

The Multiple Roles of Traditional Intellectuals in a Local Area: Liu Guyu and the Social Transformation of Modern Shaanxi

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ABSTRACT

Liu Guyu, known as the "Confucianism Master of Guanzhong," was a prominent educator and thinker in modern Shaanxi history, standing as a leader in terms of his ideas, discourse, and influence. During the social transformation of modern Shaanxi, Liu Guyu not only promoted the educational and cultural transformation of the region by establishing new-style schools and disseminating reformist ideas, but also actively participated in local affairs, contributing to the modernization of Shaanxi's economy and politics. Studying his thoughts and practices not only helps to understand Liu Guyu and the regional historical development of Shaanxi but also provides an important case for research on the social transformation of modern China.

Keywords: *Liu Guyu, Educational reform, Industrial development, Changing social customs and practices.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Role-playing theory posits that individuals adapt to social environments and interact with others by assuming different roles. It refers to an individual's behavior and attitude that align with the expectations and requirements of a role they assume, as dictated by societal norms. Liu Guyu (1843-1903), known as the "Confucianism Master of Guanzhong" in the late Qing Dynasty, embodied the responsibility and commitment of a local traditional intellectual. Against the historical backdrop of China's severe national crisis and social upheaval caused by the aggressive invasions of Western powers, he profoundly influenced Shaanxi's modernization process through educational reform, ideological dissemination, and social practice. "Liu Guangkui (also known as Guyu, noted by the editor) is a transitional figure, an enlightening thinker who bridges the old world and paves the way for a new era." "Every advancement in modern history has been directly

driven and led by intellectuals, and Liu Guangkui was one of them." [1]^{P269, P273} Liu Guyu himself remarked: "Although I am merely a humble lecturer with no official duties, the pressing affairs of the coastal regions are like sitting in a leaking boat. Though I am like a bitter gourd — unfit for anything — I am willing to share the burden with others." [2]^{P47} The article aims to explore the significant role of Liu Guyu in the social transformation of Shaanxi during modern times, analyzing how his educational philosophy and social practices contributed to the transition of Shaanxi from a traditional society to a modern one. Unveiling the relationship between Liu Guyu and the social transformation of modern Shaanxi not only helps in understanding the intellectual Liu Guyu but also aims to contribute to comprehending the regional historical development of Shaanxi, providing an important case study for exploring the social transformation of modern China.

Author's Introduction: Xiaoning Wang, Ph.D. in History, Associate Professor, and Master's Supervisor at the School of Historical Culture and Tourism, Xi'an University. Primary research focuses include the history of modern Chinese social education and modern Chinese figures.

2. THE PIONEER OF REFORMIST THOUGHT PROPAGANDA IN SHAANXI: REFORM FOR NATIONAL SALVATION AND RESISTANCE AGAINST FOREIGN AGGRESSION

The political transformation of modern China was one of the core aspects of social change from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period. As a key region in the northwest, Shaanxi's unique and complex political transformation deserves particular attention. Liu Guyu was a key disseminator of reformist ideas in Shaanxi, primarily promoting these ideas through lectures. Influenced by him, his disciples joined the reform movement, promoting the political enlightenment in Shaanxi.

2.1 Adapting to the Times and Circumstances

"The invasion by foreign powers served as the external catalyst for Liu Guyu's ideological shift toward modernization, while his traditional practical learning philosophy constituted the internal intellectual resource driving his modernization." [2]P6 Liu Guyu, born in 1843, was a traditional Confucian intellectual who was not conservative. In 1861, when he "saw the treaties with France and Britain posted on the wall of the county office in the county town, signed by the Emperor of Great Britain and the President of Great France alongside the Emperor of the Great Qing, he was deeply shocked. This realization led him to understand that the old notion of China as the Middle Kingdom and other nations as barbarians" could no longer apply to the world of today. He also came to see that Western nations were not to be trifled with—not merely because of their military might, but because their politics and scholarship must have methods that uphold their nations. Thus, he began to study Western politics and scholarship." [3]P10 In 1876, during his return from the imperial examination, Liu Guyu encountered his mentor Huang Pengnian in Baoding, who discussed the war situation. "Huang Gong instructed him", leading Liu Guyu to "henceforth pay greater attention to Western scholarship and politics" [3]P30, gradually fostering his thoughts on reform and modernization.

