

A Study on the Three-Dimensional Relationship between Liang Qichao and Peking University : With a Discussion on his Historical Contribution to the Early Development of Peking University

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Abstract: Liang Qichao maintained an important relationship with Peking University. However, previous studies on this topic have mostly touched upon it incidentally, without treating it as a focused subject, and systematic research is still lacking. By conducting a comprehensive examination of Liang Qichao's relationship with Peking University, this paper finds that their connection involves three main aspects: first, Liang Qichao was closely associated with the founding of Peking University; second, in the first year of the Republic of China, he delivered a remarkable speech at the university; third, during his travels in Europe in 1919, he helped inspire Peking University students to launch the May Fourth Movement. This demonstrates that, in the history of Peking University's development, Liang Qichao also made significant contributions to promoting its growth and progress.

Keywords: Liang Qichao, the Imperial University of Peking (Jingshi Daxuetang), May Fourth Movement

1. INTRODUCTION

Liang Qichao (1873–1929) (梁启超), courtesy name (字) Zhuoru, literary name (号) Rengong, also known by the sobriquet *Master of the Ice-Drinker's Studio* (饮冰室), was a native of Xinhui County (新会县), (today part of Jiangmen City 江门市), Guangdong. He was a renowned statesman and thinker in modern China.¹ In 1889, at the age of sixteen, Liang Qichao passed the provincial-level imperial examination (中举). Liang's later life inevitably intersected with Peking University. With regard to Liang Qichao's relationship with Peking University, previous scholarship has mostly touched upon the topic incidentally in discussions of specific issues, resulting in a rather fragmented picture that lacks systematic study.² Building upon earlier research, this article attempts to draw upon Liang Qichao's collected works, chronologies, and other related sources to provide a systematic examination and analysis of his relationship with Peking University, thereby restoring a clearer historical trajectory.

2. LIANG QICHAO AND THE FOUNDING OF PEKING UNIVERSITY

Peking University was founded in 1898 under the original name the Imperial University of Peking and began enrolling students at the end of that year. However, as early as June 12, 1896 (the second day of the fifth lunar month in the 22nd year of the Guangxu reign), Li Duanfen, then Left Vice Minister of

the Ministry of Justice (刑部左侍郎), submitted to the Guangxu Emperor a memorial entitled “Requesting the Promotion of Schools” (《请推广学校折》). In this memorial, he proposed that “schools be established in the capital as well as in every provincial prefecture (府), subprefecture (州), and county (县),” and that “the Imperial University admit tribute students (贡生) and directorate students (监生) under the age of thirty, while capital officials who wished to study should also be permitted to do so.”³ Li Duanfen thus became the first advocate for the establishment of the Imperial University of Peking. In the process of its founding, Liang Qichao also played an important role, chiefly through his drafting of *the Regulations of the Imperial University of Peking* (*Jingshi Daxuetang Zhangcheng*).

On June 11, 1898, during the Reform Movement of 1898, the Guangxu Emperor issued *the Edict on the Determination of National Policy* (《定国是诏》). This edict explicitly stipulated that the Imperial University of Peking should be established as a priority and instructed the Grand Council ministers and the princes and ministers of the Zongli Yamen to deliberate and submit their proposals jointly.⁴ Subsequently, under the repeated decrees of the Guangxu Emperor, on July 3, 1898 (the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month in the 24th year of the Guangxu reign), the Zongli Yamen submitted a memorial entitled “On the Establishment of the Imperial University of Peking and the Drafting of Its Regulations”.⁵ The appended *Regulations of the Imperial University of Peking* were drafted by Liang Qichao.

