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# The Root of All Things: Liang Jushi and Practical Enterprise in Late Qing China

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## ABSTRACT

At the turn of the twentieth century in China, a cohort of moderate literati, while marginal to the mainstream politics of reform and revolution, worked to save the Chinese nation from collapse by developing education and industrial enterprises. This article investigates the ideas of Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), one of these literati, whose views on the nation and its economy stemmed from the more parochial concern that his native Guangdong Province might be colonized or partitioned by foreign powers. Liang Jushi was inspired not only by the West, Japan, and vanquished nations such as Poland, but also by the Western colonies in Southeast Asia, where several friends had become extremely successful entrepreneurs. By regarding these Chinese-populated colonies more as a source of inspiration than a symbol of subjugation, Liang Jushi also articulated a more nuanced understanding of foreign imperialism.

**Keywords:** colonialism, education, imperialism, industry, partition

## Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Qing Empire was in a deeper crisis than it had faced in previous decades. This crisis was set against the backdrop of domestic rebellions and wars with foreign powers. These rebellions and wars depleted the imperial coffers and ultimately deprived the late Qing state of its land revenue and taxes. Provincial governors who helped suppress the rebellions gained control of the land revenues, using them to experiment with Western institutions and technologies to strengthen the embattled empire. Paradoxically, the conflicts that crippled the Qing state introduced new sources of income. The court increasingly relied on the treaty ports that opened after the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860) and on the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (*Da Qing huangjia haiguan zong shuiwusi* 大清皇家海關總稅務司) to stay solvent. For the Qing state, however, this came at the price of surrendering much of its economic sovereignty to foreign powers (van de Ven 2014).

In response to the need to generate more revenue and defend China with modern armies, Qing statesmen and provincial governors developed the program of “official supervised, merchant managed.” (*guandu shangban* 官督商辦) to acquire Western military technology and build relevant infrastructure. Under official supervision, merchants founded the firms and factories that would

constitute China's first modern industries. All related to military defense in some way, the new industrial facilities consisted of steamship companies and telegraph lines to transmit military intelligence, coal mines to supply fuel for the newly built arsenals, railroads to transport coal and personnel, textile mills to provide cloth for army uniforms, and iron and steel works to furnish raw materials for weapons and railway tracks. In retrospect, the program did not massively industrialize China; the basis of late Qing China's economy remained agrarian. Foreign banks and merchants maintained their control of Chinese businesses and treaty ports. Chinese armies continued to suffer defeats in the Sino-French War (1884–1885) and the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) (Feuerwerker 1958; Hao 1970). For many China historians of the twentieth century, China's "failure" to industrialize and respond adequately to the Western impact suggested little more than cultural conservatism and institutional rigidity (Fairbank 1953; Wright 1957; Levenson 1965). Although recent historians have reassessed China's modern industries more positively as major components of the Qing fiscal-military complex, they continue to focus on the efforts of the ruling elite—statesmen, provincial governors, and the compradors working for them (Halsey 2015). Historians generally give scant attention to the literati outside this historical group of "self-strengtheners," let alone analyze how such literati might have perceived industrialization and the issue of economic sovereignty during the late Qing period.

Indeed, one of the key questions that preoccupied late Qing literati was how to strengthen China economically without relying solely on foreign capital and therefore compromising China's economic sovereignty. This article examines the writings of Liang Jushi 梁居實 (1843–1911), a "Guangdong literatus" and registered native of Guangdong who produced "culture" (*wen* 文) and texts, such as poems, prose, and literary letters, and proposed solutions to resolve the Qing Empire's general crisis (Miles 2006, 13). Although Liang Jushi enjoyed an illustrious career as a diplomat and legation officer in Belgium, Germany, and Japan, his role in late Qing political developments was marginal. Yet as a literatus who assumed the multiple roles of envoy, poet, and traveler, he exemplified a unique experience and worldview.

Liang Jushi was a native of Guangdong, which had produced the most prominent political thinkers of the late Qing period, such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), and Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925). Compared to the reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who believed in improving the existing institutions to transform China into an industrial power, or the revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, who argued that only the overthrow of Manchu rule could save China from decline and extinction, Liang Jushi and his cohort advocated *shiyè* 實業 (practical enterprise). Liang Jushi distinguished this cohort from those who indulged in *kongtan* 空談 (empty talk) about *jiuguo* 救國 (saving the nation). Unlike the politically vocal reformers and revolutionaries, Liang Jushi was a moderate literatus who quietly focused on building a sustainable industrial base for "China."

Another parallel—or contrast—might also be drawn between Liang Jushi, or his cohort, and the "provincial patriots" of Hunan Province, whom Stephen R. Platt

has studied. As Platt (2007) suggests, although Hunan was an interior backwater far from the coastal regions and treaty port-cities that have preoccupied most China historians, it produced a disproportionate number of reformers and revolutionaries who wielded a correspondingly disproportionate influence over the late Qing Empire. By resurrecting the cult of late Ming-early Qing political thinker Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1682), the most prominent Hunan literati of the late Qing period perceived little contradiction between their provincial and national loyalties and argued that Hunan should pioneer the salvation of China. In Guangdong, however, the literati received their foreign ideas directly from exposure to overseas missionaries and traders and from overseas travel. The academies in Guangdong, whether classical or modern, were relatively new, having produced few historically established thinkers with whom the Guangdong literati could effectively form an intellectual lineage.

Nevertheless, the Guangdong literati could still be categorized into what might be called “scholarly circles” (*xueren quan* 學人圈 or *xueren qunti* 學人群體)—a familiar theme in the Chinese scholarship on late Qing literati (Lu 2015). Liang Jushi belonged to a small cohort of Hakka 客家 poets who corresponded with one another through poems, prose, and literary letters. These Hakka poets or literati formed a scholarly circle based on kinship, marriage, and especially friendship. They had no obvious leader or patron, suggesting that relations were equal rather than hierarchical (Guo 2004). In this circle premised on scholarly correspondence, Liang Jushi was perhaps the most “political” for espousing non-statist and highly provincial views on dominant political issues. He thus helped to enrich the intellectual and political landscapes of late Qing China beyond the binary of reformers and revolutionaries; because he did not descend from any intellectual lineage, he could propose alternatives to the historiographically validated “norm” of the late Qing Chinese past.

