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## Liang Shuming's Theory of Rural Reconstruction and the Lü-Family Village Covenant

### ABSTRACT:

Liang Shuming's 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) Rural Reconstruction Movement was a twentieth-century instantiation of the gripping two-millennia-long struggle between Confucian aspirations and the requirements of a centralized bureaucracy. It might also be seen as the interminable competition between Confucian and Legalist ideals of governance. Liang's Rural Reconstruction or Local Self-government theory was heavily influenced by an historical exemplar of this ideological and institutional competition, the "Xiangyue 鄉約 (Village Covenant) of the Lü Family" ("Lüshi xiangyue" 呂氏鄉約). This Northern Song-period experiment also inspired the design of Liang's uniquely innovative systems of "rural school cum government," i.e., *xiangnong xuexiao* 鄉農學校 (rural schools) and later *xiangyue cunxue* 鄉學村學 (township and village schools) that he established during the 1930s in Zouping county 鄒平縣, Shandong province.

### KEYWORDS:

*Liang Shuming, Confucianism, rural reform, Village Covenant, village compact, xiangyue, Zouping, rural reconstruction, cultural revival, Chinese cultural conservatism*

In 1920 philosopher-activist Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) predicted that the future world culture would be Chinese and thus called for a national popular revival of Confucian culture and its values.<sup>1</sup> By the middle 1920s he had decided that such a revival was possible only by building on the remnants of the Confucian moral system that existed in the countryside; the cities were, in his opinion, already lost to Westernization and its fatuous moral system based upon rewards and pun-

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FOR A detailed contextualization of Liang Shuming and his program for rural reconstruction, see my publications, especially the revised Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, 2d edn. (Berkeley: U. California P., 1986). The present article explores the Song and late-imperial Chinese roots of the rural organization that Liang pursued. I undertook this challenge to engage the field of my friend Hoyt Tillman on the occasion of his retirement from Arizona State University. Thus, this article was originally presented at the University's March 29–30, 2019, international conference on "Culture and Power in China's History," partially supported by the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation. Coauthor Stella Xing Tan 譚星 was my "visiting student" at the University of Chicago 2017–18, during which time she wrote her dissertation for her Ph.D. degree from Peking University.

<sup>1</sup> These lectures, originally delivered in Jinan, Shandong, were published in 1921 in Liang's

ishments in the next world. By 1930 he had also decided that China's future had to follow its own path, based upon its own cultural institutions and values.<sup>2</sup> Thereby he specifically rejected both the Western and Soviet paths of development together with their institutions. Liang also wanted to base his rural movement on a native Chinese institution and announced that the traditional practice of the *xiangyue* 鄉約 (Village Covenant, below referred to as "Xiangyue" in the contexts of a theory of local governance or the name of a document) fulfilled both requirements. Its core concept was moral revival of the masses and it was a Chinese notion that embodied China's own cultural values.

#### THE LÜ FAMILY VILLAGE COVENANT

The Village Covenant, or *xiangyue* system, was both an ideal and an experiment. The Lü family's effort was the earliest recorded of this kind of institution. It was formulated and executed in 1076 by the four brothers of the Lü family: Lü Dazhong 呂大忠 (d. 1082), Lü Dayue 呂大鈞 (1029–1080), Lü Dalin 呂大臨 (1044–1091), and Lü Dafang 呂大防 (1027–1097). At its core, it professed local popular self-government, a community of mutual encouragement, cooperation, and support that arose spontaneously under local elites. Liang Shuming's Zouping county experimental government and rural reconstruction (1931–1937) was based upon his adaptation of the Village Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Liang's understanding of the Xiangyue, in turn, was to a large degree derived from the scholar Yang Kaidao 楊開道 (1899–1981), who shared Liang's concern for the rural problem.<sup>4</sup> Liang intensively studied the "Lü-Family Xiangyue" and drew heavily on Yang's analyses of Ming- and Qing-dynasty versions in Yang's work *The Village Covenant System of China* 中國鄉約制度.

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*Dong Xi wenhua jiqi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學 (*Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*). On the last page, Liang wrote that the Taizhou School's 泰州學派 moral revival movement in Ming times was what he was after, but he sought the opportunity to explore and experiment in the "Confucian Life" before he said any more. In the eight subsequent years, he gradually formed an answer to the questions raised by his rural reconstruction program.

<sup>2</sup> Liang announced this sudden "awakening" on June 1, 1930, in 主編本刊之自白 (A personal statement upon assuming editorship of this publication) in *Cunzhi* 村治 (*Village Government*) (Peiping) 1.1. This was subsequently published in his book, 中國民族自救運動之最後覺悟 (*The Final Awakening of the Chinese People's Self-salvation Movement*), 3d edn. (Shanghai: 1932), pp. 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> See Alitto, *The Last Confucian*.

