scholars have, that Kang's public support of constitutional monarchy and his sense of what an emperor could do were, in part, based on his personal respect for Guangxu. Did his attitude go beyond respect? What was it based on? After all, they only had one significant meeting their entire lives. And if Kang respected Guangxu, he nonetheless had to acknowledge that he (or they) had failed. Still, Kang undoubtedly had strong feelings for the emperor that went beyond political considerations alone. Kang praised Guangxu for sheltering him from conservative attacks. He also claimed that although he saw the reform movement weakening, he did not want to leave China while there was the slightest hope of success. And he then credited the emperor with saving his life by ordering him out of Beijing as the Hundred Days began to fall apart. In the wake of 1898 Kang recorded that he continued to grieve for China: and for the emperor, but if he felt the same kind of guilt for endangering the emperor as he felt for endangering his mother he does not say.

Although Kang's most radical intellectual positions had been worked out long before 1898, this is not to say that his psychology led him to a radical lifestyle. In other words, his convictions tended toward the egalitarian and liberal, but he naturally fit into roles prescribed not only by tradition but also by his beloved Confucius. As a son, he sought to behave filially. And as a subject, however radical a one, he sought to fit into the emperor-minister relationship. This did not necessarily mean obedience or, by itself, love. But given an emperor who met Kang's own standards, and who established some kind of personal rapport, it could mean love. As well, it might be remembered that Kang's model of political leadership was Confucius, whom Kang imagined as the ultimate minister and adviser: not as an emperor but as the "uncrowned king" (素王) who worked indirectly through worldly leaders. In his own case, after long years of exam failure, which he attributed to his own distaste for the

eight-legged essay and also to political prejudice against him, Kang had finally become a jinshi (進士) in 1895. Exam success was a traditional step to political responsibility, and even though Kang publicly disowned such ideas, they may have remained in the back of his mind. Political power and a special relationship with the emperor were two sides of the same moral coin, not simply a practical consideration.

For all his social conservatism, however, Kang's self-image as a sage gave him intellectual confidence and political courage. He recounted that he was born in the eleventh month of his mother's pregnancy (delayed parturition is a classic feature of the lives of men with special purpose). He emphasized that in studying with Zhu Ciqi he found a model not just of the pursuit of scholarship but of moral character. Zhu emphasized the need to help humanity and the need for the individual to follow four moral standards: filiality, integrity, self-restraint, and introspection.²⁸ At this point, at nineteen sui, Kang had resolved to become a sage, or at least conceived the goal to be possible. He saw himself as inspired by Zhu to reach an exalted state of mind, transcending the secular world and "living" among the great men of the past. Kang reported that he gave up worldly ambitions for the delights of scholarship

reading feverishly (but systematically) and writing essays for Zhu's approbation. This was also the time when Kang married, about which he reported little beyond his somewhat prudish refusal to allow the traditional teasing of the bride.

In terms of Kang becoming Kang, as it were, these late teens and early twenties appear to have been critical. After the death of his grandfather when he was twenty-one sui, Kang became ever more confident, dismissing the entire corpus of Han Yu (韓愈 763-824) as shallow. This was followed by the well-known incident of meditation and

28 ZDNP 8; CA 30.

enlightenment. In Kang's account, he had acquired the "broad meaning" of China's written heritage and "grown weary" of books. He then locked himself in his room to meditate, laughing with joy at achieving sagehood and weeping for the agony of the world. He left Zhu's school and continued to meditate nearer home. Yet Kang did not completely cut himself off from normal human contacts. He noted that at this time his first daughter was born, he held conversations with travelers, and he wrote. He returned home when his uncles threatened to cut off his allowance. Kang did not quite say he had become a sage, though his contemporaries were to mock his pretensions. Why did Kang record this information, mixing the sublime with the mundane? Keeping in mind that his autobiography was not written for publication, though it was probably meant to be shared with kin and disciples, one answer might be that in his confidence he saw no problem including possibly embarrassing details: they were part of the process of becoming a sage. A second answer might be that he wished to show something of the actual struggle to become a sage, possibly a reflection of the Ming tradition of autobiographical writing as a record of spiritual struggle.²⁹

In any case, over the next few years, Kang continued to broaden his horizons, visiting Hong Kong and starting a school of his own. His sense of himself as a savior remained strong. He reported that in 1885 he began to write the Renlei gongli 人類公理 ("Universal principles of humanity") and the following year the Kangzi neiwaipian 康子內外篇 ("Esoteric and exoteric essays of Master Kang"). It is also interesting that his relations with local officials in Guangzhou were apparently good even as he wrote his critical New Text reinterpretations of Confucianism in the 1890s. He did not hesitate to anger many, however, writing to high officials to criticize their behavior and nag them to promote reforms. As we have

29 See Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

seen, he even submitted memorials criticizing the Empress Dowager herself for misspending funds to rebuild the Summer Palace. His risk-taking stemmed from his confidence, his self-righteousness, and also his belief in fate.

On several occasions in the autobiography Kang recorded his belief that all his setbacks and dangers would be resolved by fate, or the will of Heaven. This seems to have given him the courage to face death. In 1893, Kang reported, he went into battle against local bandits and their gentry protectors. There were literally fights over control of the local self-defense organization, and Kang was slandered to higher officials. He later drew the parallel to 1898. Others did indeed die, but not Kang.³⁰ Kang's confidence was the mirror image of his fatalism. Fearful that he might be punished or even executed, Kang noted, he worried about his mother. His mission required him to risk not merely his own life, but trust in fate justified the larger risks.³¹ In other words, the conflict between Kang's familial or filial responsibilities and what he took to be his public responsibilities was resolved through his faith in his fate. And surely Kang's protected fate was due to his sagehood. However tempted by private life to "preserve oneself and one's immediate family" and however discouraged by the futility of his actions—the difficulty of changing anything, whether footbinding, banditry, or the despised examination system—Kang wrote that he was also compelled by compassion and humanity to involve himself in public issues. He recorded that in 1895 his primary concern was national affairs but admitted that he had traveled to Beijing to take the exams only to please his mother. (At the same time, his proposals to reform but not abolish the exams might be taken as an expression of his loyalism.)³²

30 ZDNP 27-28; CA 60-61.

31 ZDNP 18; CA 47.

32 Kang and the other reformers basically envisioned replacement of the entire exam sys-

In any case, it is important to note that as Kang recorded his life, it was not one solely or humorlessly devoted to self-sacrifice for the public good. He had several enjoyments, perhaps mostly prominently tourism. In the wake of 1898 he was to become one of the world's greatest travelers, but even earlier he seems never to have missed a chance to visit a temple or a lake. In the midst of the political maneuvering of the second half of 1895, for example, Kang reported trips to the Western Hills, from which he could enjoy the haze of Beijing in the moonlight with Liang Qichao and Mai Menghua. Why was such trivia included in the autobiography? Perhaps Kang wanted a reminder of life's pleasures; certainly, as well, places can have meaning.³³ In any case, Kang's deep commitment to "national affairs" cannot be gainsaid, and, whatever his motives, Kang risked much in 1895 and all in 1898 and paid a high price, even though his life was spared.