That said, Liang Jushi and his network of educators and industrial entrepreneurs left few writings.<sup>1</sup> Liang Jushi’s own writings, few as they were, would most likely have been lost had his descendants not collated them prior to the Communist takeover of China in 1949 and published the collection in Taiwan in 1959. This collection, titled *Liang Shiwu xiansheng yigaoji* 梁詩五先生遺稿集 (The collected writings of Liang Jushi), comprises undated and unpublished essays on economic and policy issues (*zheng jing ce shu* 政經策述), forewords and congratulatory messages (*xu ji xuan zuo* 序記選作), literary letters (*shudu* 書牘), and poems (*shige* 詩歌). Literary letters, addressed to family and friends and apparently unintended for posterity, constitute more than half the collection. In the absence of any scholarship (be it Chinese, English, or Japanese) and archival or primary materials on Liang Jushi, which indicates how neglected or obscure he has been in the current historiography, this article mines his literary letters to delineate his network of literati and industrial entrepreneurs. Privately circulated, his essays

<sup>1</sup> Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905) and Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912) left voluminous writings. However, their writings were more literary than political. Moreover, as suggested by his letters, Liang Jushi appeared to enjoy a closer relationship with the Chinese entrepreneurs of Southeast Asia.

and letters wielded little influence in late Qing China. Nevertheless, his letters reveal opinions on the post-Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901) “New Policies” designed to arrest the further decline of the dynasty (Reynolds 1993). Written in the final decade of the dynasty and in their author’s own twilight years, they convey a Guangdong literatus’s unique and crystalized, but marginalized, viewpoints on reforms.

Born and raised in the “Hakka homeland” of the Jiaying 嘉應 department in northeastern Guangdong, Liang Jushi and his fellow natives (*tongxiang* 同鄉; those with registered households in Jiaying, who took the civil service examinations in Jiaying, or belonged to the lineages of Jiaying as indicated in genealogies) sojourned in Cantonese-speaking Guangzhou, the capital and economic center of the province. They were members of what Steven B. Miles (2006, 36) has identified as an “important cohort of newcomers operating in the literary and scholarly circles of cosmopolitan Guangzhou,” albeit during the late nineteenth century. Liang Jushi’s grandfather migrated to Guangdong from Fujian and was the first in the family to have taken and passed the civil service examinations; his father had attained the *juren* 舉人 status (i.e., a provincial graduate), which Liang Jushi himself would receive (Liang Yunduan 1959, i). Most of Liang Jushi’s friends were self-made entrepreneurs or literati like himself—none of them had a lineage genealogy. As outsiders and social upstarts, the Jiaying literati were peripheral to the cultural and economic development of Guangzhou and its surrounding Pearl River Delta region. However, by sojourning in Guangzhou, enrolling in its academies, and managing hostels and clan shrines catering to fellow prefecturals, they had maintained a presence “in absolute disproportion to their lack of geographical proximity” (Miles 2006, 38). How they negotiated their prefectural and/or provincial identities and whether they extended these identities beyond “China” or “Guangdong” nonetheless remains to be seen.

A Hakka and a Guangdong provincial, Liang Jushi possessed multiple identities that make it difficult to render any generalizations about him within the context of his cohort: which of the two identities—Hakka or Guangdong—dominated his thoughts and self-representation? Indeed, Liang Jushi was trying to conceptualize and perhaps reconcile this set of seemingly incompatible relations when he advocated breaking prefectural divides between Jiaying and other parts of Guangdong and deployed the term “my Guangdong” (*wu Yue* 吾粵) in describing his province (Liang Jushi 1959, 70). He identified more with being a provincial than with being a Hakka, all the while not seeing these as distinct parts of himself. Under the Qing governors, selected for skills suited for rule in specific local conditions, provincial identities acquired their own character and strengthened over time (Guy 2010, 289). As John Fitzgerald (2002, 13) elaborates, the mere creation of a territorial unit of government “generates interactions among and between parts of the political system and elements of the social, cultural, and economic environment.” Liang Jushi himself wrote that administrative boundaries shaped Guangdong’s political identity (*huajie fenjiang, lidai linian, jieyou dingsuo* 劃界分疆, 歷代歷年, 皆有定所) (1959, 70). However, given the informal structure of rule that characterized the major global (i.e., Western) empires at the turn of the

twentieth century, economic imperialism took precedence over territorial gains, and Liang Jushi was cognizant of how these empires could “inconspicuously partition” Guangdong (*wuxing zhi guafen* 無形之瓜分). He thus proposed using human talent and material wealth to safeguard China’s economic sovereignty (Liang Jushi 1959, 78). As we shall see, although his closest friends remained Hakka, he identified all Guangdong sojourners in Nanyang 南洋 or Southeast Asia as fellow provincials, regardless of the language they spoke in their native prefectures—whether it was Cantonese, Hakka, or Teochew (the three largest language groups in Guangdong). The “province” became his rallying call and overarching concern as he corresponded with his friends and engaged in the political questions of his time.

In referring to the polity under which he lived and served, Liang Jushi never used the term *Qing* 清 or *Daqing* 大清 (Great Qing). His preferred terms were *Woguo* 我國 (our nation) and *Zhongguo* 中國—the modern toponym for China. He routinely used the character *guo* 國 and quite frequently the compound *guojia* 國家 to refer not to the Qing state but to the Chinese nation. In a letter to famous educator Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), Liang Jushi suggested that with mass education, the nation might be “[temporarily] vanquished but ultimately unvanquished” (*guo sui wang zhong bu wang* 國雖亡終不亡). If the people’s (*min* 民) minds were opened, talented people (*rencai* 人才) would emerge to preserve the nation and protect the nation’s territories (*bao guotu* 保國土)—the people comprise the nation (*guo zhe, ji ren er cheng ye* 國者, 積人而成也) (Liang Jushi 1959, 82–83). Liang Jushi’s notion of popular sovereignty, indicative of—if not progressive for—the late Qing period, which was historiographically dominated by discussions of reform and revolution, suggested that the state figured little in his definition of nation. This definition was a reworking of another late Ming-early Qing literatus Gu Yanwu’s 顧炎武 (1613–1682) dictum that though a dynasty or state (Gu’s definition of *guo*) might collapse, the *tianxia* 天下 (understood variously as civilization, the Chinese cultural ecumene, or empire) would never be lost. This idea of *tianxia* was prevalent until the turn of the twentieth century when the disappearance of Chinese culture and the Chinese race appeared imminent.<sup>2</sup> Liang Jushi’s writings formed part of a new genre of *wanguo* 亡國 (vanquished nation) literature that “rearticulated away from its traditional Chinese meaning of a change of dynasty to a modern meaning of colonization” (Karl 2002, 15).