<sup>4</sup> Yang Kaidao's publications in the early 1930s are important for our understanding of how the Lü-Family Covenant was understood in the 20th c. In June of 1929 Liang Shuming published the article "Bei you suojian jilue" 北遊所見紀略 ("Record of What I Saw during My Travels to the North") in *Cunzhi* (see n. 2, above) (June 1929), pp. 1–21. In response, Yang

Yang's research examined the development of Xiangyue throughout history. The Lü brothers' creation of the Lantian 藍田 Xiangyue near Chang'an was "the first-ever non-governmental popular set of rules for governance."<sup>5</sup> Not long after the Lüs' creation of the Xiangyue, the Jurchen Jin extinguished the Northern Song dynasty, and the short-lived Xiangyue experiment was forgotten. Later, however, during the Southern Song, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) wrote a more systematic version of the Lü-family Xiangyue; Zhu also added a self-appraisal meeting and a regular public reading of the covenant text. Because of Zhu's reputation, awareness of the Lü-family Xiangyue then spread far and wide. Yang Kaidao wrote "[Lü] Heshu [i.e., Lü Dajun] was the Xiangyue system's first figure of outstanding service; Zhu Xi was the second. Heshu was the Xiangyue system's creator, and Zhu Xi was his successor."<sup>6</sup>

The Xiangyue did not reappear during the Yuan-dynasty era but was revived and further developed during the Ming. Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (the Hongwu emperor, r. 1368–1398) issued various imperial mandates on the Confucian ethical code, but never used the term Xiangyue. Only after emperor Chengzu's ascension (1402), "the term Lü-family Xiangyue was publicized throughout the land. Only at this time was the term regularized."<sup>7</sup> Before emperor Jiajing's reign (1521–1567), the Xiangyue saw only local and partial institutionalization. Beginning

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Kaidao published a series of articles under the repeating title "Liang Shuming xiansheng cunzhi qi nanjie" 梁漱溟先生村治七難解 ("Seven Knotty Problems in Mr. Liang Shuming's Village Government"), in the Nanjing weekly journal *Nongye zhoubao* 農業週報, published by Zhongguo nongyeshi 中國農業社, October, 1929. Its seven installments were: issue no. 1 (Oct. 20, 1929), pp. 5–6; 2 (Oct. 27, 1929), pp. 39–40; 3 (Nov. 3, 1929), pp. 70–71; 6 (Nov. 24, 1929), pp. 146–48; 9 (Dec. 15, 1929): pp. 227–28; 10 (Dec. 22, 1929), pp. 253–56; 11 (Dec. 29, 1929), pp. 284–87. Each was in response to the severe problems raised by Liang's article: problems re. *cunzhang* 村長 (village head); *cunmin* 村民 (villagers); *zhidu* 制度 (the system); *qian* 錢 (funding); *choubei fangfa* 籌備方法 (ways and means); *cungong xinji* 村公薪給 (village employee salaries); and *zhuci* 主次 (priorities). In the summer of 1931, Liang invited Yang to lecture at the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute (Shandong xiangcun jianshe yanjiuyuan 山東省鄉村建設研究院) in Zouping county and to carry out rural surveys. Yang later published his "Xiangyue zhidu yanjiu" 鄉約制度研究 ("A Study of the Village Covenant System") in *Shehui xuebao* 社會學界 (Beiping: Yanjing daxue shehuixuehui) 5 (June 1931), pp. 11–44. He also published several articles: "Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu" 中國鄉約制度 ("The Village Covenant System of China") *Cunzhi* 3.2–3 (Jan. 20, 1933), pp. 1–28; "Lü shi xiangyue de zengsun" 呂氏鄉約的增損 ("Fluctuations in the Lü Family Village Covenant") *Cunzhi* 3.5 (Aug. 1, 1933), pp. 1–12; and "Lüshi Xiangyue de fenxi" 呂氏鄉約的分析 ("An Analysis of the 'Lü-family Village Covenant'") *Cunzhi* 3.4 (Aug. 1, 1933), pp. 1–13. In 1937 the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute 山東省鄉村建設研究院 published Yang's book *Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu* 中國鄉約制度 (*The Village Covenant System of China*) in Zouping, Shandong, 1937. It became study-material for rural reconstruction personnel in Zouping.

<sup>5</sup> Yang, *Zhongguo Xiangyue zhidu*, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

with Jiajing's reign, *xiangyue*, *baojia*, public granaries 社倉, and community schools were gradually mandated by the imperial government. Only then did the Xiangyue see widespread development. In addition to the famous Ming-era Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618) and Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645) also made contributions to the theory of the Xiangyue institution. Lu Shiyi's 陸世儀 (1611–1672) "Three Sets of Rural Covenant Regulations" 治鄉三約 marked the high tide of Ming-period Xiangyue theorization.<sup>8</sup>