Liang Qichao

Liang Qichao's attitudes toward the emperorship and hence toward the Guangxu emperor were scarcely consistent. On the one hand, he wrote radical fulminations against the emperorship and, for a time in 1897 and into 1898, apparently opposed Manchu rule on racial grounds. His private opinions were at this time considerably stronger than his public pronouncements, though the latter were strong enough. On the other hand, he appears to have shared Kang's devotion to Guangxu in private as well as public into the early 1900s. That is to say, even after

tem by "schools" at some later date, but they understood that the exams performed an important function and thought that if policy questions and Western learning could be introduced on top of the Four Books, then the dynasty would be enormously strengthened. See Elman, Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China, pp. 591-593.

33 We might also note that the genre of autobiography owed something to traditional travel writing. See Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*.

Liang began to break with Kang on several issues, he continued to support the notion of constitutional monarchy as the ideal political form for China, and he retained the hope that Guangxu could be “restored” to real power in the wake of the defeat of the reform movement of 1898.

Liang’s brief “autobiography at thirty” conventionally dealt with his family background, childhood, education, and major incidents.³⁴ It is interesting, as Wendy Larson points out, that Liang situated himself in terms of world-historical events as well as the history of his family and community. Liang not only, therefore, put himself into a framework of time and space but also implied the universality of a framework that included all of humanity.³⁵ He situated his birth, for example, as occurring ten years after the defeat of the Taiping Rebellion, one year after Zeng Guofan’s death, three years after the Franco-Prussian War, and the year of Italian independence. Liang’s positioning of self in terms of Chinese history is perhaps more revealing and could scarcely be more nakedly political. He claimed that his hometown was effectively independent during the Qin-Han transition, and that its residents considered themselves “barbarian” and acquired a heroic reputation. During the Song-Yuan transition, the Han people of Guangdong province lost to the northern barbarians in a race war; Liang’s hometown retained historical

34 Liang Qichao, “Sanshi zishu,” 三十自述, *Yinbingshi heji 飲冰室合集* (Collected writings from the Ice-drinker’s studio) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), *wenji 文集* (hereafter YBSHW) juan 11, pp. 15-21.

35 YBSHW 11: 15. Wendy Larson points out that Liang mentions specific incidents he found to be determining or shaping influences on him rather than representative. She concludes, “Liang formulates the self as produced through its relationship to events, incidents, and people in the socio-material world rather than as a “floating” entity that emerged from the suppression of the orthodox biographical trademarks of ancestry, kinship, status, and position and association with an alternative.” (For Larson’s typology of Chinese autobiography, see below.) Wendy Larson, *Literary Authority and the Modern Chinese Writer: Ambivalence and Autobiography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 57-58.

memories of this defeat. In other words, whether as barbarian or as Han, however contradictory this might sound, Liang identified with historic acts of resistance and with racial purity (though his own ancestors arrived in Xinhui only in the late Ming).

For the most part, the text succinctly describes the circumstances of Liang's childhood education—especially his close relationship with his paternal grandfather, his discipleship under Kang Youwei, and his involvement in public events from the mid-1890s. The autobiography begins with a theme often found in Liang's private writings: his failure, his wasted life, the things he has left undone. Nonetheless, of course what he actually recorded were his accomplishments. Liang's ancestors, as he portrayed them, were of what we might call late imperial China's middle classes: neither of the national elite nor of the peasantry. They were "literate farmers," and Liang's grandfather was a member of the lower gentry (a *shengyuan*) while his father worked as a village teacher. In Liang's matter-of-fact account we are left to guess whether this was a matter of pride; that is, pride in an image of sturdy, sincere folk, neither of the high elite (oppressive, effete) nor of the masses. Liang did claim that his great-grandfather was famous for his private acts of charity, known as a diligent farmer who helped poorer kin.

By the age of five *sui*, Liang had started to learn the Four Books and the Odes with his grandfather, who also talked to him about the fall of the Song and the Ming dynasties.³⁶ In other words, Liang wanted his readers to know that he was exposed to a strain of anti-Manchuism from an early age. In another year, he had moved on to the rest of the Five Classics, and so we also learn that his early education followed a standard model. In many ways his childhood was typical of other poor gentry families (that is, not objectively poverty-stricken, but Liang tells us that

36 YBSHW 11: 15.

his family owned only two books). Liang reports that his father was loving but strict, raising him to engage in physical labor as well as study and scolding him by reminding him that he had to obey a higher standard than other children. His mother virtually never scolded Liang, but made a lasting impression by beating him once for lying. By fifteen, Liang was studying in the provincial capital when his mother died in childbirth. His inability to return home in time to see his mother encoffined since there were no steamboats then was a deep and lasting regret, Liang says.³⁷

Although Liang does not present himself as a prodigy, his educational accomplishments speak for themselves. Since he became a juren at seventeen, one is tempted to discount his complaints about the eight-legged essay. But equally there is no reason to doubt that two events Liang describes during his eighteenth year were, at least in retrospect and possibly at the time, more important. Traveling through Shanghai on his way back from attempting the metropolitan exams, Liang bought a world atlas, the Yinghuan zhilue瀛環志略 and “for the first time” learned something of the non-Chinese world. On top of this mind-expanding experience, he met Kang Youwei. Kang quickly disabused him of the good opinion he had of himself, assuring Liang that all his old learning was useless. The experience was like having cold water poured over his head. Liang lost his bearings and could not sleep. Formally becoming Kang’s disciple, Liang focused on Lu-Wang learning of the mind-heart, history, and some Western learning.³⁸ Only then did Liang

³⁷ YBSHW 11: 16. This story is confirmed by Liang’s younger brother Zhongce who records that since the weather was hot, the family could not wait for Liang’s return evidently Liang’s reaction also made an impression on Zhongce. See Ding Wenjiang 丁文江, ed., Liang Rengong xiānshēng niān pǔ chāngbiān chūgǎo 梁任公先生年譜長編初稿 (Initial draft of long version of the chronological biography of Liang Qichao; hereafter NP), 2 vols. (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1988), p. 11.