Like most authors of *wanguo* literature, Liang Jushi was not a defeatist. He explained not only why China could be vanquished but also how China could survive the onslaught of Western imperialism—a key reason, he suggested, for China’s weakness—and strengthen itself through the development of education and industrial entrepreneurship. By “industrial entrepreneurship,” I refer to Liang Jushi’s proposal that China should first establish new industries to compete with Western enterprises in the indigenous and global economies; the profits could then be channeled to building new academic institutions and vocational schools

<sup>2</sup> Gu Yanwu derived his dictum from his understanding of the dynastic transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasties. For the interplay and subtleties between *guo* and *tianxia*, see Rowe (2018, 185) and Wang (2013).

that would nurture China's technical expertise and maintain Chinese industrial enterprises. By stressing the "private" (*si* 私), Liang Jushi avoided the "statism" of his contemporaries, who continued to locate sovereignty, political legitimacy, and "the highest source of good" in a centralized state and developed state-centric ideas of citizenship and sovereignty from Western legal principles and political experiences (Zarrow 2012, 4). The rise by the late nineteenth century of a "rapidly fusing mercantile and gentry elite," as exemplified by Liang Jushi's associates, suggests the existence of a public (*gong* 公) sphere that represented all the private interests under its domain and regulated its own affairs. Although this public sphere could aggrandize collective interests at the expense of state power, it could also assimilate into the state and become a tool of governance (Rowe 1984, 1989; Rankin 1986; Wakeman 1998, 167). For Liang Jushi, the ideal was a mix of the two extremes: the landowning or degree-holding gentry and mercantile elite, by representing the collective interests of their locality, had to renegotiate their powers and responsibilities with the state amid changes in Chinese views of their monarchy or emperor system at the turn of the twentieth century.

For Liang Jushi, the state, as the implied opposite of private enterprise and interests, was counterproductive to industrial development in China. Perhaps because he was an official, he did not criticize specific state policies, but we might infer that he was responding to the program of *guandu shangban* 管督商辦 ("official supervised, merchant managed"). Although Liang Jushi did not refer to Western economic theories, his views on the economy resembled the *laissez-faire* concept that conceives of the state as an obstacle to economic development and a potential source of many economic problems. Liang Jushi was also responding to Western economic imperialism in China when he suggested that the Chinese should accumulate talent (*cai* 才) and wealth (*cai* 財) to recover economic rights (*quan* 權) over their resources, which were being appropriated by Western empires as they expanded into China (Liang Jushi 1959, 88–90). This article suggests that Liang Jushi's views on the nation and its economy stemmed from a provincial concern—the possible foreign colonization or partition of Guangdong due to the Qing state's inability to develop the province economically and protect it militarily. He was inspired not only by the West, Japan, and vanquished nations such as Poland—an intellectual trend in China at the turn of the twentieth century that Rebecca E. Karl (2002) has investigated—but also by the Western colonies in Southeast Asia, where his friends had become highly successful entrepreneurs. By regarding these Chinese-populated colonies more as a source of inspiration than a symbol of subjugation, Liang Jushi also presented a more nuanced understanding of foreign imperialism.

This article comprises four main sections. It begins with an introduction of Liang Jushi's "moderate," transnational network of educators and industrial entrepreneurs, almost all of whom were born in or could trace their ancestry to Guangdong. The second section explores Liang Jushi's anxieties about the possible foreign colonization and partitioning of Guangdong, which prompted his rethinking of state-provincial relations in an increasingly subjugated China—Qing or otherwise. The third section examines how his viewpoint merged two dominant strands of thought of the moderate Qing literati seeking to rescue the nation—

national salvation through education (*jiaoyu jiuguo* 教育救國) and national salvation through industry (*shiye jiuguo* 實業救國)—as he elaborated on why industry should be prioritized. The final section analyzes, from Liang's perspective, the implications of the colonial experience in colonized Southeast Asia for China and how it could be transplanted to Guangdong, which matched the conditions of Western colonies and might thus serve as a model province for an industrializing China. The entanglement of provincial interests with national fate reveals why, despite his downplaying of state control of the local economy and resources, Liang Jushi still took for granted that Guangdong constituted part of the Chinese nation, whether it was Qing, reformed, or revolutionized.

### Liang Jushi and Friends

Born in Jiaying Prefecture 嘉應縣 (later known as Meizhou 梅州), Guangdong Province, in 1843, Liang Jushi was raised in a family of letters. His father and grandfather had achieved some success in the civil service examinations, and he and his cousins had studied under local notables during his formative years (Liang Yunduan 1959, i).

In the 1870s, before achieving success in the civil service examinations and fame as a poet, Liang Jushi toured Nanyang (Huang 2005, 204). If the lives and career trajectories of many of his friends were any indication, he might have considered traveling to seek his fortune in Southeast Asia, which offered refuge from the devastation of post-Taiping Jiaying. Among those whom he considered friends—their names appear frequently in his writings—were Pan Xiangchu 潘祥初 (1851–1911), Zhang Rongxuan 張榕軒 (1851–1911), and Zhang Bishi 張弼士 (better known as Cheong Fatt Tze, 1840–1916). All were Jiaying natives who formed trading empires in Southeast Asia and southern China, suggesting the existence of a strong, diasporic business network based on native-place ties. Zhang Rongxuan, for example, was Zhang Bishi's protégé in Sumatra before starting his own business in coffee, rubber, and tea. Unlike the compradors in treaty-port China, the Jiaying traders were truly entrepreneurs—they accumulated their own capital and were under contract to neither European firms nor the Qing circuit intendants (*daotai* 道臺) who oversaw the Sino-foreign settlements such as Shanghai. Enjoying greater economic and social freedom in the Western colonies of Southeast Asia than in China, the Jiaying merchants owned estates, mansions, and plantations and became respected leaders of local Chinese communities (Yen 1976, 1986; Godley 1981).