In his self-compiled chronological record, Kang Youwei (康有为) clearly noted that the regulations were drafted by Liang Qichao:

“Since the end of the fourth lunar month, when discussion of the Imperial University began, the Grand Council (shuyuan 枢垣) entrusted me with drafting the regulations. At the time, I was too occupied with imperial audiences to spare the time, so I instructed Zhuoru (Liang Qichao) to prepare the draft, adapting the systems of Britain, America, and Japan. It was very thorough, and vested the chief authority in the instructors. When the Zongshu (总署) resubmitted the memorial on the school matter, the ministers assigned it to the secretaries (章京). Zhang Yuanji (张元济), one of the secretaries, came to request that I compose it. I then formulated four provisions: first, to arrange for a large fund in advance; second, to allocate official residences immediately; third, to select instructors with great care; and fourth, to publish and engrave textbooks.”⁶

In this passage, shuyuan (枢垣) refers to the Grand Council (军机处) at the time, while Zhuoru (卓如) was Liang Qichao’s courtesy name. In the fourth lunar month of 1898, since Kang Youwei was occupied with frequent imperial audiences, he entrusted Liang Qichao with drafting the regulations for the Imperial University (大学堂). Drawing on the systems of Britain, the United States, and Japan, Liang prepared the regulations, which vested supreme authority in the Chief Instructor (总教习). The phrase “the Zongshu resubmitted the memorial on the school matter” refers to the joint memorial of May 14, Guangxu 24 (1898) submitted by the Grand Council and the Zongli Yamen (总理衙门), titled “Memorial on Reconsideration of the Regulations for the Imperial University in Accordance with Prior Deliberations”. The ministers of the Zongli Yamen assigned the drafting to Zhang Yuanji, then serving as secretary (章京), who requested Kang Youwei to compose it. Kang accordingly laid down four rules.

Liang Qichao himself also recalled the circumstances of the drafting in his *Account of the 1898 Coup* (《戊戌政变记》). He wrote:

“The senior ministers, under strict imperial orders to draft regulations quickly, were all at a loss, for

China had never before established schools, and there were no precedents to consult. At that time, the Grand Council and the ministers of the Zongli Yamen each sent people to request that Liang Qichao draft them on their behalf. Liang then drew somewhat upon Japanese school regulations, adapted them to China's own conditions, and drafted more than eighty rules. These were subsequently submitted, the Emperor approved them, and thus the establishment of the school was roughly settled.”⁷

Drafted by Liang Qichao and submitted by the Zongli Yamen, *the Regulations of the Imperial University of Peking* was the first modern university charter in China. The charter consisted of eight chapters: Chapter One, General Principles (总纲); Chapter Two, Regulations on Curriculum (学堂功课例); Chapter Three, Regulations on Student Admission (学生入学例); Chapter Four, Regulations on Graduation and Official Advancement (学成出身例); Chapter Five, Regulations on the Appointment of Instructors (聘用教习例); Chapter Six, Regulations on the Establishment of Administrative Offices (设官例); Chapter Seven, Finance (经费); and Chapter Eight, Provisional Statutes (暂章).⁸

Chapter One: General Principles contains eight sections. It emphasizes that the Imperial University of Peking should serve as the model for all the provinces and must not fall short of the highest standards of institutional organization. All provincial schools were to be placed under the jurisdiction of the University, and all regulations and curricula were to be determined in accordance with its rules. Within the University, both primary and secondary schools were to be established to ensure smooth progression of students through successive levels of study. In addition, a Normal College (师范斋) was to be set up to train teaching personnel. A Translation Bureau was to be opened in Shanghai and other locations to compile textbooks for the University, covering both Chinese and Western learning, which were to be widely distributed to provincial schools. A Library (藏书楼) was to be established within the University to collect important Chinese and Western works for the use of teachers and students. An Instrument Institute (仪器院) was also to be created to facilitate instruction in practical subjects. At the same time as the University's founding, provincial governors-general(总督), governors (巡抚), and education commissioners (学政) were to be strictly ordered to establish primary and secondary schools quickly, so as to provide the necessary preparatory foundation for the University.