The "Lü-Family Xiangyue" was a written set of binding agreements. It had three distinguishing features: it took as its unit the rural township or village, not the county; it was a covenant made voluntarily by the civil population, not by government fiat; and it was voluntary, thus the population of the town or village did not participate in its entirety, since no one was compelled to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Yang Kaidao saw six major differences between Wang Yangming's famous essay "The Southern Jiangxi Lü-Family Xiangyue" 南贛鄉約和呂氏鄉約 and the Lü-family's *original* compact. First, while the Lü-family's original contained the embryo of democratic government, Wang's version created a tradition of a Xiangyue under the supervision of government officials. Second, as just mentioned, the Lü compact was completely voluntary, but Wang's Xiangyue was compulsory for everyone in the village. Third, the Lü family's text was precise in its wording and structure, whereas Wang's version was loosely organized and vaguely worded. Fourth, Wang expanded the staff of public employees to seventeen, but the Lü family's plan had only two or three. Fifth, Wang's version called for frequent and complicated meetings, with ceremonies for public rebuking and public confessions, public commendations, impositions of curfews, and of course, public reading of the Xiangyue text. The Lü-family compact did not. Sixth, Wang's version gradually became an implement of the government by enforcing government codes and regulations.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Liu Zongzhou's style-names (*zi* 子 or courtesy names) were Qidong 起東 and Niantai 念台. Because he taught on the northern side of Mount Ji, he was known as the Master of Jishan 戴山先生. He was known for criticism of Wang Yangming. Lu Shiyi was a late-Ming to early-Qing Confucian scholar and litterateur. His courtesy names were Daowei 道威 and Gangzhai 剛齋, but he used the alternative personal name (*hao* 號) Futing 桴亭 in later years. His major works include *Sibianlu* 思辨錄 and *Lunxue chouda* 論學酬答. Lü Kun was a Ming-era litterateur, thinker, and government official. His styles were Shujian 叔簡 and Xinwu 心吾. He was from Ningling county 寧陵縣 (part of present-day Shangqiu city 商丘市, Henan), and his major works are *Shenyinyu* 呻吟語 and *Quweizhai wenji* 去偽齋文集.

<sup>9</sup> Yang, *Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu*, pp. 69–72.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110–17.

Lü Kun's contribution to the Xiangyue institution was the creation of the Xiangyue-cum-Baojia 鄉甲約 system, which combined the two into one structure. The Xiangyue emphasized spirit, and the Baojia emphasized organization. Thus, Lü Kun combined moral, spiritual, and intellectual education in a tightly organized community under direct government rule. It was a tool for mass education as well as for village government. Its constructive, encouraging, aspect was the Xiangyue program's exhortation to virtue and its punishment of vice, whereas its obverse, punitive, aspect was calling for the apprehension of the wicked and the elimination of crime by legal means. Lü Kun had another innovative contribution – the training of village leaders. His was first to train the upper levels of the Baojia leadership, and then have them train the lower-level Baojia leaders and so on down to the lowest level.<sup>11</sup>

Lu Shiyi first drafted the work named *Zhixiang sanyue* 治鄉三約, which contained his theory of Xiangyue, in 1640. In previous theoretical discussions of the Xiangyue, morality, government, economic matters, and education were not coordinated. However, Lu Shiyi made the Baojia system the primary focus with the community granary and school as supporting entities. He affirmed the Xiangyue's fundamental spirit and important position in the local community by making it the guiding principle of government. That is to say, he made the Xiangyue the program for governance, with morality as its center.<sup>12</sup> As Yang Kaidao rightly judged that “[Lu Shiyi's] theories were never actually carried out in practice, so his work can only be regarded as a castle in the air.”<sup>13</sup>

After the establishment of the Qing dynasty, the Xiangyue became a grass-roots organization but under official government control – a conduit of communication for imperial edicts. Hence, the Xiangyue became a passive organization, a part of a top-down administrative system. Thus, after the reforms of Wang Yangming and Lü Kun, the concept gradually and simply became a tool of official government. The Republican Period scholar Yang Kaidao rightly concluded: “The original substance of the Xiangyue was stripped away, and the Xiangyue spirit decreased. . . . The people's voluntary moral admonishments became the imperial moral admonishments.”<sup>14</sup> Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權 (1897–1981) went so far as to term the Xiangyue's moral education a “tool for thought control.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Xiangyue changed in fundamental character and

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 130–34.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 174–75.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 184, 198.

<sup>15</sup> Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權, *Zhongguo xiangcun: 19 shijie diguo kongzhi* 中國鄉村, 19世紀帝

gradually added many functions, such as the village head's being made responsible for the arbitration of disputes. Combining the Baojia and the Xiangyue resulted in the "moral exhortation" system becoming merely a device for local security. The Xiangyue took on the function of organizing local militia, and even tax collection.<sup>16</sup>

With this brief description of the Xiangyue and its evolution over time, we can appreciate how the Lü-Family Xiangyue changed dramatically during the Ming and Qing periods. Yang Kaidao did observe, however, that it had considerable influence and significance prior to Ming. It is this original spirit that provided inspiration to, and had impact on, rural reconstruction. That impact shows a vitality that would continue as an ideal into the twentieth century.

