ABSTRACT

Liang Qichao’s career as reformer, publicist and historian spanned the last two decades of imperial China and the first two decades of Republican China. During this era, China’s intellectual scene was in a state of ferment -- traditional Chinese learning had come under close scrutiny and many intellectuals now took for granted that Chinese scholarships must submit to radical changes in order for China to brave the “Western impact”. Liang Qichao was a key actor in this arduous drama. Armed with a powerful pen and voluminous writings, Liang called out for revolutions in everything from production to poetry, and perhaps most important of them all, an unprecedented historical revolution.

This preliminary study explores Liang Qichao’s historiographical thought and methodology, paying close attention to his innovative suggestions for the modern transformation. Liang in his deeply significant Xin Shixue (《新史学》 New History) and Zhongguo Shi Xulun (《中国史叙论》 The Prolegomena to Chinese History), threw open China’s historiography to an agonizing reappraisal and in the process, he led historians into the discovery of a whole new trend. Among his revolutionary conceptions were the re-periodization of Chinese history modeling the Western standard, the shift from Confucian cyclical view of history to Darwinian evolution, the replacement of traditional “dynastic history” with “national history”, and “individual’s history” with “people’s history”. Above all, he stressed emphatically that “new history” must be able to inspire and nourish a deep sense of national solidarity so vital to China’s modernization of historical scholarship. Besides echoing middle Qing’s “empirical method of research” (考证法), Liang also introduced quantitative methods into Chinese historical research when he wrote his equally trailblazing Zhongguo Lishi Yanjiufa (《中国历史研究法》 Chinese Historical Methods) and its sequel, Zhongguo Lishi Yanjiufa Bubian (《中国历史研究法补编》 A Sequel to Chinese Historical Methods).
Liang Qichao’s constructive ideas for the “new history” are both bold and imaginative. It was evident that he straddled Eastern and Western historiography, but as this thesis concludes, this tug-of-war between his Chinese-Western inclination saw an obvious winner: Liang is so intellectually tied to his tradition that any Western influence cannot be compared with the indigenous Chinese influence as his main historiographical source.