Chapter Two: Regulations on Curriculum contains six sections. It emphasizes that setting the curriculum is the foremost task of the University. The curriculum must combine both Chinese and Western learning without leaning excessively to either side. Western languages were to be one subject in the curriculum; however, they were considered only as an introduction to Western learning, not its culmination, and this principle was to be communicated to all provinces.

The University's courses were divided into two categories:

General Studies (溥通学) — comparable to today's general education courses, consisting of four main areas: Classical Studies (经学), Studies of the Various Philosophers (诸子学), Logic (公理学), Chinese and World History (中外史志), and Mathematics (格算学). All students were required to study these subjects.

Specialized Studies (专门学) — each student was to study one or two specialties. Alongside general studies, students were required to choose one foreign language from among English, French, Russian, German, and Japanese. Only after completing all general studies courses could students move on to Specialized Studies. Students under twenty years of age were required to study a foreign language,

while those over twenty could be exempted.

Students at the University were to spend six hours daily in classrooms under the supervision of instructors, and four hours in independent study. Of the six hours in class, equal time was to be given to Chinese and Western texts. Except on rest days, attendance at classes was mandatory. To assess students' academic performance, the system of credit points used in Western countries was adopted. Scores were totaled monthly, and the results were publicly posted in ranked lists.

Chapter Three: Regulations on Student Admission contains eight sections. It specifies two main sources of students: 1. Those listed by imperial decree, including Hanlin Academy compilers and proofreaders(翰林院编检), officials of the ministries and boards, imperial guards at the palace gates, candidates and expectants for posts of circuit intendant (道员), prefect (知府), subprefect (知州), county magistrate (知县) and above, the sons of high-ranking officials, those holding hereditary titles within the Eight Banners (八旗), and descendants of provincial military officials who wished to study at the University. 2. Graduates of provincial middle schools (中学堂) who, having received diplomas, were recommended to Beijing for further study at the University.

Students were divided into two classes: the first class consisted of those who had already completed the general studies; the second class consisted of those still pursuing the general studies curriculum.

As for the sources of students, the Imperial University did not carry out entrance examinations at the outset, but this did not mean there were no standards. Those wishing to enroll were first registered as auditing students (旁听生). After one month, the Chief Instructor conducted evaluations of their character and aptitude. Only those deemed truly capable of receiving instruction were allowed to remain as regular students.

The University initially set an enrollment quota of 500 students: 300 from the first category of sources, and 200 from the second. Once the quota was filled, any additional applicants were to be admitted only as auditing students, who would be allowed to attend classes temporarily but would not receive board and lodging. When vacancies arose, they could be admitted as regular students.

The 500 students were divided into six ranks. Their stipends for living expenses were determined according to their academic performance. Quotas for sending students abroad for further study were to be strictly controlled—"better to have none than to admit the unqualified." Advancement within the six ranks was to be rigorous rather than lenient, while those falling behind academically could be demoted at any time.

Those who violated school regulations would be punished: minor infractions resulted in demotion to auditing student status, while serious offenses led to expulsion. From among the top three ranks of students, the best were selected as normal students (师范生), who were later to be assigned as instructors to provincial schools. For their teaching practicum, these normal students were to use the primary school (小学堂) attached to the Imperial University. Pupils of the primary school were to be between 12 and 16 years of age.

Chapter Four: Regulations on Graduation and Official Advancement contains five sections. This chapter argues that one important reason previous schools had failed to achieve good results was that success in the state examinations and advancement in official careers did not proceed through these institutions; thus, those who completed their studies had no outlets, and the most talented were unwilling to attend. Now that the Imperial University of Peking had been established, and provincial institutions were also to follow, it was necessary to reform the civil service examination system so that

advancement in state examinations and official careers would be channeled through this path, thereby encouraging able and promising men to pursue study at the University.

Graduates of the Imperial University who obtained diplomas were to be regarded as jinshi (进士, Metropolitan Graduates). They would be presented in audience and appointed to official posts, assigned according to their specialties and strengths, in order to assist the New Policies. Graduates of provincial middle schools were to be regarded as juren (举人, Provincial Graduates) and could take up positions as instructors at various schools.