³⁸ YBSHW 11: 16-17.

“finally understand what learning was.”

Under Kang’s charismatic (or so we gather) tutelage and the mutual encouragement of his schoolmates, Liang’s studies continued to emphasize history and politics, both Chinese and foreign, for the next four years. The two men also discussed Kang’s own writings Liang was so excited by the Datong shu 大同書, he tells us that he wanted to disseminate it immediately, but Kang said the time was not right. In this way, Liang described himself as more radical and impetuous than Kang. At the same time, Liang began to develop what would be a life-long interest in Buddhism and also enjoyed literature (having already mentioned that he originally learned Tang poetry from his grandfather). He married, and when he was twenty sui his grandfather died though interestingly Liang says nothing about the funeral or mourning for his first teacher. Nonetheless, Liang tells of his love for his grandfather, an expression of filial piety that also represented his attitudes toward his first teacher, whom he remembered as filial, diligent, honest, and both loving and strict.³⁹

For our purposes here, what is most interesting about Liang’s account of the politically important year of 1895 when he was twenty-two sui was that while helping Kang organize reform petitions, taking the exams, and learning to ‘network’ among the Beijing gentry, Liang also resolved to further his studies. In other words, what Liang himself remembered about his Beijing experiences was his failure to command attention and his sense of his own ignorance, especially of the West. So he decided to further his education through translations, mathematics, geography, and more history. Similarly, Liang emphasized that in the brief but stormy history of the Society to Strengthen Knowledge (強學會) he was given the opportunity to read in its extensive library of

39 NP, pp. 3-4.

translations and developed the ambition to become a writer.⁴⁰ Indeed, he refused invitations to join the staffs of prospective ambassadors in order to work on his new “profession” of journalism. During the following two years, Liang recalls that he became friends with Tan Sitong 譚嗣同. They discussed Tan’s “Humanity” (*Renxue* 仁學) and studied Buddhism. In the autumn of 1897, Liang’s move to Hunan to teach at the Shiwuxuetang 時物學堂 was perhaps less isolating than it otherwise might have been since Tan and other comrades were also moving to Hunan. The theme of friendship is extremely important to understanding Liang’s private life.

In his autobiography Liang had very little to say about the tumultuous events of 1898, presumably because he had already produced detailed accounts. He was very ill in the spring, but perhaps the urgent press of political action in the summer and fall prevented him from pursuing activities of purely private significance. Having fled to Japan, Liang tells us on the one hand he experienced new intellectual challenges (and traveled to Hawaii, Southeast Asia, India, and Australia). He feels some peace of mind in using his writing to “fulfill my responsibility” to use his talent for the sake of the Chinese people and encourage men of resolve (志士). On the other hand, however, he also feels an acute sense of failure and frustration.⁴¹ Liang had failed to complete even twenty percent of what he should have done. “Alas, woe! The troubles of the nation are many and the months and years pass; I am small and my talents few while the responsibilities are great.” One cannot become a hero using words; talented people do not write. Liang also mentioned the confusion of the Boxer uprising and especially his sense of loss with the failed uprising and martyrdom of Tang Caichang 唐才常.

40 YBSHW 11: 17. Liang’s “General Discussion of Reform,” (變法通議), a strikingly mature work for such a young man, began to be serialized by the end of the year.

41 YBSHW 11: 19.

Although Liang's brief autobiography is not very revealing, it suggests several themes that are worth pursuing for what they may tell us of the relationship between his private and his public life. First, the contradictions between his private (or true?) ideas and his public pronouncements, and especially the conflicts he felt between the personal and public parts of his life. Few people have had as engaged a life as Liang: as a public intellectual, as a journalist, and as a political activist and politician. Yet he seems often to have longed for escape. Second, his attitudes toward personal relationships – family and friends – which will also allow us to test again the relationship between filiality and political loyalty. Third, his passions and emotional life, which were tied to political issues: private life and opinions on the one hand and public life and pronouncements on the other were connected along a continuum, not separated into discrete compartments.

Probably the greatest gaps between Liang's private views and his public position occurred in the mid-1890s. To his students at the Shiwu xuetang in 1897 he emphasized the racial differences between Han and Manchu.⁴² Liang supported democracy and called the emperors traitors (民賊) and killers; indeed, the entire imperial history had produced not a single “true king” (王) in Confucius' s sense, and only a few hegemons (that is, leaders at least capable of defending the borders and preserving the peace). This was the period when Kang Youwei, with Liang following, was calling for Manchu-Han cooperation. Both men also supported the (reformist) monarchy, but Liang's criticisms of the monarchy were not only delivered to his students. In an 1896 letter to Yan Fu 嚴復 Liang engaged in harsh criticisms of monarchy as “selfishness” while he claimed that only democracy could represent the public good (of course, this did not depend on racial analysis).⁴³ Earlier, in the wake of the Sino-

42 NP, pp. 43-44.

43 YBSHW 1: 109.

Japanese War, Liang wrote in a poem: “The emperor is foolish; he does not hear my calls/My high-minded ideas are of no use.”⁴⁴

It would be a mistake to regard Liang’s public positions as hypocritical or even misleading. Literati could not, of course, publish direct attacks on the monarchy and expect to live. (At the same time, Liang’s views were scarcely secret and aroused the ire of the Hunan conservatives.) But the real point is that Liang did support the more modest proposals of the “General discussion of reform” (變法通議) even while he was developing privately a more radical analysis of China’s problems. In a letter that broached the subject of Hunanese independence, Liang emphasized that his ultimate goal was to preserve the Chinese nation and, in the event of continued political deterioration, to provide a haven where resistance could be developed and, so he hints, the emperor moved to a safer place. Liang’s famous gradualism thus had roots in his very first political activism, while he was to further develop his radical ideas once he was free of China (and of Kang) in Japan until he turned in a more conservative direction within a few more years. As well, any consideration of Liang’s attitudes toward the monarchy must take his relationship to Guangxu into account. This was not a personal relationship, though Liang seemed proud of the fact Kang had had an audience with the emperor. But it was a political relationship forged in 1898 and transmuted into the restorationism and constitutionalism that would basically mark his politics for the next decade.⁴⁵

Liang supported both “preservation of the nation” (保國) and “Preservation of the faith [Confucianism]” (保教) in the late nineteenth century. In my view, there was no conflict here. He did at times specifically remind his colleagues that their ultimate goal was the preserva-