In the 1880s, while his *tongxiang* continued to found banks, factories, and shipping lines, Liang Jushi resided in Jiaying and Guangzhou to prepare for the civil service examinations. During this time, Liang Jushi's distant cousin Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), a Jiaying native who shared his interest in poetry, recommended him (unsuccessfully) for service in the Qing's Japan legation with him (Huang 2005, 704–705).<sup>3</sup> In 1889, Liang Jushi passed the

<sup>3</sup> Huang Zunxian was serving as a minister to Japan when he recommended Liang Jushi for an overseas appointment.

provincial examinations and became a *juven*. He did not immediately assume an official position, however. Famous for his lucid poetry and prose, he moved to Guangzhou and lectured at the Yangcheng 羊城 and Yingyuan 應元 academies, which supplemented the core classical or Confucian curriculum with purportedly more “concrete studies” (*shixue* 實學) such as mathematics and the sciences. He befriended Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912), an accomplished poet and fellow educator, and one of his daughters married Qiu’s son Qiu Niantai 丘念臺 (1894–1967), who would become a Nationalist bureaucrat after the Qing collapse. For Guangdong’s educators and school instructors, poetry was a common avocation and the main mode of expression for feelings and political aspirations. Through poetry, Liang Jushi was also acquainted with Wen Zhonghe 溫仲和 (1849–1904), who had studied under the respected Guangdong literatus Chen Li 陳澧 (1810–1882) and sought to synthesize evidential scholarship (or “scientific” research) with moral and political concerns (Elman 1984, 246–247; Miles 2006, 201–236). Liang Jushi also knew Huang Xiquan 黃錫銓 (1852–1925), who founded banking and industrial enterprises in Southeast Asia and sponsored education and infrastructure building in Jiaying.

Liang Jushi met the moderate Guangdong (specifically Jiaying) literati while preparing for the civil service examinations. By taking the examinations and competing for the ultimate prestige of attaining an official degree or title, Liang Jushi remained part of the traditional educational and political system. However, most of his cohort were entrepreneurs and civil servants with agendas quite different from his, at least during the 1870s and 1880s and prior to his production of literary letters and policy essays at the turn of the twentieth century. For a time, then, Liang Jushi viewed passing the examinations and subsequently obtaining an office as the main route to success. At the same time, however, his elite strategy, or method for creating an intellectual lineage that would begin with his grandfather’s success in the examinations, did not involve forming national networks. He stopped at the provincial examinations, appeared content with his *juven* status, and expressed little desire to take the highest metropolitan examinations and enter the circuit of the national elite. Thus, for him, regional networks mattered more than national ones. Over time, as we shall observe, he would not only identify business and other non-traditional pursuits as viable strategies for social advancement, but also consider them more important than the bureaucratic career that he enjoyed for developing a province or the nation. The existence of Liang Jushi’s coterie of entrepreneurs, literati, and officials reinforces Miles’s (2006, 13) point that the line between the gentry class and other social groups, such as merchants, was exceptionally porous in Guangdong.

Presumably, Liang Jushi and his friends spoke the Hakka vernacular, but it was not widely used in their letters, poetry, and prose. Most of Liang Jushi’s poems were written in the standard classical Chinese in which he and candidates for the civil service examinations were trained. During the 1890s, with Jiaying literatus Liang Guorui 梁國瑞 (dates unknown), Liang Jushi helped compile the *Guangxu Jiaying zhouzhi* 光緒嘉應州志 (The gazetteer of Jiaying Prefecture, Guangxu edition) by soliciting co-authors such as Wen Zhonghe, who became

its chief editor, and funds from Zhang Bishi and Zhang Rongxuan. The choice of Wen Zhonghe as editor-in-chief was deliberate. An evidential scholar, Wen Zhonghe helped to standardize the lexicon and phonetics of the Hakka language with references to classical texts and existing vernacular Hakka literature (Li Ling 2017). Nevertheless, the gazetteer emphasized the historical geography of Jiaying Prefecture rather than Hakka history, identity, language, and other “ethnic” characteristics. Even Wen Zhonghe’s extensive treatise on Hakka customs was intended to establish Hakka affinities with the rest of China (Leong 1997, 80). Seen in this light, the national past of how the Hakka people had originated in the Central Plains or Yellow River basin and migrated to southeast China mattered more than the assertion of a local, unique identity.

In the gazetteer, the Hakka literati maintained that they were part of the Han race vis-à-vis the Manchus. While claiming that they and the Hoklo people in Fujian Province were racially purer than the speakers of Cantonese because they originated within the center of the Han civilization in Henan Province, they struck a delicate balance between Hakka pride and the idea of a unified Han race against the Manchu state (Ching 2007). By defining the Hakka as Han, the gazetteer was a product with national implications. But the Manchus were not the only imagined adversary. The systemic racism of white-dominated colonial societies in Southeast Asia predisposed both Hakka and non-Hakka migrants to the nationalist and republican ideas of the anti-Manchu literati, who advocated that the sojourners’ aims for native-place development were intertwined with the fate of the Chinese nation: a better China would result in a better Jiaying and Guangdong. A nationalist consciousness of the foreign threat to China prompted the Chinese who directly experienced foreign power in either the Chinese treaty ports or the European colonies in Southeast Asia to reinterpret their cultural identity as part of a universal Han race and Chinese nationhood (Benton and Liu 2018, 178).

Having helped annotate Huang Zunxian’s magnum opus *Riben guozhi* 日本國志 (Treatises on Japan), Liang Jushi enjoyed considerable knowledge of Japan (Huang 2005, 406–407). Liang Jushi’s students included He Shoupeng 何壽朋 (1866–1921), the son of China’s first minister to Japan, He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838–1891). In 1903, most probably at the recommendation of He Shoupeng and Huang Zunxian, who had both served as Qing diplomats in Japan, Liang Jushi was appointed a counselor (*canzan* 參贊) and trade representative for the Qing legation in Japan. He subsequently served as minister to Japan (1905), minister to Germany (1906), and minister to Belgium (1909). The well-read and well-traveled Liang Jushi was well-versed in diplomacy, *qiaowu* 僑務 (matters relating to overseas Chinese), local defense, education, mining, and industry (Liang Yunduan 1959, 1–2). His thinking was motivated not only by his overseas experiences but also by his fear that Guangdong—or even the Chinese nation—would be colonized or partitioned by foreign powers.

### **Partitioning China—The Guangdong Experience**

At first glance, Liang Jushi does not appear to be unique among the many late-nineteenth-century Chinese literati who discussed the negative implications of

China's national weakness for its survival and territorial integrity. For concerned literati and political cartoonists of the late Qing era, the fear of China being carved up like a melon (*guafen* 瓜分) by foreign powers was a central motif. Graphic and literary depictions of the melon icon were widely circulated among millions of Chinese readers of magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets. The emergence of print culture—or print nationalism—in the coastal cities ensured that for many educated Chinese, national sovereignty (*zhuquan* 主權) and territorial integrity were the “highest political aim” during the late Qing period (Judge 1996; Mittler 2004; Matten 2016, 7). Liang Jushi's concerns were more provincial. While the picture he painted for Qing or post-Qing China was not dystopian, he imagined the full impact of foreign imperialism on Guangdong Province should the Qing state collapse, and he considered ways for China to survive the fall.