As for those already holding office who studied at the Imperial University, decisions on their exceptional appointments after graduation were to be left to the Emperor. Among students of provincial middle schools, if some had already obtained the status of juren, then upon graduation and advancement to the Imperial University, they were to be regarded as jinshi, and treated in the same way as those University graduates who had already received official posts.

From among the graduates of the Imperial University, the most outstanding were first to be given prestigious appointments and then sent abroad to study in Europe and America for several years. Upon their return, having broadened their knowledge and experience, they would be entrusted with important responsibilities, thereby strengthening the present administration and encouraging later generations.

Once the question of graduates' official advancement had been resolved, the instructors of the University should also be rewarded. Instructors at the Imperial University, as well as chief instructors (总教习) and branch instructors (分教习) of provincial schools, who devoted themselves earnestly to teaching and achieved verifiable results, were all to be formally recommended for promotion once every three years.

Chapter Five: Regulations on the Appointment of Instructors (5 sections). It was stipulated that those to be chosen as chief instructors must be Chinese scholars who had mastered both Chinese and Western learning and were able to grasp the essentials of Western knowledge. Ordinary instructors should be selected from men of both upright character and scholarly excellence, familiar with both Chinese and foreign knowledge, regardless of their official rank or age. The paramount principle was to obtain capable individuals; alternatively, the ministers of the Zongli Yamen could recommend suitable talents for imperial approval and appointment.

Ten instructors were to be appointed for general studies, all of whom were to be Chinese. For English, twelve instructors were to be appointed, half British and half Chinese. For Japanese, two instructors, one Japanese and one Chinese. For Russian, German, and French, one instructor each, who might be either Chinese or a native of the corresponding country, depending on circumstances. For each of the ten specialized subjects, one instructor was to be appointed, all drawn from Europe or America.

All ordinary instructors were to be appointed by the chief instructors. For those European or American instructors who proved difficult to recruit, the chief instructors were charged with the responsibility of consulting with the Zongli Yamen and the foreign envoys, and negotiating with the relevant schools in those countries to secure their services.

In the initial period, since most students were beginners, they were first required to complete the courses of general studies compiled by the Bureau of Translation before advancing to specialized subjects—a process expected to take at least two years. At present, if the specialized-subject instructors had no students to teach, they were temporarily to be employed in the Bureau of

Translation to assist in the work of translating books.

Chapter Six: Regulations on the Establishment of Administrative Offices (9 sections)

This chapter stipulated the administrative personnel required for the Imperial University of Peking, including the number of posts, the standards for selection, and the division of responsibilities. With the exception of the Minister-in-Charge of Education (管学大臣), all other administrative officers were required to reside permanently within the University to carry out their duties.

Chapter Seven: Finance (4 sections)

This chapter stipulated that the University's finances should adopt the Western system of budgetary estimates and final accounts, with the preparation of a budget table, and disbursements made strictly according to the budget. Substantial stipends were to be granted to the University's staff in order to ensure their full dedication to their duties. With the exception of the Minister-in-Charge of Education all instructors and administrative personnel were to receive salaries.

The total annual expenditure, including salaries for instructors and staff, student living stipends, and other miscellaneous expenses, was estimated at 190,420 taels of silver. The initial establishment of the University would require approximately 350,000 taels, covering the construction of the school buildings, the library, and the laboratory facilities, as well as the purchase of Chinese, Western, and Eastern books, scientific instruments, and the travel expenses of foreign instructors coming to China. Among these expenditures, the largest portions were for the construction of facilities, the purchase of books and instruments, and the passage of foreign instructors to China.

All financial matters were to be managed by the General Director (总办), with disbursements made strictly on an actual-cost basis.