44 NP, p. 20.

45 NP, pp. 61, 81, 103-104.

tion of the faith (following Kang' s notions of transforming Confucianism along the lines of Western religion, especially the established Church of England, and also the Meiji' s use of Shinto). Basically, as Wang Junzhong 王俊中 has suggested, Liang would compartmentalize Buddhism and Confucianism into separate categories of the religious and the scholarly respectively, which was a way to deal with any conflicts he might have felt between them.⁴⁶ But at the time he began to study Buddhism in the 1890s, first under Kang and then with friends, Liang' s understanding of Confucianism might be called “Buddhist-ized” insofar as he saw it as a source of universal salvation. In letters to Kang written in 1896 Liang confessed that he felt his understanding inadequate and that his new studies had destroyed his old intellectual foundations.⁴⁷ Since he also noted that the universal utopianism (太平大同) of Confucianism was found in Brahmanism but not in Buddhism, one wonders if Liang did not feel Kang' s interpretation of Confucianism to be in doubt. It is difficult to interpret this passage definitely; certainly, Liang went on to affirm Confucianism in the strongest possible terms. This was, however, a Confucianism designed to save the world, not merely make China stronger. Liang reminded his colleagues that their goals went beyond the political to “spread the teaching” (傳教), or Confucian missionary work.⁴⁸

Liang thus was ready to de-emphasize pure nationalism in the late 1890s, but his target was not nationalist goals themselves, only the view that they possessed a transcendental nature in their own right. Slowly,

46 Wang Junzhong 王俊中, “Jiuguo, zongjiao yi zhexue: Liang Qichao zaonian de foxueguan jiqi zhuanzhe (1891-1912)” 救國、宗教抑哲學？ 梁啟超早年的佛學觀及其轉折 (National salvation, religion, or philosophy? The young Liang Qichao' s 5 Buddhist views and their permutations), *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 31 (Taipei, June 1999), pp. 103-106.

47 NP, p. 34.

48 NP, pp. 34-35. Liang' s notion of saving the world was not entirely new here; see his 1894 letter, NP, p. 22.

however, Liang began to move away from boajiao, a process that might be traced back to his contacts with Yan Fu and Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 after 1897.⁴⁹

One area where Liang himself expressed a sharp sense of conflict lay in his competing desires for the politically active life and the life of scholarly retirement. He repeatedly claimed to want to “retire” from the world to focus on his studies. This conflict was thus practical rather than existential: he promised that after he completed his studies he would return to the world, indeed that the point of studying was simply to equip him (and his colleagues) to better pursue reform. Yet practically there was a conflict. As well, Liang’s desire to retire from the world at times stemmed from depression or political distress. In the wake of the Sino-Japanese war (and petition drive), disgusted with the court and the emperor, he wanted to devote his life only to study.⁵⁰ More generally, he longed to escape the political tumult. When Liang told his friends that they all should retire to the hills to improve themselves, he complained, they laughed at him.⁵¹ Yet his point was, how could people whose learning was inadequate save China, much less the world? In a strange way, Liang may have come closest to achieving this goal in the wake of the 1898 debacle. His simple life during his early years in Japan marked a period when he discovered new intellectual vistas. Liang and his students did not exactly retire from the world, but they did have the time to pursue new and old areas of scholarship.⁵²

For all the inner tensions Liang experienced, his political ideals, his scholarship, and his ideal of friendship were of a piece. When he was only nineteen sui, in 1891, he wrote to Wang Kangnian 汪康年: “I have much

⁴⁹ NP, p. 42.

⁵⁰ NP, p. 20.

⁵¹ NP, pp. 34-35.

⁵² NP, p. 92.

enthusiasm and tenacity, and I constantly think of our ambition to do good, but when I consider Heaven and humanity, I know that there is no way to do this. I only want to write books with a few good comrades and teach the younger generation.” In addition to the escapist or eremitic strain noted above, we see that Liang’s ideal of study was not an isolated one but part of a circle of friends and students. The exchange of ideas was critical both to friendship and learning. Friends thus helped one another find the truth through disagreement. Argument and intellectual excitement ended in agreement, and a larger process of “polishing and refining” ended in self-improvement. This was true for Liang’s relationships with Xia Suiqing 夏穗卿, Chen Tongfu 陳通甫 (who had first introduced him to Kang), and Tan Sitong.⁵³ Historians seldom speak of Liang’s charisma or appeal as a teacher. Nonetheless, no less than eleven of his Shiwu xuetang students (who had studied with him only briefly) followed Liang to Japan in the wake of the 1898 debacle.⁵⁴ They then lived and studied together.

Liang’s relationship to Kang Youwei was complicated. Over time, his adolescent enthusiasm for the man who first showed him what “learning” really was, became tempered by the realization of Kang’s faults. Liang found Kang’s intellectual judgment to be untrustworthy and arbitrary as early as 1895 in Kang’s textual studies of the “forged classics” (偽經). Yet their overall positions, both political and scholarly, remained close.⁵⁵ As is well known, Kang retained enough authority to order Liang to cease contacts with the Chinese revolutionaries in 1899 and send him to the Americas, although Liang was plainly interested in meeting Sun Yat-sen. At the same time, in “remonstrance mode” in 1900 and 1901 Liang persistently urged Kang to be less narrow-minded. As

53 NP, pp. 22, 29-30, 37.

54 NP, p. 92.

55 NP, p. 29.

he put it, Kang should not limit his political circle to his own disciples. This led Kang to criticize Liang's "arrogance" – a charge Liang admitted and apologized for without changing his mind.⁵⁶

Finally, let us turn to Liang's moral ideas and his own assessment of his character. Of his enthusiasm and tenacity there can be no doubt. His hard work helping Kang organize the petition drives in 1895 and 1898 and the Society to Protect the Nation (保國會), his efforts to connect with his students in 1897, his writings: Liang's eremitism was nothing compared to his this-worldly entanglements. He urged action even against impossible odds.⁵⁷ As he critically assessed his character in 1899, Liang wrote, "All my life, my enthusiasms have been very strong and my wishes numerous."⁵⁸ At the time he wrote these words, Liang was on board a ship heading toward Hawaii, and apparently spending all his time writing poetry instead of following more useful pursuits. He felt he tended to get sucked into his enthusiasms to the point of neglecting everything else, and promised to give up poetry (a promise he did not keep). In a self-criticism the following year, Liang wrote to Kang and to friends that he was becoming more and more rude and arrogant.⁵⁹ What he seems to have meant was that his intellectual progress was not marked by moral improvement and had indeed led to problems he had not even been aware of. Liang therefore promised to undertake five daily tasks: 1) self-control (克己) or using his mind-heart to control things before reaching the precipice; 2) sincerity (誠意) or not lying to himself and eradicating bad intentions; 3) respect; 4) labor; and 5) consistency: constant introspection. Liang found inspiration in Zeng Guofan, and hope in Zeng's combination of self-cultivation and the accomplishment of

⁵⁶ NP, pp. 109, 122-123, 125.