2.2 Establishing the Earliest Reform Organization in Shaanxi

After Liu Guyu failed to pass the imperial examination in 1875, he "vowed not to become an official, but rather to consider himself a scholar of the world and devote himself to education." [4]P147. In 1895, "Shi Wu Zhai" was founded in Jingyang County. "The room(Zhai) is called Shi Wu, for one to learn to manage one's body and mind, uphold the essence of saving the time, and pay attention to the world and the country, especially the urgent task of saving the time. Even if we consider it, the current problem is not the lack of literary skills, but the lack of political practice." [5]P750 Shi Wu Zhai selected 40 outstanding students to specialize in discussing domestic and international events, becoming the only political school in Shaanxi at that time to cultivate talents for reform and national salvation. [6]P13 According to the "Regulations of the Shi Wu Zhai", "Now that we understand the root causes of its shortcomings, we must strive to rectify them and establish the Shi Wu Zhai in the Wei Jing Academy, so that everyone can have the task of the time in their minds and seek remedies in the classics and history. Everyone comes out useful, and the power of China and the teachings of Confucius and Mencius may not necessarily dominate the continents." [7]P372-373 "Shi Wu Zhai" was later changed and expanded to Chongshi Academy, dedicated to cultivating modern talents who are both Chinese and Western. In 1897, "Li Xue Zhai" was founded. These two study institutes are considered to be the "earliest reform organizations in Shaanxi", [8]P365 "with the aim of imparting advanced Western natural science and preaching domestic and international current events. They trained a large number of talents who emphasized practical learning and engaged in activities to save the country and resist aggression in Shaanxi at that time, and spread practical Western scientific culture in the Shaanxi region." [9]P388

2.3 Teachers and Students Jointly Carrying out Reform Activities

During the 1898 Reform Movement, Liu Guyu actively promoted Western learning and reform ideas. His influence in the northwest was comparable to that of Kang Youwei, earning him the nickname "Southern Kang and Northern Liu". During the Wuxu Reform period, Liu Guyu founded the reform group "Fubin Society" and published Yan Fu's "Tianyan Lun" and Kang

Youwei and Liang Qichao's reform treatises. He also sent disciples to communicate with the reformists, promoting the spread of reformist ideas in the northwest region. After the failure of the Wuxu Reform, Liu Guyu was regarded by the court as a follower of Kang Youwei and was forced to resign from his positions as the head of the Weijing and Chongshi academies, and retire to Li Quan. Liu Guyu promoted education to revitalize the country and cultivated many new talents for Shaanxi, especially during his tenure as the head of the Weijing and Chongshi academies. He relied on the "Shi Wu Zhai" and "Li Xue Zhai" as the basic support and influenced students through teaching. During his long-term coaching experience, Liu Guyu cultivated a group of reformists who were ideologically liberated, daring to speak and act, such as Li Yuerui, Song Bolu, Yu Youren, Wu Mi, Zhang Jiluan, Guo Xiren, Yang Songxuan, Li Yizhi, and others. At that time, people praised him as "a generation of talented people in Guanzhong, ninth of ten have been educated by Liu Guyu." [6]^{P5} Among them, student Song Bolu immediately submitted a letter to Emperor Guangxu after the signing of the "Treaty of Shimonoseki", requesting the implementation of a new policy to save the national crisis. Student Li Yuerui not only undertook the fundraising work of the "Current Affairs" in Beijing, but also introduced Liang Qichao to Liu Guyu, promoting communication and exchange on the reform situation between the capital city and the northwest inland Shaanxi. Song Bolu and Li Yuerui also collaborated with officials in the capital to organize the Guanxi Society, which later developed into the Shaanxi Society, greatly promoting the development of the Shaanxi Reform Movement. Student Yu Youren once recalled, "Mr. Liu Guyu not only taught us how to read, but also how to be a good person and how to serve the country." [10]^{P112}

3. EXPLORERS OF SHAANXI'S INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: ESTABLISHING INDUSTRIES TO PROMOTE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Marxist materialist conception of history holds that the economy is the material basis for social existence and development, and any social transformation cannot be separated from economic support. The economic transformation of modern Shaanxi is an important part of China's

modernization process, and Liu Guyu, as a key figure in the history of modern Shaanxi, played an important role in the economic transformation. This traditional intellectual, who upholds the roots of local culture, "eagerly collects new knowledge, new skills, and new tools from Westerners, works tirelessly for agriculture and industry, and takes saving the people as his profession." [2]^{P7} Through advocating industrial salvation, attempting to establish civilian industries, and cultivating economic talents, he carried out highly pioneering practical explorations in the process of Shaanxi's economic modernization.