Chapter Eight: Provisional Statutes (5 sections)

This chapter provides supplementary and flexible regulations to be enacted after the establishment of the Imperial University. It stipulates that any new circumstances arising after the opening of the university should be handled by the respective administrative staff according to their duties. Detailed rules regarding courses are to be drafted by the Chief Instructor and assistant instructors. Matters such as general regulations, the construction of buildings, departmental divisions, teaching units, and all related formats are to be drawn up by the Chief Administrator. The catalog of books to be purchased, as well as detailed regulations for the Imperial Library's collection and lending system, are to be drafted by the Library Administrator.

On the very day that the Zongli Yamen submitted its memorial together with *the Regulations of the Imperial University of Peking*, the Guangxu Emperor immediately issued an imperial decree approving the regulations, commending the effort, and appointing Sun Jianai (孙家鼐) as Minister-in-Charge of the Imperial University. At the same time, he also ordered that Liang Qichao take charge of the Translation Bureau of the Imperial University, granting him the title of Juren with the sixth official rank, with the decree reading: "Juren Liang Qichao is granted the sixth rank and entrusted with the management of the Translation Bureau."⁹

3. LIANG QICHAO'S SPEECH AT PEKING UNIVERSITY IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1912)

In 1912, the Imperial University of Peking was renamed Peking University. In early October of the same year, Liang Qichao returned from Japan, ending his fourteen years of exile abroad. His

homecoming was met with an enthusiastic reception from all sectors of Chinese society. On the afternoon of October 31, 1912, at the invitation of Ma Liang (马良), then Acting President of Peking University, Liang Qichao visited the university to attend a welcoming ceremony in his honor, where he delivered a remarkable speech to the faculty and students. The main content of Liang Qichao's speech¹⁰ can be divided into three parts.

3.1 The first part aims to trace his relationship with Peking University. He himself believed that Peking University was formerly the Guan Shuju (Government Printing Office 官书局), and that the Guan Shuju had its origins in the Qiangxuehui (Society for the Promotion of Learning 强学会). Thus, he indeed had a certain connection with Peking University. However, the university's development to its present state is the result of the efforts of many predecessors as well as successive presidents and teachers. To claim that he was the initiator of the university's founding, he felt, would be beyond his merits.

It is also necessary to note that some scholars consider Liang's view—that Peking University's predecessor was the Guan Shuju, and the Guan Shuju's predecessor was the Qiangxuehui—to be inaccurate. More precisely, there existed only certain historical connections among these institutions.¹¹

3.2 The second part describes the distinctions between the university and ordinary schools as well as various specialized schools. It emphasizes that although the university has achieved considerable development today, it still lags behind the universities of Europe, the United States, and Japan. In addition to expecting the university's presidents and faculty to work diligently, it particularly stresses reliance on the students currently enrolled, urging them to study hard and bring honor to Chinese scholarship.

He believed that the purpose of ordinary schools is to cultivate in students “a sound character, along with the abilities necessary for their personal development and for society,” which is also the spirit of the entire educational system. However, beyond this purpose, the university has its own special aim, namely “to investigate profound principles of learning, to develop the civilization of one's own country, and thereby contribute to the civilization of the world.” What the university teaches goes beyond “the knowledge and skills necessary for everyday human and social life” to include “the principles governing all phenomena,” which is what is meant by “science.”

The distinction between the university and specialized schools is also found here. “The purpose of specialized schools is to cultivate technical professionals for society, whereas the purpose of the university is to cultivate scholars of learning.” The knowledge taught at specialized schools, though containing many scientific principles, is more focused on practical skills and emphasizes learning for immediate application. What the university teaches may also include technical knowledge, but it emphasizes the scholarly aspect, highlighting the understanding of learning through the use of skills.

What is “learning” (学)? What is “skill” (术)? Liang Qichao himself explained: “Learning is the investigation of the principles and laws underlying all phenomena, in order to explain them. Beyond seeking to understand and explain phenomena through these principles, no separate methods are employed to pursue practical use. Skill, on the other hand, is merely the application of methods and techniques derived from principles of learning, and is fundamentally different from learning, which seeks to explain phenomena through the investigation of principles.”