#### THE XIANGYUE TRADITION AND LIANG SHUMING

Liang Shuming's rural reconstruction program embodied the original Xiangyue tradition in three important ways. First, it continued the Lü-family's Xiangyue tradition concerning rule by the people, and quite consciously maintained a certain distance from government power. Second, "Resolve" (*li zhi* 立志) and "Reciprocal Affection" (harmony in mutual respects, or, 互愛, *hu'ai*) ran through his rural reconstruction theory from beginning to end. Third, Xiangyue systems inspired Liang's design of rural schools – *xiangcun xuexiao* 鄉村學校 and *xiangxue cunxue* 鄉學村學<sup>17</sup> – which constituted rural reconstruction's grass-roots government administration. Given its functions in Liang's project, a better name for the institution would be "school-center."

The Xiangyue reference in Liang's "Theory of Rural Reconstruction" 鄉村建設理論 was made explicitly to the Lü-family version, which was a spontaneous mass movement (in some sense a rural movement initiated by local leaders for the masses). It was not, Liang stated, "the

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國控制, trans. Zhang Hao 張皓 and Zhang Sheng 張升 (Beijing: Jiuzhou Publishers, 2017), p. 219. For orig. English version, see Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 1960). This assessment is an exaggeration, but typical of many non-CCP historians after 1949. Xiao's entire book presents laws, regulations, and rituals as though they had actually been universally implemented and enforced, but that, I think, is a fundamentally faulty assumption.

<sup>16</sup> Yang, *Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu*, pp. 238–43.

<sup>17</sup> The distinction between the two schools will be discussed in more detail, below. They represent two successive organizational forms in Rural Reconstruction practice. A rough distinction between the two might be made by this: If the *xiangcun xuexiao* 鄉村學校 represented Liang's supplementation to, and reform of, the original Lü-Family Xiangyue, then the township and village schools 鄉學村學 represented a further supplementation to, and reform of, the *xiangcun xuexiao*.

Xiangyue that used official government power as encouraged by Ming-Qing governments. [Instead, my use of Xiangyue] refers to the one in the early-Song dynasty, the first Xiangyue that was spontaneously set up by rural people themselves. It was created by Mr. Lü Heshu.”<sup>18</sup> This meant that the rural reconstruction movement’s Xiangyue was not one based on government power, but instead was an organization created by a social (or cultural) movement. The official government only had to give social groups an opportunity to organize, and then recognize the result. Government was merely in an intermediary, supplementary position. Because of this, rural reconstruction not only meant reconstruction, modernization, and reform, but at the same time had meaning as local self-governance “by the people.” Liang used a metaphor to explain the relationship between rural reconstruction and the government: “Our rural organization is like a living sprout, a seed. The seed cannot be planted by government; volunteers in society must plant it. ... Government is like rain, sunlight, and fertilizer, and so on. The government can only cultivate it from all sides to help the rural organization grow naturally.”<sup>19</sup>

Liang’s program sought to implement several principles, which we will now elaborate.

#### *Reciprocal Affection and Resolve*

The elemental spirit behind “Reciprocal Affection 互愛” and “Resolve 立志” pervades the Lü-Family Xiangyue, as seen from the four major objectives stated in their Xiangyue text: “Mutual exhortation toward moral conduct; mutual supervision of faults; mutual adherence to etiquette and customs; mutual aid in adversity.” The prologue of their written Xiangyue states: “A person is dependent upon neighbors and fellow villagers as the body has hands and feet; the family has brothers. They will be affected by whatever good or evil, beneficial or harmful, is done every single day. Otherwise, if one treats neighbors as indifferently as the Qin (in the far north) treats the Yue (in the far south), then he will not care about any of these deeds at all.” Liang specially pointed out this passage because, to him, it explained “the relationships in society and the necessity of organization.”<sup>20</sup>

This was in total agreement with Liang’s own original philosophy of groups and organizations. The elements in the Xiangyue tallied ex-

<sup>18</sup> Liang Shuming, *Xiangcun jianshe lilun* 鄉村建設理論, in idem, *Liang Shuming quanji* 梁漱溟全集 (Jinan: Shandong Province Press, 1991) 2, p. 320.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

actly with his own personal inclinations; it resonated with his conceptions that he had formed on his own prior to his knowledge about the Xiangyue. He held that the family, the lineage, and the village constituted societal communities. Groups should be organized, he stressed, not by laws and regulations, but rather by “resolve” and “reciprocal affection.” In groups and organizations, emphasis should be placed on ethically responsive relationships between individuals.

Liang held that “Resolve” was “constant striving for improvement,” a constant elevating of aspirations; this was one of the crucial spiritual assets of the Xiangyue. “Aspiration” (*zhiqi* 志氣) was critically important to social order. In his view, there were only two forces that could affect social order: brute force 暴力 and (moral) “reason” (*lixing* 理性).<sup>21</sup> This was an expression of the unending tension between Confucian aspirations and the requirements of a centralized bureaucracy. “Reason” was Confucian, and brute force was bureaucracy. Both were necessary, but to different degrees. Force could destroy reason, and reason could reject force.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, Liang’s own inclination was to value reason as more desirable. This inclination was derived from Confucian thought on government through moral suasion, rites, and music.<sup>23</sup> The important thing was that the masses consciously restrained themselves from wrong-doing, and could not be simply forced to be good by harsh punishments prescribed by law. Government by moral education and suasion and rules of propriety is exactly the development and expansion of moral “reason,” which calls for the raising of moral aspirations. Aspirations must be raised before “reason” can come into play.