3.1 *Developing Shaanxi's Industry with Western Human Machines*

Faced with the aggression of Western powers, "foreign artillery is invincible, and China wants to become a ground camp without taking advantage of the narrow channels. What is the point? How can China not gather the financial resources of a country to conduct business when foreign countries threaten it? Foreign things are all skillful, and if China wants to avoid setting up job exams, can it be achieved... The current urgent task must start with reducing laxity, eliminating barriers, eliminating superficial knowledge, and practicing practical learning." [2]^{P18} In Liu Guyu's view, economic backwardness is one of the main problems faced by Shaanxi and even China. Only by developing agriculture, industry, and commerce can the country achieve prosperity and strength. "When Shaanxi was under the governance of Tongzhi, the annual sales and distribution value of silver was four million, but now it is less than one million yuan. Western cloth is popular, and silver is also leaked overseas. To prevent leakage, we must rely on machines." [11]^{P741} In 1890, Liu Guyu opened the "Fubin Machinery Hall" at the publication office of the Wujing Academy, "specializing in researching and promoting the sericulture industry and silk spinning and weaving technology, which played a positive role in promoting the development of Shaanxi's sericulture industry." [4]^{P140} In 1918, with the support of Zhao Weixi, a scholar in Shaanxi, Liu Guyu and his disciples proposed to raise funds to establish the "Shaanxi Baofu Machine Weaving Bureau". Therefore, Liu Guyu specially formulated the "Shaanxi Baofu Machine Weaving Bureau Brochure" to arouse sympathy and support from officials and merchants. Although the layout was not completed due to insufficient funds, the responsibility and commitment as an intellectual are evident. However,

in the process of establishing the Weaving Bureau, Liu Guyu's disciple Chen Tao bought a Japanese made gin from Hubei, with a gin efficiency of "about 200 pounds per person per day, equivalent to the power of seven people". Afterwards, Liu Guyu raised funds to purchase more than ten cotton ginning machines and opened a machine ginning factory at the west gate of Jingyang County, attracting cotton farmers from surrounding villages to process cotton here. From then on, "the trend of machine ginning began to flourish, and within a few years, it spread throughout the northern Wei River area". [4]^{P156}

3.2 *Borrowing White Wax Trees in an Attempt to Create a Source of Income for Mulberry Trees*

White wax tree is an economic crop that was widely planted in the Yazhou area of Sichuan during the late Qing Dynasty. White wax has medicinal value, and the wax juice secreted by the parasitic white wax insects on trees is an important raw material for making candles and wax paper. Upon learning this information, Liu Guyu came up with the idea of planting white wax trees. At that time, various opium plants were planted in the Guanzhong region, resulting in poor soil and people living in poverty. Liu Guyu hoped to replace opium with the economic crop of white wax tree, which can increase the income of the villagers and improve the rural economy and social atmosphere. In the summer of 1891, Wang Huaitang, a disciple of Liu Guyu, found a white wax tree on the north mountain of Jingyang and brought back a specimen. In the early winter of the same year, Liu Guyu led eight or nine disciples into the mountains to search for and inspect the White Wax Tree, and finally found it at the Dingtian Temple in Dongshan, Zhaoling Town, Liquan County. After a year-long observation experiment, Liu Guyu led his students to search for insect bubbles in the mountains and obtained more than 600. They were hung on more than 600 trees in front and behind Chaoyang Mountain in Liquan for small-scale artificial insect hanging and wax extraction experiments. This move received economic support from Lin Zihe, the then magistrate of Xianyang County, and Zeng Huaqing, the governor of Buzheng. [12]^{P102} Unfortunately, the white wax insect has high environmental requirements, and the natural conditions in the Guanzhong region are not entirely suitable for its growth, resulting in some insect species dying and little harvest. In addition, the establishment of the Wei Jing Academy, Shi Wu

Zhai, and Chong Shi Academy, among other reform initiatives, left no time for the trial planting of the white wax tree. The main person in charge, Wang Huaitang, unfortunately passed away again, and the planting of trees gradually declined. As a result, the experiment on the white wax insect ended in failure. Although Liu Guyu's attempt to plant the white wax tree did not meet expectations, this attempt and exploration demonstrated Liu Guyu's spirit of daring to explore and innovate.

3.3 *Giving Equal Importance to the Cultivation of Economic Talents and Educational Reform*

Compared with traditional economic development, the demand for technical and skilled talents has become more prominent in the development of industrialization since modern times. Liu Guyu not only sees this trend, but also strives to meet the needs of economic development and is committed to cultivating practical talents. Relying on his lectures at Chongshi Academy and Weijing Academy, Liu Guyu not only promoted Western practical learning ideas and theories, but also conducted practical explorations in Xianyang. Therefore, whether serving as a private tutor or teaching at Chongshi Academy, Weijing Academy, etc., Liu Guyu not only teaches Confucian classics, but also adds practical courses such as mathematics and Gezhi (natural sciences), emphasizing the application of knowledge. Not only that, during his tenure as the mountain chief, Chongshi Academy added courses such as political science and economics to teach students new knowledge and skills. Liu Guyu's educational reform has cultivated a group of new economic talents for Shaanxi. Many of his students later became the backbone of Shaanxi's modernization process. Famous figures such as Yu Youren and Zhang Jiluan have all received education from Liu Guyu. This educational philosophy provides talent support for Shaanxi's economic transformation.