⁵⁷ NP, pp. 50-51, 53.

⁵⁸ NP, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁹ NP, pp. 119-120.

great tasks. Liang felt his own accomplishments to be risible. At the same time, we should note that Liang's letters also pointed to the importance of "liberty" for fulfilling human potential. In other words keji and ziyou (自由) were not opposites but complementary; if liberty was a way to free the self from the Three Bonds and the restraints of the ancients, self-control was not one of those restraints.⁶⁰ However, Liang frankly stated he was not sure if he would succeed at his program of moral improvement.

Song Jiaoren

From 1904 to 1907 Song Jiaoren kept a diary largely covering his experiences in Japan.⁶¹ A small edition was published in 1919 after his death and we may assume he did not write it for publication. As a diarist, Song recorded his emotional ups and downs, as well as his occasional thoughts, more directly than did Kang and Liang in their autobiographical writings. But Song equally gives us a chance to examine the relationship in his own mind between his public and his private life. Song had gradually turned onto the revolutionary path in the first years of the twentieth century while he attended school in Changsha. After the failure of an uprising planned with Huang Xing 黃興, he fled first to Shanghai in November 1904 and then to Japan in December. He thereupon played a critical role in the exile revolutionary community as a publicist and organizer.

60 NP, p. 125. Liang wished to deny Kang's accusation that he had become corrupted by Japanese (liberal) ideas. He argued that the Chinese in particular suffered from lack of freedom.

61 Song Jiaoren, Wo zhi lishi 我之歷史 (My history) (Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1962); hereafter "WLS." References below will be to diary entry date (year/month/day), original juan and page number, and published page number. The standard biography remains K. S. Liew, Struggle for Democracy: Sung Chiao-jen and the 1911 Chinese Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

After he had been in Japan for almost a year, Song received a letter from his family telling him of his grandmother's death, three months after the event. Song records that he was desolated, that he hated his exile, that his unfilial behavior reached to Heaven.⁶² In the spring of 1906 another family letter to Song emphasized his mother's love and longing for him, and he was himself reminded of his love for his mother.⁶³ But he also replied that his family needed to remember why he had to go into exile in the first place. By the summer, he had admitted himself to a hospital for depression (and a kind of nervous breakdown we will return to below), when his wife wrote urging him to return.⁶⁴ Displaying no affection for his wife, Song was resolved to get cured first. But when his elder brother wrote to ask him to send money or return home, noting that the family had sold land and pawned their clothes and that his mother missed him, Song reports how sad he felt.⁶⁵ He wished he could rush home, wished he had money to send, wept with frustration. But he actually did nothing. Not until late 1906 did Song promise to return home, though only for a visit. He wrote a lengthy letter to his mother emphasizing the need to finish his education (i.e., in Japan).⁶⁶ The letter implied that his family was facing various problems in which they were trying to involve Song. He urged his mother to correct his brother through shame rather than scolding, that his youngest sister should unbind her feet and continue her studies before marriage and that she be married to an educated man but not necessarily to a rich one.

In all, it is not clear that Song was especially close to his family, even his mother. He did not keep his promise to visit them early in 1907

62 WLS, 1905/9/13, 2: 35b, p. 84.

63 WLS, 1906/3/14, 3: 20a-20b, pp. 127-128.

64 WLS, 1906/8/20, 4: 13a, p. 181.

65 WLS, 1906/9/26, 4: 35b, p. 226.

66 WLS, 1906/10/1, 5: 1, p. 237.

but rather left for Manchuria in an attempt to foment rebellion there. He was the younger son, but his older brother seems to have been a bit feckless, and it could be said Song did not fulfill his filial responsibilities very well. Nonetheless, he did at least agonize over them (or over his moral failures), while he paid more attention to the fate of China. During his hospital stay he wrote poetry, including the following lines: “Within the four walls, the insects urgently chirp/Alone by the lamp, the cold night rain/I myself, in melancholy/my native country, seen in a dream.”⁶⁷

Who was Song Jiaoren, then? One the one hand, he was arguably one of the most sober, if deeply committed of the revolutionaries: a skilled political organizer and alliance-builder in the highly factionalized world of exiles and student radicals. On the other, he was a romantic who took his penname from the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, who compared himself to the ancients who sacrificed themselves for the benefit of humanity, who wept easily, and who worked at both moral self-improvement and the cause of revolution to the point of breakdown.⁶⁸ As he fled China in the fall of 1904, Song frankly reported his feelings of fear, sleeplessness, and also shipboard boredom. Yet it is also worth noting that Song was an indefatigable tourist, ever ready to enjoy the sights even while fleeing for his life.⁶⁹ If not in Kang Youwei’s league, Song still enjoyed puppet shows, bookstores, the hurly-burly of town life, and once safely in Japan continued to note occasional outings. Nonetheless, overall, Song does not pretend to his diary that he is a single-minded hero lacking all self-doubt. On the contrary, he admits to homesickness and, especially, full-fledged

67 WLS, 1906/10/5, 5: 3b, p. 242.

68 Song variously noted that he was reading *Shuihu zhuan* (1904/11/3, 1:6b, p. 12) and later that he was moved to tears by the heroic sacrifices of Wu Yue 吳樾 and Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1906/9/6, 4: 24a, p. 203).

69 WLS, 1904/10/4-5, 1: 2b-3a, pp. 4-5.

depression. He was in a hospital (though he seems to have been free to come and go as he liked) from 19 August to 4 November 1906 for his “nervous disorder.” At the same time, however, he aspired to the revolutionary comradeship for which historical knights-errant (俠義) and the Shuihu zhuan provided models.⁷⁰ Song also engaged in a strenuous program of self-education — reading widely in history and philosophy, political theory (socialism), psychology, and military affairs, and studying Japanese. (When he was in the hospital, he also read Dream of the Red Chamber and detective stories.)