In simple terms, the university focuses on research and invention, while specialized schools focus on practical application.

Precisely because the university has an educational orientation different from that of ordinary and specialized schools, and possesses the unique purpose of “investigating profound principles of learning,” the courses it offers are devoted to “encompassing all systematic knowledge of humanity.” Therefore, Liang Qichao said, “The university is not only the central institution of higher education in a country, but in fact the very seat of a nation’s scholarly life, and can be regarded as a nation devoted to learning.” Moreover, “Learning is the mother of civilization and the source of happiness; a nation’s university is thus the foundation of that nation’s civilization and well-being.” Its status is accordingly both important and honorable, and the students bear the “great responsibility of researching knowledge.” Hence, in his speech, he encouraged the students then studying at the university to uphold its dignity and to devote themselves diligently to the pursuit of learning.

To this end, he specifically pointed out the harm of the former Qing educational system. He believed that the greatest harm of that system lay in its practice of rewarding social status (出身): it linked studying with holding office, causing students to “take obtaining an official position as the purpose of learning, and learning as the means to obtain office.” As a result, while in school, students pursued “graduation scores and official rank,” and after graduation, “they abandoned their studies and devoted themselves to official duties.” This educational system meant that, even after more than a decade of promoting schooling in China at the time, scholarship remained undeveloped, and students across the nation still “did not know what learning truly was.”

Therefore, in his speech, he once again encouraged the students then studying at the university to “take learning as their purpose, and not use learning as a means to other ends. For the university is a place for the pursuit of knowledge, and knowledge is a sacred undertaking. You should study for the sake of knowledge alone; beyond the purpose of learning, no other aim should exist, so that you may truly be worthy university students.” If one pursues goals beyond the purpose of learning, it would harm the dignity of the university, profane the sacredness of knowledge, and could no longer be called the pursuit of learning. He encouraged the students, saying: “Devote yourselves diligently to the enterprise of learning, in order to develop the civilization of China, so that in the future China may hold a leading position in global scholarship and serve as a guide to world civilization. The responsibility is not light; you must strive to bring honor to Chinese civilization.”

3.3 The third part addresses the issue of the academic ethos in China at the time. Firstly, Liang Qichao believed that the prevailing academic atmosphere was very poor, and that students lacked the virtue of obedience. Young students in schools did not submit to the guidance and discipline of teachers and principals; they “behaved recklessly, stirred up disturbances, and thus allowed virtue to make no progress and learning to achieve nothing.” He argued: “In a country, everything may be free, but the military and students cannot be free.” If students claim freedom, not only will their studies fail and education be ineffective, but the country will also suffer significant harm.

“In a republic, all people enjoy freedom, yet all must also be capable of obedience.” In an autocratic state, people are compelled to obey by force, and students need not cultivate the virtue of obedience. In a republic, however, students must develop obedience through education; otherwise, the very foundation of the nation will be in danger. As the highest institution of learning in the country, Peking University could set an example for the nation. Liang hoped that the university could educate its students and train them in the virtue of obedience, thereby helping to correct the academic ethos nationwide.

Secondly, Liang also believed that Chinese students at the time lacked a spirit of simplicity. He said: “Many of our students were originally modest and frugal, yet in recent years the culture of indulgence

has become widespread. In clothing and food, they seek only luxury; in their living conditions, they seek only comfort. Most distressing of all is the extravagance and self-indulgence of young students pursuing learning, which not only harms their moral character but also undermines their studies.” Therefore, this trend must be reformed; otherwise, the future of Chinese education would be in jeopardy. He hoped that the university students present would strive to promote the spirit of simplicity, thereby helping to reform the academic ethos throughout China.