Liang Qichao (1999, 299–301) offered perhaps the most elaborate treatise on the possible partition of China. In an 1899 article entitled *Guafen weiyan* 瓜分危言 (A note of warning on the partition of China), he argued that in the event of a partition, the Chinese, rather than the foreign powers that carved up China, would be most responsible. His view was that the Chinese had destroyed the capacity that China once had to resist a foreign takeover (i.e., a functioning state, land, people, talent, warriors, economic sovereignty, and military power). He suggested three major reasons for China's imminent partition: 1) China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War; 2) China's surrender of sovereignty over its northeastern provinces to Russia, which exposed it to further foreign encroachment on its territories; and 3) the ruling elite's rejection of meaningful reforms to safeguard their own interests. A key figure in the failed Hundred Days' Reform that sought to institute a constitutional, parliamentary government in China, Liang Qichao blamed China's de facto ruler, Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835–1908), and, arguably her most important minister, Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), for the nation's troubles. Nationalism, or the Chinese consciousness that they were a nation, provided a cure. As a Guangdong literatus, he did not suggest a separate provincial identity until Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916), the first president of the Republic of China, tried to restore monarchical rule.<sup>4</sup>

The strongest advocate for Guangdong independence from Qing rule was Ou Jujia 歐榘甲 (1870–1912), another Guangdong literatus and disciple of Kang Youwei. In his magnum opus *Xin Guangdong* 新廣東 (New Guangdong), which first appeared as a series of articles in San Francisco in 1901 and was reprinted by Liang Qichao as a pamphlet in Yokohama in 1902, Ou Jujia (1960) explained why Guangdong was a model province—it was cosmopolitan, developed, and modern. He argued for its independence so that it could first inspire other provinces to secede from the Qing and then reunite with them in a federated China. For him, Guangdong's independence was feasible due to its peripheral location, maritime trade, and global network of capital and labor. Its revenues should be channeled

<sup>4</sup> Cixi ordered the arrest of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and other participants of the Hundred Days' Reform and placed the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908) under house arrest. Liang Qichao fled to Japan, where he published writings highly critical of Manchu rule.

to local development rather than to the imperial state that would squander them. In rousing rhetoric, he concluded that “Guangdong belonged to the Guangdong people” (*Guangdong zhe, Guangdongren zhi Guangdong ye* 廣東者，廣東人之廣東也) (1960, 91).

Like Ou Jujia, Liang Jushi agreed that Qing-dynasty Guangdong had lost more territory to foreign powers than any other province. The Qing government signed away its sovereignty over Guangzhouwan 廣州灣, Hong Kong, Macau, Xiangshan 香山, and Xin'an 新安, and Guangdong literati feared that Guangzhou and Hainan Island would be ceded as well in future conflicts or wars with Britain and France. Ou Jujia (1960, 50–61) believed that the partition of China was imminent, so the people of Guangdong should organize themselves and resist the foreign takeover of their homes, property, and territory. Perhaps fearing that he might be accused of treason—he was still serving the Qing government as a diplomat—and that Guangdong might be irrevocably separated from the Chinese nation, Liang Jushi did not explicitly advocate Guangdong independence. (As his involvement in compiling the Jiaying gazetteer suggests, he believed that his prefecture and the province at large were unquestionably part of China.) Rather, he supported the idea of having Guangdong prepare for that possibility (not inevitability); whether China was Qing or republican was a secondary consideration. Liang Jushi was serving as a diplomat in Japan (1903–1906) when the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and postwar negotiations were underway, and he paid close attention to how the events unfolded. Unlike Ou Jujia, he anticipated that a scramble for China would not take place. Britain and the United States, he wrote, preferred free trade and open competition to outright territorial annexation, and limited trading rights pegged to territorial jurisdiction, while a victorious Japan needed only a sphere of influence over Korea and northeastern China. Together, they would deter Russia from violating China's territorial integrity and making further claims to Chinese territories. By extension, Britain and France, whose spheres of influence overlapped in Guangdong, would respect Chinese sovereignty over the province (Liang Jushi 1959, 4–5; Moore 2015).

Liang Jushi understood the shift at the turn of the twentieth century of European “formal” empires to “informal” structures of rule in Africa and Asia, where colonizers deployed strategies ranging from trade and elite cooptation to a display of military force—or gunboat diplomacy—to gain hegemony over indigenous polities and populations. These empires, save perhaps Russia, were more maritime than terrestrial, and they were more interested in controlling sources of capital, labor, and raw materials than in annexing territories, where the costs of governance might negate the economic benefits of owning the colonies (Robinson and Gallagher 1961; Darwin 2009; Barton 2014; Cain and Hopkins 2016). For Liang Jushi, the partition of China would be more economic than territorial; for China to resist imperialism and survive (or revive) as a nation, economic rather than territorial sovereignty was key.

### **Education for Industry**

Neither a reformer nor a revolutionary, Liang Jushi was marginal to the mainstream

visions of rule and national unity. He believed that the state, while important, was less central to the fate of China than the people. For Liang Jushi (1959, 82–88), the state could assume different forms and names and was a mere component of the nation. In the face of imperialism, the nation rather than the state was at stake. Educating the people was more urgent than reforming or overthrowing the state.

Moderate Chinese literati, such as Liang Jushi, emphasized education and/or industry to save their nation, as Marianne Bastid's (1988) analysis of Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853–1926) in Nantong Prefecture, Jiangsu Province, has demonstrated. Those prioritizing education proposed that children were an economic resource that could strengthen China with the scientific or technical expertise acquired at modern academies. They believed in nurturing patriotic and morally upright leaders who could arrest China's decline. For them, the revolutionaries were too radical; change is a gradual process, and the people should be taught their civil liberties and responsibilities for change in such a way as to be non-violent and acceptable to most people. Those prioritizing industrial entrepreneurship argued that private enterprises could benefit from mass education, which required funds from successful entrepreneurs. They believed in training specialized talent who could industrialize China based on the European experience (Li Zhong 2011). Liang Jushi stressed industrial progress not only because practical enterprises could apply the knowledge acquired in vocational schools but also because they could help reform the people. He was partly responding to a widespread boycott of foreign (particularly American) goods in China in 1905, which stemmed from anger over the execution of anti-Chinese measures in the United States (Wong 2002). The boycott could not last, he suggested, because the Chinese lacked the industrial capacity to manufacture their own products and reduce their reliance on foreign goods, which were superior in quality. Contrary to what patriotic Chinese believed, consumers were more interested in the quality of their purchase, and merchants, motivated by material gains rather than patriotic slogans, were more interested in profiting from selling high-quality foreign goods. He argued that foreign powers extracted China's wealth and raw materials to fuel industries, so it was time for the Chinese to understand the source of Western power and acquire the skills for improving their own products (Liang Jushi 1959, 1–4). China supplied the raw materials for foreign manufacturers to make and sell products for handsome profits; the roles had to be reversed so that China could benefit (Liang Jushi 1959, 88–90).

