ABSTRACT

This study explores Liang Qi-Chao's ethical thought in a crucial period of intellectual transition in Modern China. Liang was chosen because his ethical thought was the most representative of Chinese intellectuals of that time. Liang, through his powerful writings, exerted tremendous influence on the intellectual climate of Modern China.

This Academic Exercise consists of six chapters. Chapter one gives a brief introduction of Liang, who embarked upon his career as reformer and publicist in 1895. His persuasive and often impassioned arguments made him a national hero in China's political as well as philosophical scene. Chapter two analyses the theoretical origins of Liang's ethical thought, namely: the "Three ages" of Kong-Yang Doctrine (公羊三世说), the Social Darwinism, the concept of grouping (群) and the theory of destruction (破坏主义).

Chapter three presents Liang's view of social and intellectual profile of the people in late Qing Dynasty. Through his writings, Liang hoped to change the outmoded and feudal thinking and behaviour of the people.

Chapter four focuses on the vital concept of Liang's ethical thought, the "New Citizen" (新民说). The essence of
Liang's new citizen ideal was one of collectivism and activism. He advanced a host of new values: the enterprising and adventurous spirit, public morality, self-respect and sense of responsibility. Through the introduction of nationalistic and liberal-democratic ideas, Liang called for a new kind of Chinese citizen, one who was active, independent and nationalistic. His writings helped prepare the minds of many for the programme of the revolutionary movement.

Chapter five deals with the general criticisms of Liang's ambiguity in his ethical thought after 1903. Did Liang return to traditional Confucian morality and revoke the commitment to civic virtues after his trip to America? This chapter provides evidence to explain the shift in Liang's thought after his trip.

The last chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of Liang's ethical thought. As an outstanding thinker, Liang's constructive "New Citizen" thought helped pave the way for the political revolution of Modern China. Furthermore, a whole new generation, nurtured in Liang's thought was able to help China reconstruct when the time was ripe.