Furthermore, Liang believed that students, in the course of their studies, needed to cultivate a spirit of calm and serenity. “The spirit of calm and serenity serves, first, to develop a composed mind, and second, to nurture an elevated spirit. During one’s school days, it is used to advance one’s studies and cultivate virtue; after graduation, it serves as a foundation for handling affairs successfully.” The pursuit of knowledge requires a calm and steady mind; with a restless and impatient heart, one cannot gain a deep understanding of learning.

“The spirit of vigorous action should be applied when undertaking tasks, and not during the pursuit of learning.” If this spirit is misapplied during one’s studies, it may result in students who disregard rules and become people lacking both knowledge and cultivation. Such individuals, “can only be called reckless and rash, and in carrying out tasks, they will accomplish nothing.” During their time as students, one should use “the spirit of calm and serenity to properly nurture the spirit of vigorous action.” After completing their studies, one may then apply this vigorous spirit to their undertakings, which is what Mencius referred to as “nurturing my noble and expansive spirit.”

Finally, Liang also noted that the problems with China’s academic ethos were not limited to the three points he had mentioned; these three were merely the most pressing. He brought them to the attention of the students in the hope that they would take them as a warning and strive to contribute to the future of Chinese scholarship.

4. LIANG QICHAO’S ROLE IN PROMOTING PEKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO LAUNCH THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT

After the end of the First World War, the victorious powers convened the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty and resolve various international issues. The conference was held from January 18 to June 28, 1919. Regarding China’s Shandong Question, the conference proposed that Japan inherit all of Germany’s pre-war rights and interests in Shandong, which infringed upon China’s sovereignty. At that time, Liang Qichao was traveling in Europe; while residing in Paris, he closely followed the progress of the conference. During this period, he sent a series of telegrams back to China, among which two were of particular importance.

The first was sent in mid-March 1919, when he telegraphed Wang Daxie (汪大燮), then Chairman of the Chinese Government’s Diplomatic Committee, and Lin Changmin (林长民), Secretary of the Committee, reporting on developments concerning the Qingdao (青島) issue at the conference. On March 24 of that year, *Shun Pao* (《申报》) published his telegram.

Liang Qichao said in this telegram: “As for the return of Qingdao, both China and Japan have made the same demand to Germany, yet the key point of contention at present lies in determining who is to be the principal claimant. Since Japan’s occupation of the Jiaoji (胶济) Railway several years ago, China has adhered strictly to a policy of protest, refusing to recognize Japan’s succession to Germany’s rights. Yet last September, when the German army was on the verge of defeat, for what reason did our government at that very moment conclude an exchange of notes with Japan, thereby binding its own hands? Such secret agreements run counter to the spirit of Wilson’s Fourteen Points,

and may well be expected to be annulled. I earnestly beg the government not to provide others with further grounds for criticism. Otherwise, a golden opportunity, coming once in a thousand years, will be ruined by a handful of treaty-makers, which would indeed be lamentable. As for myself, a mere wanderer abroad, apart from lending support through advocacy, I have taken no part whatsoever in the actual proceedings of the conference. Yet since I have come to hear of these matters, I dare not refrain from reporting them, so that those in authority may have them for reference. I respectfully request that this be submitted to the President.”¹²

Following this telegram, on April 8, 1919, the National Association for Foreign Affairs (国民外交协会), initiated by Zhang Jian (张謇), invited Liang Qichao to serve as its representative and to take charge of petitioning the Paris Peace Conference. However, since the Beijing government had already concluded a secret agreement with Japan in September 1918—an agreement that recognized Japan’s succession to all of Germany’s former rights and privileges of aggression in Shandong—and given that Japan had also secured the understanding of Britain and France, the conference ultimately decided not to deliberate on the Shandong question. As a result, the demands put forward by China’s delegates to the Paris Conference, together with Liang Qichao and others, for the return of Qingdao to China, could not be realized. Under these circumstances, Liang Qichao could only fall back on a secondary demand: that the Chinese delegates refuse to sign the treaty. This brings us to the content of Liang Qichao’s second telegram.