Coal and iron were key resources for industrialization at the turn of the twentieth century. As a source of power and wealth, industrial mining underlay economic imperialism and ultimately led to the scramble among the Western powers for mining concessions in China (Shellen Wu 2015). Liang Jushi saw that education served a purpose insofar as it could relieve China of its reliance on not only imported goods, but also foreign advisers, engineers, and technical experts, who had the blueprints, layouts, and maps of Chinese factories and infrastructure and could betray China's interests in times of war or conflict. Practical enterprise, he declared, was "the source of education" (*shiye wei xingxue zhi quanyuan* 實業為興學之泉源). If manufacturing (*gongye* 工業) was developed, it could stimulate demand for agricultural products as well as the trade of domestically produced

commodities. Once China possessed the knowledge and technology to exploit its own resources, it could compete with foreign powers both locally and globally (Liang Jushi 1959, 69). He urged the Chinese to recover their “national rights” (*zhuguo zhi quanli* 主國之權利) over mining and railroads and reestablish control of their mineral resources (Liang Jushi 1959, 130).

Citing his native Guangdong as an example, Liang Jushi reiterated the imperative for China to enrich itself by managing its own resources. Guangdong, he wrote, had a large population and many mountains, but little arable land. Did this mean that Guangdong was predestined to be poor? No, he answered, because people and mountains were Guangdong’s assets. Education could turn people into craftsmen and technicians, and reclamation could extract resources from the mountains, which were rich in minerals. The people could then know Guangdong’s comparative advantages and cultivate suitable crops on the mountains for either consumption or export. Liang Jushi claimed that developing a functioning local economy would be more effective than teaching the people to respect authority and hierarchy in reducing social or political tensions—if the people are gainfully employed, he asked, why would they need to rebel or seek changes? Mountainous Guangdong, he suggested, was abundant in firewood and thus well-suited for the labor-intensive charcoal industry. Guangdong also had coal deposits, which could be mined by the Chinese. The Guangdong gentry, however, were divided into ideological camps for either reform or revolution and could not unite to protect their own resources. The link that Liang Jushi drew between mineral products and national wealth resonated with Guangdong reformer Zheng Guanying’s 鄭觀應 (1842–1922) argument that British power originated in its empire of coal and colonies (Liang Jushi 1959, 70–72).<sup>5</sup>

In his letters to Liang Guorui, Liang Jushi expressed the need for the Guangdong people to arm and defend themselves by forming militias. Support for the militias would be forthcoming, he observed, because many in the province were frustrated that the British and the French could take over Guangdong’s territories without a fight. The idea of raising militias and private armies in the counties and provinces was not new in the late Qing era; they were the main force that suppressed the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864). Nevertheless, this idea gained renewed significance during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), when foreign troops looted Beijing and forced the emperor and the empress dowager to flee to Xi’an in the west of China. The governors-general of China’s southern provinces refused to attack the invaders, as imperially decreed, and instead concluded a neutrality pact with the powers.<sup>6</sup>

For Liang Jushi, the event exposed the vulnerability of Guangdong, even though the foreign troops were concentrated in northern China. When the pact was concluded, Li Hongzhang was the governor-general of Guangdong. While he

<sup>5</sup> Unlike Zheng Guanying, who advocated “building the nation through trade” (*yi shang li guo* 以商立國), Liang Jushi prioritized industry over mercantile activity.

<sup>6</sup> For the implications of this incident, later called the “mutual protection pact of the southeastern provinces” (*dongnan hubao* 東南互保), for movements for local autonomy and self-expressions, see Lin (1980).

was a shrewd politician who avoided getting embroiled in the Qing court's conflict with the foreign powers, Liang Jushi wrote, he did not have the military strength to withstand a determined foreign invasion. Guangdong might fall into foreign hands like Taiwan, which Qiu Fengjia had tried unsuccessfully to defend against a Japanese takeover in 1895. Banditry was also rife, threatening the security of the province. Liang Jushi proposed setting up a rice trading company to supply the militias and relieve the poor to prevent them from turning to banditry. To that end, the local authorities should solicit donations from wealthy Guangdong merchants, who had profited handsomely from maritime trade. Liang Jushi might appear idealistic for thinking that with funds, militiamen, weapons, and grain, Guangdong could overcome the neglect of the Qing state and the ambitions of the foreign powers. But for him, these were merely a means to an end. They constituted a civil defense (*qiang min feng* 強民風) by helping to cultivate a sense of identity and purpose in the Guangdong people, who could then be galvanized into “supporting one another in difficult times” (*gongji shijian* 共濟時艱) (Liang Jushi 1959, 74–82).

To promote education in Jiaying Prefecture, Liang Jushi invited Japanese scholars to help Qiu Fengjia establish the School of Japanese (Dongwen xuetao 東文學堂), which taught subjects such as science and technology and Japanese—perceived as easier to master for accessing Western knowledge. Through education, Liang Jushi suggested, the people could remove from their minds the “boundaries” (*jie* 界) or binaries between 1) East and West, 2) Chaozhou (Jiaying's adjoining prefecture) and Jiaying, and 3) gentry and merchant (Liang Jushi, 1959, 82–83).<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the sentiments of many Chinese literati at the time, Liang Jushi believed that China could learn more easily from Japan on how to industrialize because they belonged to the “same continent and race” (*tongzhou tongzhong* 同州同種) (Reynolds 1993). His views echoed Pan-Asianism, or the ideology that Asian peoples should unite against Western imperialism, which was in vogue in the early twentieth century (Matten 2016, 19). He was convinced by Meiji Japan's successful modernization that “practical enterprise was the root of all things” (*shiye wei wanshi genben ye* 實業為萬事根本也). Like China, Japan had the tradition of “emphasizing agriculture and restricting commerce” (*zhongnong yishang* 重農抑商), and yet the Japanese were quick to realize that they could strengthen their nation by generating material wealth from modern industries. They set up vocational schools for both men and women. Within thirty years, Japan had trained a generation of skilled workers and developed a variety of industries, allowing it to catch up with the Western powers and defeat Russia in a war. Japan was thus a source of inspiration for Liang Jushi's advocacy of national salvation through industry (Liang Jushi 1959, 91–94).