“Reciprocal Affection” is fundamentally different from individual rights and law-based Western systems. An ethically responsive relationship was “obligatory yet voluntary 義務,” referring to Confucianism’s Five Cardinal Ethical Bonds: ruler–subject, father–son, brother–brother, husband–wife, friend–friend. Liang substituted “rul-

<sup>21</sup> This concept is *not* derived from the Song-dynasty era Confucian philosophers, such as Zhu Xi. As used by Liang, it is certainly not translatable by the usual English equivalent “reason,” except perhaps as Coleridge distinguished it from “rationality.” It meant “moral” reason, or moral sense – the opposite of Western “selfishness” and “utilitarianism.” This was the essence of Chinese culture, which Liang felt remained in vestigial form in the Chinese countryside. Rural Reconstruction was meant to nurture these vestiges. It might also be translated as “moral wisdom.”

<sup>22</sup> Liang, *Xiangcun jianshe lilun*, pp. 331–32.

<sup>23</sup> The locus classicus of this notion is probably Confucius’ *Analects*, book II, no. 3 (論語, “爲政”): “If the people are ruled by laws, and be punished in strict accordance with them, they will try to avoid the punishment, but will have no sense of shame. If they are ruled by virtue, and abide by rites and propriety, they will have a sense of shame, and so will restrain themselves from wrong-doing 道之以政, 齊之以刑, 民免而無恥: 道之以禮, 有恥且格.”



er-subject“ with ”group-member.”<sup>24</sup> Liang declared, “The Xiangyue was in accord with reciprocal affection, mutual admonishment of faults, and mutual encouragement; [whereas,] local self-government laws and regulations were: if you committed an error, you would immediately be arrested, beaten, fined or given other punishments; it had not a bit of reciprocal affection for the villagers in its program.”<sup>25</sup> Liang greatly emphasized kindness and sympathy. As the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote, “Nothing affects and moves people more than kindness and sympathy.”<sup>26</sup> Liang deeply believed in this kind of spirit and in the spirit of the Xiangyue; therefore, he rejected settling the first offence with punishment, and advocated mutual empathy, mutual appreciation, mutual aid and mutual encouragement.

Liang’s notion of moral reason embodied sympathy and kindness, especially in ethical relationships. From this, it is clear that “reciprocal affection” and “resolve” were two sides of the same coin. “Resolve” is intentional and on one’s own initiative; if it arises under compulsion, it is not real resolve. Because of this, resolve is imperceptible, but entirely consistent with the Xiangyue’s fundamental spirit of “government by the people.” In brief, the Xiangyue was a people’s organization based upon the spirit of “resolve” and “reciprocal affection.”

### *Rural Schools*

The spirit of “resolve” and “reciprocal affection” aside, the organization and methods of the rural schools in Liang’s Rural Reconstruction drew direction from the Xiangyue. They represented an augmentation to and modernization of the Xiangyue. In Liang’s own words, “This new organization [rural schools] is a supplemented and improved version of what the ancients called ‘Xiangyue.’”<sup>27</sup>

Liang had a concept of rural schools prior to his arrival in Shandong. In 1928, he had already launched a rural reconstruction/local self-government program in Henan by means of the Village Government Academy 村治學院 and a publication titled *Village Government Monthly* 村治月刊. But the Nationalist government took over governance in Henan province in 1931 and closed down the Academy. Nevertheless, Han Fuqu 韓復榘 (1890–1938), the new governor of Shandong province, invited Liang’s group to Shandong to continue their work in

<sup>24</sup> Liang, *Xiangcun jianshe dayi* “鄉村建設大意”, in *Liang quanji* 1, p. 665.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323, 659, 655.

<sup>26</sup> From Bai Juyi’s “Yu Yuan Jiu shu” 與元九書 (“Letter to Yuan Jiu [Yuan Zhen]”), in *Bai Xiangshan shiji* 白香山詩集 (SBCK edn.) 71, p. 243.

<sup>27</sup> *Liang quanji* 5, pp. 532–47, 347–56, 712–21.

Zouping county, where they established the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute. Han turned the county government over to them, but the county was still subject to provincial laws and regulations. In 1933, the Zouping government was given complete autonomy.