Song’s life in Japan, as recorded in his diary, seems to have consisted of roughly equal parts of visits and discussions with revolutionary comrades and friends, of his revolutionary journalism, of his self-education projects, and of learning Japanese and about Japan. His patriotic concerns were constant; he kept up with events in China such as the latest foreign incursion. His anger over Qing ineffectiveness was a matter of anguish, not merely public wrath. He was able to witness the Japanese patriotism of the Russo-Japanese war firsthand, noting how it was fostered by public ceremonies and even humble entertainment such as puppet plays.⁷¹ As for the Russian Revolution of 1905, Song merely noted that the Chinese lacked the same popular spirit (民氣).⁷² On the one hand, Song observed traditional Chinese holidays like lunar New Year, Dragon Boat, and so forth, while he also recorded enormous respect for the Japanese — even its jailers seemed highly moral.⁷³

Like Liang, Song believed that moral self-cultivation, not merely scholarly or political accomplishments, was important. And like Liang, Song found the mutual criticism of friends to be key to self-cultivation.

70 WLS, 1904/9/9, 1: 3b-4a, 6-7; 1904/11/3, 1: 6b, p. 12.

71 WLS, 1905/1/1, 2: 1a, p. 15.

72 WLS, 1905/1/15, 2: 2b-3a, pp. 18-19.

73 WLS, 1906/8/16, 4: 12a-b, pp. 179-180.

Following the example of Xue Jingxuan 薛敬軒 as recorded in the Mingru xue' an 明儒學案, Song resolved to keep a record of his reading and thenceforth used his diary as a commonplace book.⁷⁴ He believed that to follow the Way (道), one needed self-control (克己) and empathy for others. One's actions needed to be based on humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom (仁義禮智). "When one acts completely according to Heaven's laws (天則), then the Way is present." At the beginning of 1906, Song was reading Wang Yangming's 王陽明 Quanxilu 傳習錄, which he saw as a guide to "entering the Way" (入道).⁷⁵ As well, Song was particularly interested in "establishing the will" (立志), which was a critical notion for justifying revolutionary action and which Song based on Wang Yangming's theory of innate good learning (良知). Song told his friends that if they knew their own purpose, then all else follows.⁷⁶ There is also a sense in Song's diary that he was modeling himself on Wang, who was, after all, a man of action and whom Song studied systematically.

As he worked out his ideas in his diary, Song followed Wang closely.⁷⁷ It is not our concern here to judge whether Song understood Wang correctly, nor to turn a few random diary jottings into a philosophy on its own account. Nonetheless, we can here see what ideas Song found exciting and useful. In his own view, Song followed the mature Wang in basing the Way of the sage (聖人之道) on the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge (格物致知), which in turn lay in one's own sufficient nature. This is in contrast to Wang's earlier attempt to investigate the patterns of affairs and things. However, Song wanted a unitary vision encompassing both the mind-heart (and therefore the Way of the sage) and a form of the investigation of knowledge that was all-

74 WLS, 1906/1/11, 3: 3a, p. 93.

75 WLS, 1906/1/22-27; 3: 5a-6b; pp. 97-100.

76 WLS, 1905/9/9; 2: 34b-35a, pp. 82-83.

77 WLS, 1906/2/13, 3: 11a-b, pp. 109-110.

encompassing. He seems to have felt Wang did not precisely provide this; in any case, within his own version of the all-encompassing, Song found two constituent parts: the mind-heart and objects. The ‘mind-heart’ refers to the learning of the spiritual. ‘Objects’ refers to the learning of material things. ‘Investigation’ lies in investigating objects while ‘reaching’ lies in reaching objects. However, this approach did not lead Song, as we might expect, back to Zhu Xi 朱熹, whom Song, in a letter to a friend, accused of excessively dividing the mind-heart from principle (in any case, neither Zhu Xi nor Wang Yangming understood how to plumb principle as well as had Confucius, in Song’s view). And neither can one say that mind was simply principle.⁷⁸ Whatever Song was trying to say, he stressed that neither the mind-heart nor objects can be neglected. This was precisely the mistake of Chinese scholars since the age of the Three Dynasties. Yet if Truth and Humanity (人道) do not take on a complete form, then this is like the world before Columbus discovered a new continent. Song concluded that the evolution of humanity had thus far naturally failed to reach its highest point.

For Song, Wang at least offered the best entrance point to true understanding through his conception of the mind-heart. Why should Song have cared what a Ming dynasty philosopher wrote? Though he does not spell it out, I suspect Song found Wang useful in solving a particular moral problem facing the revolutionaries. That is, what justified their violent actions and how did they know they were right? The epistemological aspect of this problem was subsumed in the morality of praxis. This is because through self-cultivation – particularly caution-when-alone (慎獨) and self-control (克己), both of which Song cites, one can learn to trust the righteousness of one’s will (志).⁷⁹ In Song’s

78 WLS, 1906/3/26, 3: 23b-24a, pp. 134-135.

79 WLS, 1906/2/14-18, 3: 11b-12b, pp. 110-112.

(traditional) terminology, through introspection and self-control, one could learn to distinguish what is Heavenly pattern (天理) and what is mere selfish desire (人欲).⁸⁰ This was of importance not only to revolutionaries, but it was critical to taking revolutionary action. In another letter to a friend, Song had previously defined the nation as composed of individuals. Therefore, such individuals needed to have the qualifications to make the nation, or in other words, to be citizens. And the core notion here, for Sung, was that this in turn required complete possession of the Way of being human (為人之道): including patriotism but also thought, morality, knowledge, and ability.⁸¹

Nonetheless, Song' s self-cultivation did not save him from agonizing conflicts with his personal friends, especially the excessively demanding Li Hesheng 李和生. Song' s complicated and intense relations with Li may have been a major factor precipitating his hospitalization.⁸² Even revolutionaries far from their families cannot avoid personal complications.

Unlike Kang and Liang, Song was not the eldest male in his family. He was able to leave behind an older brother to take care of his mother, and thus he might seem to fit the Skinnerian profile of the less filial, the more inclined to taking radical action. Yet not only do we find that Song expressed strong filial feelings including guilt, he also achieved the kind of educational success Skinner statistically attributes to the elder, most filial son and seems to have been relied on by his family. In other words, Song was functionally close to being the eldest son. If anything, during the late Qing, it seems to be the imposition of family responsibilities on bright, educated sons like Kang, Liang, and Song that led them to feel responsibility for the nation. This in turn led them all to radical

80 WLS, 1906/2/21, 3: 13a-b, pp. 113-114.

81 WLS, 1906/5/21, 3: 32b, p. 152.

82 For Li, see various references from WLS, March and June-August 1906.

action, putting themselves and their families at risk.