<sup>7</sup> I understand *jie* as binaries rather than rivalries because, at least from Qiu Fengjia's perspective, although the new school was founded in Shantou by Chaoshan elites, it could also serve the Hakkas of Jiaying and the Hoklos of southern Fujian. In Shantou, Chaoshan merchants enjoyed cordial relations with their trading partners from Jiaying and southern Fujian, and so Qiu Fengjia had to cater to the educational needs of its diverse business community. That the Chaoshan region was a newly urbanized region developing from its treaty port of Shantou might explain why it was spared from the ethnic or lineage feuds (*xiedou* 械鬥) that had characterized the hinterland of Guangdong. See Wu Rongqing 吳榕青 (2015, 120–128).

### Lessons from the Colonies

In the face of Western imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese literati observed colonized nations, such as Poland, and formulated a broader worldview of anti-colonialism (Karl 2002). Liang Jushi was similarly inspired by Hungary, Italy, and the United States, which successfully resisted their imperialist oppressors (Liang Jushi 1959, 155). He thus looked to the Western colonies in Southeast Asia for more ideas on how China could be reformed or saved. After the 1870s, he continued to visit his friends in Southeast Asia, albeit sporadically, throughout his life. Through letters, his friends in Nanyang kept him abreast of conditions in Southeast Asia.

Liang Jushi argued that the support of Chinese entrepreneurs and merchants in Southeast Asia was key to educating and industrializing Guangdong's prefectures. "The seafaring traders of Chaozhou and Jiaying were all over the southern seas," he wrote, "and they were all eager to fund education and care about the overall situation [in their native places]" (*Chao Jia yangshang manbu nandao, qiwu fuyou rexin jiaoyu, juanhuai daju* 潮嘉洋商滿布南島，豈無復有熱心教育，眷懷大局) (Liang Jushi 1959, 86). He believed that the responsibility for educating the Guangdong people rested with the gentry and merchants rather than with the state. Citing the public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) universities in Europe, Japan, and the United States as examples, he discussed how gentry and merchants could cooperate to establish public universities by raising funds from the public, and private ones by pooling their own resources. He distinguished the locally funded public universities from the state colleges (*guanli xuetang* 官立學堂) supported by the government. He was convinced that the local academies that Qiu Fengjia and other literati founded were sustainable so long as donations from merchants, both local and overseas, were forthcoming.

The wealthiest and most successful of Guangdong's merchants hailed from Chaozhou and Jiaying prefectures; they should unite and contribute to the province regardless of administrative and cultural divisions (Miles 2006, 37).<sup>8</sup> Liang Jushi also hoped that the Chinese people would abandon the notion that society was divided into gentlemen, farmers, artisans, and merchants (*shi nong gong shang* 士農工商) (Zurndorfer 2017). This idea, or the "discourse on the four categories of people" (*simin lun* 四民論), had become obsolete and no longer reflected the diversity of professions and trade in the increasingly global economy. More importantly, it created a false impression of hierarchy and discouraged the participation of merchants in developing their ancestral villages (Liang Jushi 1959, 86). For Liang Jushi, provincialism, or the natural affection of people for their home or native communities, was "the firmest surety for good government," as first suggested by Gu Yanwu (Kuhn 2002, 77).

<sup>8</sup> As many scholars have suggested, although Jiaying was administratively part of Guangdong and was ruled by officials stationed in Guangzhou, it was more economically and geographically linked to northeastern Guangdong and southern Fujian, including the coastal port city of Chaozhou. Jiaying did not enjoy easy riverine access to Guangzhou and the Pearl River Delta region; it was easier to reach Jiaying from southern Fujian rather than sailing the rivers and scaling the mountains that separated it from central Guangdong.

Liang Jushi's call for greater overseas Chinese involvement in China's affairs was part of "China's discovery of the Nanyang Chinese" at the turn of the twentieth century. The Qing court, which also recognized the potential of its overseas subjects to reverse China's fortunes, established consulates in British Malaya, of which Singapore was administratively a part, in the late nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Huang Zunxian had served as the Qing consul in Singapore, and it was probably through him that Liang Jushi consolidated his friendship with the Jiaying business magnates of Southeast Asia, on whom the Qing government had bestowed honors and titles. Zhang Bishi, Pan Xiangchu, and Zhang Rongxuan were among the wealthiest and most prominent, with Zhang Bishi leading the pack. The Qing court recruited Zhang Bishi, who served variously as the consul in Penang and in Singapore and as the minister responsible for building or developing agriculture, business, mines, and railroads in southeast China. He advised Cixi to appoint merchants as industrial managers and emphasized the importance of overseas Chinese talent and wealth in industrializing China (Godley 1981, 60–93). In his letter to Zhang Bishi, Liang Jushi urged him to protect Guangdong's largest industries from foreign competition. By developing its own industries and thus generating its own revenues, Guangdong—alongside Fujian, which also had a large trading diaspora that could replace foreign companies in providing capital and expertise—could secure the three elements of China's modernization: talent (*cai* 才), wealth (*cai* 財), and rights (*quan* 權). For Liang Jushi (1959, 172–173), "rights" referred to the economic sovereignty that China must retain; the three elements were also "the root of all things" (*wanshi zhi genben* 萬事之根本).

In another letter to Zhang Bishi, Liang Jushi mentioned that the recommendations he had proposed to Zhang were forwarded to and approved by the Qing court for implementation. He had sent a few of his essays on how to build practical enterprise to Zhang Bishi for his reference. Like Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775–1855), the Jiaqing-reign (1796–1820) reformist scholar whom William T. Rowe (2018, 13) has studied, Liang Jushi was an "expert" who was "consulted in a broad but defined range of policy areas." The prominence of non-bureaucratic experts had continued into the late Qing period, when, despite exponential growth in the population, the court refused to expand the formal administration. On the local administrators' own payroll, informally appointed functionaries, such as county clerks, runners, and private secretaries (*muyou* 幕友), managed the ever-increasing administrative workload (Folsom 1968; Porter 1972; Cole 1986; Reed 2000). Although Liang Jushi was a bureaucrat, his post was minor compared to that of ministers and provincial governors—the policymakers of his day. For that reason, he could only advise friends who could directly petition the court if he wanted his opinions heard or acted on. Some of Zhang Bishi's suggestions to the Qing government, such as recruiting overseas Chinese merchants like himself for official appointment and ploughing the mountains for economic gains, apparently came from Liang Jushi (Godley 1981, 97).

<sup>9</sup> The Chinese consulates in Singapore and Penang were established in 1877 and 1893, respectively. See Yen (1985, 140–41, 171).