Before this, the concrete organizational unit of rural reconstruction was the rural school (*xiangnong xuexiao* 鄉農學校), which would now be called the “village and township school” (*xiangxue cunxue* 鄉學村學). There were direct parallels to the Xiangyue in the rural school organization. Village and township residents were called “students” (*xuezhong* 學眾), namely, the equivalent of the Xiangyue’s “covenant members 約眾.” In the Lü-Family Xiangyue, the villager who was most respected for his moral character served as “covenant chief” (*yuezheng* 約正), and took responsibility for supervising moral education. The rural school had such a person serve as “school principal” (*xiaozhang* 校長). The rural school students selected those with the greatest ability in managing affairs to serve as “school board members” (*xiaodong* 校董); moreover, they created a standing board committee to handle day-to-day affairs. The Lü family’s Xiangyue arrangement was very simple; day-to-day affairs were handled by rotation of single individuals who served month-long terms. A rural school-board member and Wang Yangming’s Southern Jiangxi Xiangyue administrator (*zhiyue* 知約) were similar in function. The rural schoolteacher (*jiaoyuan* 教員) was responsible for planning and promoting programs. Aside from the school’s teacher and an invited principal teacher, there was also a “guide” (*fudaoyuan* 輔導員), essentially a rural reconstruction cadre.<sup>28</sup> In the original Lü-Family Xiangyue, there was no equivalent of teachers or guides. Instead, such personnel were like the “instructors” (*jiaojianyuan* 教練員) in Lü Kun’s Xiangyue cum *Baojia* system. Unlike the original Xiangyue, Liang’s own grand vision for his project was not limited to the reconstruction of single villages and townships, but rather were intended to become links in his comprehensive “Project of National Reconstruction” (*jianguo fang’an* 建國方案).

The fulfillment of this “National Reconstruction” was the formation of a national organization for rural reconstructors of all sorts. It convened national meetings three times and its members visited each other’s sites. In Liang’s vision, the Zouping county rural reconstruction experiment would eventually inspire the entire country to emulate it “from the grass roots upward” – a mushrooming of moral rectitude. In

<sup>28</sup> Most of the teachers and guides were not natives of the village or township; they were rural workers trained at the Shandong Rural Reconstruction Institute 山東省鄉村建設研究院. See Liang, “Xiangcun jianshe dayi,” p. 687.

fact, Zouping's Xiangyue-inspired rural reconstruction methods never went beyond its borders.

#### LIANG'S MODIFICATIONS OF THE XIANGYUE

Having explored, above, Liang's adaptation of the original Xiangyue, we now turn to his specific modifications to it. He made at least three major innovations. First, he raised the Xiangyue's minimum standard, namely, "the good" (*shan* 善), to "limitless good 無限的善." Second, he looked at all village matters as one integrated whole, with each a part of a coordinated plan. Thus, the Xiangyue, with its particular emphasis on morality, propriety, and protocol, developed into a project that congealed as a free-standing government – with economic, self-defense, and educational components. Third, although limited in members, Liang created a national association of rural reconstructors.<sup>29</sup>

The term "self-defense" referred to the association of linked hamlets (*lian-zhuanghui* 聯莊會), not to national self-defense.<sup>30</sup> Even though Han Fuqu's governorship of Shandong province after 1930 had improved rural security somewhat, the province was still home to large bandit-gangs that could threaten even county governments. In Zouping itself, Liang emphasized that armed force should be used only when there was no other alternative.<sup>31</sup> The Heze 菏澤 branch of the Rural Reconstruction Institute, located in less secure southwestern Shandong, however, relied heavily upon local militias for community organizing.<sup>32</sup>

As for national defense, Liang accurately predicted that Chinese regular armies would not stand a chance against Japan's highly mechanized juggernaut. He felt that only the rural-reconstruction type of militia could defend China in an all-out war with Japan. Liang thought that this kind of local militia was the only force capable of defeating Japan

<sup>29</sup> This association met three times. The proceedings of these meetings are found in Zhang Yuanshan 章元善 and Xu Shilian 許仕廉, eds., *Xiangcun jianshe shiyan* 鄉村建設實驗 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1936–1938).

<sup>30</sup> Liang's vision for effective national defense, however, was anchored in the same Xiangyue-inspired idea of enthusiastic grass-roots community participation. Successful resistance depended upon a "spontaneous voluntary force. Who? You must rely upon the people... upon the peasants militarily. Only then can we have [effective] self-defense." In other words, the only way to mobilize this rural resistance, was his rural reconstruction. Liang, *Liang quanji* 5, pp. 1023–32.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 5, p. 441.

<sup>32</sup> *Xiangcun jianshe* 鄉村建設 5.5 (October 15, 1935), Zouping; and "Yinianlai de Shandong gongzuo" 一年來的山東工作, in Zhang and Xu, eds., *Xiangcun jianshe shiyan*, vol. 3, pp. 293–302.

in open warfare. Only an organized and motivated peasantry fighting a protracted defensive war could prevail. The only way to mobilize this rural resistance was his Xiangyue-based rural reconstruction.<sup>33</sup>

#### SOME OBSERVATIONS

The Lü-Family Xiangyue was an organization formed by the educated elite of traditional society to mobilize the masses. Its fundamentals were: “To admonish one another to adhere to moral principles; to correct others when they committed mistakes; to interact with one another according to social propriety; to support one another in adversity.” All of these rested upon clear-cut standards. For example, in “Mutual exhortation to moral conduct,” the standards were for a person to be able to manage his own personal behavior, to administer his household, to serve his father and elder brothers, to teach his children and younger brothers, to direct servants, to serve superiors, to have amicable relationships with relatives and old friends, to be selective in choosing friends, to be incorruptible and uncompromising, to give favors broadly, and so on.