They did not often display a strong sense that they themselves saw their private lives and public lives in conflict or even as separate. Yet they did inevitably divide their lives into what we may distinguish as public and private spheres, and had some subjective awareness of doing so. Of course, the two spheres were not entirely distinct, any more than they are in any society. Kang, Liang, and Song attempted to apply the same morality to private and public spheres again, hardly a uniquely “Confucian” approach, and it may be impossible to determine which sphere friendship, for example, belonged to. Nonetheless, it is significant that both Liang and Song specifically relinquished their love for non-Chinese women, in part because of their public commitments. This is especially clear in Liang’s case. As he himself wrote (to his wife), he had no doubts about the depth of his love for an ethnic-Chinese American he met in Hawaii in 1900. However, as a well-known public figure whose actions came under constant scrutiny, Liang did not want to give his critics any excuse to attack him. Specifically, given his position as a reformer favoring sexual equality, Liang did not feel he could take a concubine, nor “at a time of national emergency” did he want to be dismissed as a womanizer.⁸³

In Song’s case, his reasons for abandoning his growing attachment to a Japanese woman are not spelled out in his diary. Rather, he emphasized the opposition of his friends and his own uncertainty. He felt that his behavior did not transgress moral boundaries, but exactly what constituted these moral boundaries is not made clear being known, presumably, to Song himself.⁸⁴ After much agonizing, confusion,

83 NP, p. 136. Also, it is interesting to note that personally, Liang appeared horrified that his wife, who expressed no anxieties about his taking of a concubine, might tell his father, whom Liang assumed would be very upset.

84 WLS, 1906/3/14, 3: 20a-b, 127-128.

and shame, Song did accept his friends' accusations of the fault of lust, but he equally argued that love did not violate natural law. At one moment, Song seems to be convinced he was in virtuous love, the next moment in sinful lust. In the end, he credited his friends for showing him the wrongfulness of his intentions. On the one hand, this brought him to an awareness of human vulnerability: as one could become a sage with a moment's thought, so one could become a moral criminal. On the other hand, Song continued to express feelings for the girl, and this incident too may have contributed to his need for hospitalization.⁸⁵ In any case, if Kang Youwei, as a man more comfortable with traditional mores, had no difficulty in taking (Chinese) concubines, Liang and Song were holding themselves up to new standards, standards set by their immediate communities of friends and comrades, as well as by "the public" more broadly.

Autobiography, privacy, and emotions

To make sense of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Song Jiaoren, our familiar dichotomies — public and private, family and state, rationality and emotion, even speech and silence — are of limited use. Of course. And yet given the parameters of the very interesting conference for which this essay was originally written — focusing on the themes of revealing what was obscure, exploring realms of private emotion, and the performative aspects of texts — these difficult dichotomies inescapably frame the analysis used in this essay. They also define, to a real and significant degree, the conflicts felt by our three subjects. But note: these three men did not set the demands of one side of each dichotomy versus the other side (chosing between public and private or chosing between being rational or being emotional). Rather, within each sphere

85 WLS, 1906/3/26, 3: 23b, p. 134; see also 1906/3/19, 3: 21b-22a, pp. 130-131.

(such as the private sphere, or the sphere of the rational), they had to negotiate decisions in such a way as to reflect their needs and values.

The texts they produced reveal much about this process while performing the process. In other words, self-writing was a way of defining the self both publicly and privately; it was a way of working out the tensions and conflicts that, painful or not, went back into the process of creating the self. “Privacy” remains a difficult term to define in part because the absolutely private is ineffable. What is spoken can be heard by others, but if heard by others cannot be considered absolutely private. Nonetheless, in common use “privacy” covers a range of experiences and intentions and we might start from the other end: what is not meant for the hearing of the entire world is then, to some extent, private. Autobiographical writing is tantalizing because it raises the prospect of genuine or sincere accounts not possible in public. For in public we must to one degree or another conform to the expectations of others, and even if we seek deliberately to confound those expectations we are still in a sense responding to others in ways that seem possible for autobiography with its potential or primary audience of only the self to escape. Yet of course autobiography is also a “public” performance.⁸⁶ At the least, it has a potential audience outside the self unless one’s words are erased as soon as they are written. It cannot provide a (privileged) window to the soul but functions as another mask, and a mask that is, even more than most masks, under the control of the subject during its construction. However, when all is said and done, diaries and memoirs offer another dimension of the individual’s life; they allow insights not

86 It is clear that autobiography can be entirely trusted neither in the sense I have just suggested nor even as a source of circumstantial facts (autobiography has other merits). For overviews, see James Olney ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

into the soul but certainly into the private life as opposed to public activities. Furthermore, only the subject's own words offer even the possibility of direct access to the subject's inner life. Autobiography is always true in some sense; the subject may consciously or unconsciously reshape events of the past (or lie), yet even lies have meaning. (Or in more psychoanalytical terms, evasions, denials, forgettings, and repressions contribute to processes of working through or self-discovery.)

Pei-yi Wu has emphasized the use of the genre of historical biography by Chinese autobiographers: dry, annalistic, ostensibly factual rather than subjective.⁸⁷ We see this too in the late Qing. Wendy Larson has usefully noted two ideal-types of Chinese autobiography: the circumstantial and the impressionistic.⁸⁸ The former sites the subject in the socio-material world, defining the self in terms of events, official positions, ancestry, and so forth, while the latter sites the subject as a "detached literatus" substituting references to nonsocial activities, artistic pursuits, travel, pleasure, and so forth for the circumstantiality of the former. The former defines the self in terms of objective institutions and power structures as well as physically in time and space, while the latter defines the self in terms of atemporal textual traditions. Coming into the twentieth century, Larson found, impressionistic texts became a good indicator of conservatism while circumstantial autobiography could be either conservative or progressive: "a tool that could be utilized by writers in their own internal production of modernity." I would say that the use of the literatus persona in an era when the literatus scarcely

87 Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*. Wu finds that a major exception to this generalization evolved in Buddhist and especially Neo-Confucian self-accounts of spiritual growth during the Ming,

88 Larson, *Literary Authority*, esp. pp. 3-8, 11-29. Larson does not use the term "ideal types" but emphasizes that real autobiographical texts exist along a continuum, and that both types are equally textual or literary, though in different ways.

existed was nostalgic or reactionary. In any case, the autobiographical writings considered here are certainly all circumstantial in Larson's definition.⁸⁹ Yet they are still highly revealing.