Nevertheless, Zhang Bishi deserved some credit. He owned, among other things, coffee, rubber, and tea plantations, and, as the wealthiest person in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, where trade and financial activities were less regulated by the state, he substantiated Liang Jushi's claim that the private ownership of natural resources and the commercial management of extraction and distribution might work for China. Liang Jushi was not concerned about the excessive power of the state over private enterprises and local interests in China. On the contrary, he feared that the state had become too weak to improve the economy and effect industrialization, and so the gentry and merchants must step in to complete the task. While Gu Yanwu argued that educated men, rather than state officials, were obligated to save their nation, Liang Jushi added overseas merchants into the equation (Liang Jushi 1959, 173).

Liang Jushi rejected the traditional idea that China stood at the apex of human civilization; rather, he subscribed to the idea of developmentalist normativity that American-European-Japanese-style development was the norm and the teleological goal for the Chinese to accomplish. According to Liang Jushi's logic, industrialization first emerged in Europe and was transplanted to the European colonies in Southeast Asia. Speaking in the 1900s when Cixi and the Qing government launched the New Policies to overhaul and modernize China's system of rule based on Japanese and Western models, Liang Jushi argued that it would be imprudent for China to imitate the ways of "civilized nations" (*wenming guo* 文明國) and forcefully implement their constitutions, laws, and practices, which might not suit China at its level of development. Instead, China should investigate the laws and performance of civilized colonies that hosted a substantial Chinese population, such as Hong Kong, Malaya, Taiwan, the Philippines, Canada, and Australia, where colonial officials modified metropolitan institutions to govern the Chinese according to local conditions. He singled out the British colonies for their highly developed legal system, which was especially suitable for China's management of its coal deposits—coal (and colonies) industrialized Britain and transformed it into a global empire (Pomeranz 2000). China should adopt their laws and system of titles and deeds to guarantee the mining and property rights of individuals, who would be incentivized to start their own practical enterprises and compete with foreign firms (Liang Jushi 1959, 140–141).

For Liang Jushi, the legions of Chinese entrepreneurs, with their vast fields and plantations of coffee, gambier, pepper, rice, tapioca, and tea, and Chinese laborers, who mined coal, gold, and tin for their Chinese employers, practically transformed Nanyang into an overseas Chinese colony (*[Nanyang] shi woguo haiwai yi da zhimindi ye* [南洋] 實我國海外一大殖民地也). The Chinese, he suggested, possessed the cultural attributes to succeed in commercial and industrial activities. Hardworking, thrifty, and trustworthy, the Chinese were aided by the fertility of Nanyang's soils and the abundance of Nanyang's natural resources. Most of the Nanyang Chinese were natives of Guangdong, he emphasized. For him, the Chinese in Southeast Asia were both a source of support for China's industrialization and a symptom of China's weakness. The Qing government, he wrote, should simultaneously improve Guangdong's economic conditions to stem

the outflow of capital and labor and attract wealthy Guangdong merchants to contribute to their province's development. By establishing more consulates, for example, the Qing government could "preserve the national entity, relieve poverty, recover the hearts of people who left, and develop domestic industries" (*chong guoti, su minkun, wan waixiang zhi renxin, xing neidi zhi shiye* 崇國體, 蘇民困, 挽外響之人心, 興內地之實業) (Liang Jushi 1959, 118–121). "Like a fish without water, a nation without wealth will perish" (*yu shi shui ze si, guo wu cai ze wang* 魚失水則死, 國無財則亡). China had the mines, railroads, ships, and factories to enrich itself, but much of its wealth flowed to foreign powers. Practical enterprise, developed by overseas Chinese merchants and laborers who possessed the practical experience of establishing colonies in Southeast Asia, could improve China's fortune. The state might fall, Liang Jushi elaborated, but with an educated and entrepreneurial people to preserve whatever remained, the nation would rise again (Liang Jushi 1959, 124–129).

In the final analysis, unlike the late Qing Chinese literati and political thinkers whom Karl (2002) has described as having formulated a "Third-World," anti-imperialistic nationalism based on the perceived experiences of colonized peoples outside China, Liang Jushi professed little altruism or solidarity with the oppressed "natives" of Western colonies in Southeast Asia. In fact, he barely mentioned them. Neither had he established a link between his own experiences in Japan—which had in hindsight mixed institutional building with settler colonialism to absorb Hokkaido, Ryukyu, and Taiwan into its expanding empire (Myers and Peattie 1984)—and his praise of overseas Chinese-led entrepreneurship in Nanyang. He shared the desire of many Chinese literati to protect China (and Guangdong especially) from imperialistic interventions, but at the same time, he endorsed the British colonial project in Southeast Asia and recognized the potential of overseas Chinese entrepreneurial enterprises to lead China to economic and political revitalization. Although he did not express the hope that the Qing government would undertake its own project of building an overseas empire similar to that of the British and the Japanese, he also did not form moralistic judgments against imperialism. Strictly speaking, then, he was not an anti-imperialist who embraced the utopian visions of cultural internationalism, global integration of all nations and peoples, and a world devoid of imperialistic exploitation and political boundaries (Iriye 1997). His vision remained provincial and national; he acknowledged the existence of an informal Nanyang Chinese empire and settler frontier that might help reinvigorate his home province and nation.

### Conclusion

Within months of his final official appointment as minister to Belgium, Liang Jushi fell sick and returned to Jiaying, where he died in May 1911. The Xinhai Revolution broke out in October 1911 and ultimately overthrew the Qing dynasty in February 1912.

As this article suggests, in Liang Jushi's final years, he entertained alternative pathways to personal success and even believed that some form of overseas Chinese economic imperialism might protect China from foreign aggression. For him, then,

saving the province and nation was no longer the responsibility of only the literati or *shi* 士; anyone who was at least remotely connected to Guangdong could help protect it from partition or subjugation. His observations ultimately turned him to the south (Nanyang or Southeast Asia), rather than to the west (Europe and North America) or to the east (Japan), for solutions to China's crises and possible disintegration.

In many ways, the fall of the Qing dynasty was economic rather than political. The rise of "railway nationalism" in the Qing's final years, which saw determined protests against the court's plans to nationalize railroads and transfer control to foreign banks at the expense of local business interests, catalyzed popular anger and culminated in the Xinhai Revolution. The Qing government collapsed because officials failed to reconcile state (*guan* 官) interests with public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) interests (Lee 1977; Zheng 2018). Liang Jushi anticipated the inability of the Qing state to do so and had placed his hopes on overseas Chinese industrial entrepreneurs to save China from foreign economic imperialism. That even moderate literati expected so little from the state might explain why it ended with a whimper.

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