In a theoretical departure from the Lü family’s and other versions of the Xiangyue, Liang Shuming introduced the concept of “unlimited [moral] good.” The traditional Xiangyue only asked its pact members to fulfil its written rules. However, Liang thought that truly fulfilling the moral good is an endless task of continuous striving to improve the self, so it shouldn’t be confined to such “limited goodness.” “Goodness” should be extended to “limitless good.”<sup>34</sup> By this move, Liang changed the nature of the Xiangyue, and, we would say, overextended his characteristic zealous pan-moralism into the realm of naïve impracticality.

In theory, he “enlarged” “the good”; however, in reality, only achievable goodness is truly the good. For common villagers, who struggled for their survival and livelihood, to fulfil the minimum requirement of moral good would already be a great accomplishment. In practice, to declare “limitless goodness” as a goal would not boost their morale. After all, as Guan Zhong 管仲 (720–645 BC) observed, “If the granaries are well filled, then people will understand social propriety; if food and clothing are plentiful, then the people will understand the difference between honor and disgrace 倉廩實而知禮節，衣食足而知榮辱。”<sup>35</sup> Of course, one of rural reconstruction’s primary goals

<sup>33</sup> Liang, *Liang quanji* 5, pp. 1023–32.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 2, pp. 332–33.

<sup>35</sup> Li Shan 李山, annot., *Guanzi* 管子 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), chapter “Mumin”

was economic development, but the pursuit of this goal, one of “unlimited good,” came from the idealistic philosopher Liang Shuming’s own ideological realm; it was not, after all, the most pressing demand or aspiration for the masses of the people.

Second, the original Lü-Family Xiangyue concentrated on ethics and rites in its education of pact members. Thus, it did not integrate various other matters of the village into one unified comprehensive plan, whereas Liang’s situating the village schools in the official government system was also completely different from the original Xiangyue. Therefore, it is not surprising that the earlier Xiangyue of the Lü family had to deal with government suppressing any bottom-up initiatives, which often led to completely counter results. Lü Dajun commented:

This [Xiangyue] is an abnormal event; those who promote it have overly interpreted it. They regarded it as forcing people to do something impossible to do; therefore, it seemed to be against human nature. They also considered it as launching plans arbitrarily without the emperor’s orders, and so it appeared to be rebellious in nature.... The moral good, no matter how great or small it is, must be promoted by those who are virtuous and hold an office, so that the upper and the lower classes will all obey without any hesitation or doubts. These days, unfortunately, it is initiated by those who are unintelligent and base, so it will naturally be criticized by many.<sup>36</sup>

Even if the countryside “gentry” were virtuous, but without official status, their position in the “democratic” Xiangyue was awkward and problematic. Their implementation of policies had many limitations. Between the official government’s suspicions or misgivings and the people’s disrespect, Xiangyue leaders had a difficult row to hoe. The Xiangyue’s emphasis on ethics and rites was an intentionally cautious and self-restraining strategy. An overall plan that included politics, economics, and self-defense – like Liang’s – would have overstepped the Xiangyue’s authority, so its actual capacities were utterly unequal to its goals.

In contrast, Liang was promoting Rural Reconstruction amidst warlord chaos and at a time when the central government was extremely weak and Japanese aggressing was intensifying. In the 1920s, intellec-

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牧民 (“Governing the People”), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Lü Dajun 呂大鈞, “Da Liu Pingshu” 答劉平叔 (“Reply Letter to Liu Pingshu”), quoted in Yang, *Zhongguo xiangyue zhidu*, p. 80. See web entry <[zh.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/廖曉義](http://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/廖曉義)>, accessed Dec. 28, 2019.

tuals and ruling elites had reached a consensus on the existence of a rural crisis, and so rural reconstruction was in vogue to some degree. Governments also hoped to strengthen non-governmental groups to revive the countryside. At this juncture, the philosopher Liang Shuming grasped the overall situation in its entirety, and so executed a plan that merged “government, economics, self-defense, and education” into a single entity. All rural activities were included within the scope of such a system of rural reconstruction. Furthermore, whereas Liang’s Rural Reconstruction was a national project, the Lü-Family Xiangyue essentially was only a local experiment because the Lü brothers never aspired to promoting it nation-wide; moreover, the family’s having linked a Xiangyue with those of other locales was out of the question. Liang Shuming’s Rural Reconstruction, however, was not an insular experiment, but an integrated whole made of linked parts. Horizontally, village upon village were linked, then county to county linked, and finally province and province. Vertically, it was layer upon layer. The village schools were guided by the township schools, and the township schools by the county government. The Rural Reconstruction Institute was the planning and guiding body for the experimental county government. Linked horizontally and vertically, the rural reconstruction system formed a universal national communal network.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Liang drew from the ideas and system of the Xiangyue for his rural reconstruction project. He inherited its tradition of rule by the people, and consciously kept it a certain distance from government power. He gave full play to the fundamental Xiangyue spirit of “resolve” and “reciprocal affection,” which guided rural reconstruction. The rural schools not only drew from the Xiangyue, but also from the amalgamation with Southern Jiangxi and *xiangbaoyue* organizations during late-imperial China. All of this created a more complex structure.