To bring this discussion back to private emotions, I am obviously not claiming that autobiography is a site of absolute privacy. Nor am I claiming that the private life is a site of emotion and sentiment as opposed to the public life of calculation and rationality. Public and private are equally subject to emotion (and are in any case overlapping, indistinct categories). But we should also remember that private emotions do not necessarily refer to the private life alone. For example, concern over the fate of the nation was obviously a dominant public concern in the late Qing. This was felt personally by Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Song Jiaoren, among others. What is the impact on the individual's emotional life and character when the very nation one belongs to seems to be on the verge of collapse? What is the impact of the demand expressed equally by "reformers" and "revolutionaries" not merely to contribute one's mite to human betterment but to "rescue the nation from imminent extinction (救亡)"? Intense emotions are generally associated with personal loves and hates, but at certain historical moments can stem from the public sphere as well.⁹⁰ When this is the

89 Problems of modernity and the crisis of textual authority and doubts over the functions of writing that Larson delineates in the May Fourth period are irrelevant for my purposes here. Of course, the late Qing sense of crisis was in no small part a reflection of problems of modernity, in this case in the form of the intrusion of competing claims to universal truths (historical and political explanations and naturalized socio-economic arrangements).

90 This might be a rare case when it is relevant for me to speak autobiographically myself. In my youth (roughly ages 13-20) I was a passionate supporter of the movement protesting America's war in Vietnam. I remember that I sometimes worried that I could not balance the needs for some kind of private life with my political commitment. Such political passions may be hard to understand by anybody who has not been caught up in such a movement themselves; even for me, the memories of this time are overlain by later years of living more privately and taking a much cooler, observer's political posture.

case, public passions can shape one's personal life, and one may make personal decisions on the bases of public commitments. Yet this is too simple. Insofar as the public and private lives of the individual can be distinguished, they influence and reflect on each other.

The traditional connection drawn between filial piety and political loyalty might conversely be put in Freudian terms: to kill a king is to kill a father. It seems clear that such approaches cannot provide a guide to late Qing life. Certainly, insofar as we can test the connection between filiality and loyalty, it simply does not exist: or at least was not a significant factor in the late Qing. Yet this is not to deny important relationships between the personal and the political, so to speak, or the existence of an entire "hidden world" of tensions and conflicts in the lives of the three men discussed here. All three men willingly risked death but chose not — if they could help it — to become martyrs. Reflecting on this issue, Kang relied on fate while Liang and Song feared dying in vain. Kang saw himself as directly willing to sacrifice himself for his emperor, if need be. Liang, I would say, rather, was willing to sacrifice himself for top-town reform, if need be. And Song was willing to sacrifice himself, if need be, in revolution. Nothing in the personal lives of these

In any case, the point is simply that not through historical empathy but from my own experiences I can understand how political passions, at certain historical junctures, can for some people smash the barriers between public and private life and between their rational and emotional worlds. I hope, of course, that this is not an anachronistic imposition or "transference," but although I am reluctant to push personal experience too far, in my view the opposite stance — the pretense of complete objectivity — is even more dangerous. There is a large historiographical literature on this topic; for a sensible discussion, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1988). In a sense roughly similar to mine, Roderick MacFarquhar has noted that his experiences as a Labour backbencher in the British Parliament gave him insights into the workings of the Chinese politburo in the 1960s. See Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. ix.

men exactly explains their political decisions. Yet it is important remember that each man found it personally important to ground their decisions not in a vague idealism but in a strong sense of personal morality, particularly informed by the Wang Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism. They valued their families, their friends (or in Kang's case, disciples), and an abstract sense of political justice and progress.

「矛盾情結」 晚清時期 「公與私」的面面觀

沙 培 德^{*}

摘要

晚清時期的獨特局勢乃在「公」「私」之間引發了新的衝突。「忠」與「孝」的價值觀受到了質疑，但這篇文章的焦點並不在於意識形態與政治哲學之上，而反是在於這些衝突當中所涉及到之無意識或者幾近有意識之矛盾感受的情感糾結。當專事於研究康有為（1858-1927）、梁啟超（1873-1929）和宋教仁（1882-1913）等人的私人寫作時，對於政治活躍人士之政治目標可能會和其私人生活之價值觀念的基準相違背之一事，就變得明顯易見了。這是無法以「理性v.s.情感」來作一分為二的劃分，而反是「公」與「私」均顯示出其所同時具有之理性與情感的一面。以國家與家庭為並行之層級架構的觀念，便在傳統底下的宇宙論理中被表白得很清楚。這篇文章的一個面向，就是檢視了皇帝其作為崇奉對象之所涵蓋的範圍程度。眾所周知，對帝制的態度已開始在改變；然而，家庭與友誼的觀念，其變遷則較為遲緩。可是，一旦變遷的過程開始了，就很難阻止。傳統宇宙論的銷蝕崩解，終究還是影響到對家庭的態度。甚至在這態度出現變化之前，政治行動的邏輯便已加重了晚清時期所面對的這波「價值觀上的苦難」。

或許更有可能的是，國家與家庭之間的連繫關係早在清末以前就已斷喪，並因而為這關係的兩方創作出一個新的重新思考的空間。在康有為自

關鍵詞：公與私、情結矛盾、康有為、梁啟超、宋教仁

* 中央研究院近代史研究所副研究員。

我的披露下，他在道德上所面臨的主要問題便是：他在使自己陷於政治危難的同時，也使得他的家庭，特別是他的母親，陷於危局之中。最後他乃將這個問題交由命運來解決。在梁啟超的案例中，顯然是，他面對了一種介於政治行動上的需求與其對遊學生涯和友誼的渴望等之間的衝突矛盾。在面對他本身的問題時，他訴諸於道德自我修正的良方來解決。而宋教仁亦是如此。宋氏受到來自家庭的直接壓力，要他放棄會使得他感到未能盡孝的政治活動。雖說如此，他的最高忠誠還是留在漢民族的身上（類似於康有為之對光緒皇帝的忠心不二）。部份的這些壓力可能就是導致了宋教仁於 1906 年在日本達到崩潰地步的來源。在這三位人物內心世界的細節中

就以我們所能夠取得並對他們內心世界作合理推斷的這部份屬於研究方法上所面臨之困難問題的範圍裡 我們可以闡釋出他們在公眾生活中所掩藏的一角。我們同樣也可以見識到介於「公與私」、「國家與家庭」、「理性與情感」，甚至於「說話與靜默」等等之間的某些互相作用。他們的自我寫作乃同時是一項自我表露和一項演出，而這演出除了在於掩藏也做了表露，而卻總會解決了從孩提時代開始和就某方面來說從過去的幾世紀以來就已「內心化」之對立價值觀其彼此之間的緊張和衝突。