At the end of April 1919, Liang Qichao telegraphed the National Association for Foreign Affairs to report the decision of the conference on the Qingdao question. He instructed Wang (in 1918, President Xu Shichang (徐世昌) had appointed Wang Daxie as Chairman of the Diplomatic Committee of the Beiyang Government) and Lin (after the end of the First World War in 1918, Lu Zhengxiang (陆徵祥), Minister of Foreign Affairs, was dispatched to attend the Paris Peace Conference. For this purpose, President Xu Shichang specially established a Diplomatic Committee and appointed Lin Changmin as a member and Secretary-General. On February 12, 1919, the League of Nations Comrades Association was established, with Lin serving as Secretary-General) to warn both the government and the public to hold China’s delegates to the Paris Conference strictly accountable and to demand that they not sign the treaty.

The telegram read:

“To Ministers Wang and Lin, to be conveyed to the Association for Foreign Affairs: Concerning the matter with Germany, it is heard that Qingdao will be directly returned; yet because the Japanese Envoy has pressed strongly, Britain and France have been swayed. If we acknowledge this, it will be tantamount to binding our own hands. Please warn the government and the people to hold our plenipotentiaries strictly accountable, and under no circumstances should they sign their names, so as to demonstrate our resolve.”¹³

At that time, Liang Qichao also specifically telegraphed Wang Daxie, stating that if it proved difficult to resist the recognition of Japan’s succession to all of Germany’s prewar rights in Shandong, “it would be feasible to consult Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, styled Jiemin 子民), so that he might publicly oppose it in the name of public opinion.”¹⁴ Cai Jiemin refers to Cai Yuanpei.

After receiving the second telegram from Liang Qichao, Lin Changmin, in order to prevent the government’s representatives from signing the peace treaty, turned to the power of public opinion. On May 2, 1919, *The Morning Post* (《晨报》) published Lin Changmin’s article “Diplomatic Warning to the Nation”, which raised the rallying cry: “Jiaozhou is lost! Shandong is lost! The nation is no longer

a nation! ... Forty million compatriots swear to fight to the death for it!" On the evening of May 3, Wang Daxie, then chairman of the Diplomatic Committee, went to see Cai Yuanpei. At that time, Cai Yuanpei was serving as president of Peking University. That very evening at 9 p.m., he convened a meeting with student representatives from Peking University. The following day, Peking University students launched a protest demonstration, which marked the beginning of the May Fourth Movement.¹⁵

It can thus be seen that Liang Qichao, who happened to be traveling in Europe at the time, played a direct role in promoting the outbreak of the May Fourth Patriotic Movement in China.

In summary, Liang Qichao had a very close relationship with Peking University. He participated in the founding of Peking University, drafted the first university charter in Peking University's history and also in modern Chinese history, laying the foundation for Peking University's subsequent development. In the first year of the Republic of China (1912), his inspiring speech at Peking University enlightened the thoughts of the students at that time and guided the spiritual direction of a generation of intellectuals. During his trip to Europe in 1919, by closely following the progress of the Paris Peace Conference and a series of telegrams sent from Paris to China, he contributed to the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement in China, stimulating the patriotic enthusiasm of Peking University students and promoting the historical process of China at that time.

Therefore, Liang Qichao holds an important place in the history of the founding and development of Peking University and has made remarkable contributions. Paying attention to the historical connection between Liang Qichao and Peking University is not only a retracing of the interactive relationship between two "giants of the era", but also helps us understand from multiple dimensions such as education, thought, and social transformation the trajectory of China's modern transformation, as well as the pioneering role of higher institutions represented by Peking University in national development.

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Citation: Zuo Yinfeng, “A Study on the Three-Dimensional Relationship between Liang Qichao and Peking University : With a Discussion on his Historical Contribution to the Early Development of Peking University” *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*. vol 11, no. 3, 2025, pp. 39-50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-7654.1103004>.

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