The competition between Confucian cultural power and officialdom’s power continues to the present. As an epilogue of sorts, we present an ironic example of the contemporary fate of Liang’s rural reconstruction heritage: this was the “green” rural reconstruction program of Liang Shuming’s “disciple” Liao Xiaoyi 廖曉義 (b. 1954). Liao is the founder and president of the Global Village of Beijing 北京地球村, the first and largest Chinese Environmental Protection NGO. Her program (established in various sites, for example, Qufu county, Chongqing city, Changsha county) is called (in the official translation) the Loho Home-

land 樂和家園, which is based upon Liang Shuming's rural reconstruction model. (Alitto visited several of the project's villages.) Although Liao was originally strictly devoted to environmental protection, she found that in rural areas environmental protection could be achieved only by involving and organizing village communities themselves. This in turn brought her to the study of Liang Shuming. Liao rebuilt (in several senses) devastated villages in northern Sichuan after the 2008 earthquake. She then moved on to Wuxi county 巫溪縣, in Sichuan, where she had great success in executing her green rural reconstruction and community rebuilding.<sup>37</sup> Her model, admittedly, was Liang's rural reconstruction, and not the Lü Family's Xiangyue; nonetheless, she succeeded in reaching several of Liang's and the Xiangyue's original goals, including cultural revival. In addition, she succeeded as well in solving rural environmental issues that have arisen in modern times – long after the Xiangyue and rural reconstruction. The central government took note of her work because Beijing saw that Liao's project could achieve desirable results that official local bureaucracies could not. However, she often faced the “usual” opposition by those local bureaucracies, who were only interested in economic growth that would reflect well upon them and promote their careers.

To a degree, Liao's experience was analogous to the Xiangyue's history, but the Confucian versus Legalist tension played out in a manner different from Liang's case – in that she and her rural reconstructors had no official power at all. Her project was based entirely on the spontaneous and voluntary response of local villagers and operated with the approval of the county government. Liang had been given control of the Zouping county government, but Liao's project could only function through an established village committee that paralleled the official village government. The committee's other organizations, such as an office for resolving disputes, the care of left-behind children 留守兒童, and the seniors' center, operated as civil institutions. When the county's Party secretary departed and the new one decided not to continue the government's approval of Liao's work, Liao's Wuxi county project was then terminated. She did go on to establish other sites, but only with the support of local governments.

Liang's Xiangyue-based rural reconstruction was a twentieth-century instantiation of the gripping two-millennia drama of the struggle between Confucian aspirations and the requirements of a centralized

<sup>37</sup> On the Loho Homeland, see Liao Xiaoyi, “Building a Loho Homeland with Traditional Wisdom,” in Guy S. Alitto, ed., *Reconstituting Confucianism: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary World* (Berlin: Springer, 2015), pp. 63–78.

bureaucracy. Thus, as noted above, it might be seen as the interminable competition between Confucian and Legalist ideals of governance. Her reconstruction experiment did not resolve the enduring tension between Confucian aspirations and the requirements of a modern centralized bureaucracy. In its ideal form, the Xiangyue could not be realized without hard political power, which opposed the fundamental principles of any spontaneous, grass-roots moral revival.

A word on Liang's use of the Xiangyue might speak to the now rather hoary question, articulated by Joseph Levenson (1920–1969): was authentic traditionalism of any sort possible in the twentieth century? According to Levenson, all modern, Republican Period expressions of traditionalism in thought and action were nostalgic, romantic manifestations made to serve nationalism or to demonstrate “equivalency” with the West. Confucius and his later interpreters had been relegated to the status of an exhibit in a museum of nationalism. The undeniable fact, Levenson thought, was that in the end “a traditional institution based on traditional values” has never been “taken as the basis for present action.”<sup>38</sup> Much has happened in China since that assessment, most notably the social and economic transformations put into play during the Reform Period and the various recent efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to revive traditional Chinese culture. Most of these changes seem to reinforce the deduction that authentic revivals of traditional thought and institutes are impossible. Nevertheless, we would contend that there has been at least one significant exception – Liang Shuming's Rural Reconstruction, which was built upon the earliest instance of the Xiangyue, however little the Reconstruction achieved.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: U. California P, 1964–1966), e.g., vol. 1, pp. xiii–xix, 95–133; vol. 3, pp. 47–109.