4. SHAANXI SOCIAL CUSTOMS REFORMERS: OPPOSING OPIUM SMOKING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN'S SUFFICIENCY

Under the impact of the tide of the times, the social customs of modern Shaanxi have become intertwined with the old and the new, with both changes and conservatism coexisting, presenting a complex appearance. "The 'dirty old customs'

represent the ugly side of historical sedimentation. But they are also accepted by millions of people and manifested as an unconscious and stubborn force in the process of social change. Therefore, it is difficult to change politics, and even more difficult to change customs and habits. And the reform of politics is closely linked to the improvement of customs." [13]^{P300} Liu Guyu realized the harm of opium consumption to the physical, mental, and socio-economic well-being of the people, as well as the physical abuse and deprivation of rights of women caused by foot binding. Through the promotion of new ideas and concepts, he advocated for the change of customs, guided public opinion, and pushed for the transformation of social customs towards civilization and progress.

4.1 Opposing the Smoking of Opium

Since modern times, especially after the Opium War, opium cultivation in Shaanxi has continued to increase, with only "seven out of ten smokers in Sanyuan County and three out of ten smokers in rural areas". [14]^{P224} Liu Guyu believed that "since the lifting of the maritime ban, poppy plants have caused great harm to the grain and soil, and Shaanxi people have become addicted to foreign tobacco, wasting their production and employment, or greedy for the benefits of cultivation, resulting in a widespread spread of the virus". [15]^{P89} In view of this, when Liu Guyu served as the head of the Wei Jing Academy, he explicitly required that students should not "smoke foreign cigarettes" and that scholars should not "smoke opium". This was because "foreigners use opium to poison China, which is most detestable, and scholars who mistakenly become infected with it have led to the downfall of their ideals, academic neglect, and even hardship to end their lives, which is also full of sorrow. However, if this prohibition is not strict, it will be followed by others. At the beginning, it will mislead oneself, and then it will mislead others. Its poison is even more indescribable. Today, we will follow the old rules and stop taking medication for anyone who has an addiction. If the fruit can be saved, it can be reformed, and the name can be used to teach the perfect person. It should be rewarded as an initiative, and those who think they can learn to change should be persuaded. If smoking persists for more than three months, immediately (screen) [refuse] discharge from the hospital." Not only that, Liu Guyu stipulated in his self-organized Fu Bin Tong Ji Society that "men and women are not allowed to smoke opium". [11]^{P694-695,821}

4.2 Supporting Women to Release Foot Binding

Female foot binding is a very special and long-standing social custom in ancient China. Foot binding causes great harm to women's bodies, causing their foot bones to deform and muscles to atrophy, leading to difficulty walking and affecting their normal development and health. Many women are left with lifelong disabilities as a result. Starting from the late Qing Dynasty, some knowledgeable individuals began advocating for the abolition of foot binding. Liu Guyu organized the "Tianzhu Society" in 1894, mobilizing students and knowledgeable people to participate and promote the benefits of Tianzhu. His wife and daughter, daughter-in-law and student's wife or sisters no longer bind their feet. However, many people are concerned that women with large feet may face difficulties in getting married in the future. They not only resist the release of their feet, but also refuse to marry members of the "Tianzhu Society". However, Liu Guyu has not given up on this proposition. In 1897, Xing Ruisheng and Bai Houfu, students of the "Shi Wu Zhai", learned that Liang Qichao had published the "Preface to the Foot Binding Society" and they wanted to establish a foot binding society in Shaanxi. At the invitation of disciples Xing and Bai, Liu Guyu wrote a preface titled "After Persuading Not to Tie Feet" and bluntly stated, "People are unscrupulous, and there is no one willing to offer a female wife for good play... What kind of law does a woman's foot violate, yet she uses punishment as a ritual? As soon as she enters the boudoir, even though her family is innocent, they all become noble and beautiful. What is the sincerity of her?" And call Xing and Bai "outstanding people of Shaanxi" and give them support. [2] The local government did not stop it, and the trend of women in Shaanxi not binding their feet and letting their feet go is gradually spreading.

5. PARTICIPANTS IN SOCIAL AFFAIRS: DISASTER RELIEF AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION, AS WELL AS CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

As a local intellectual, Liu Guyu responded to social changes with a positive attitude, provided profound education and guidance to students, improved social customs with the responsibility of an intellectual, and also participated in social affairs

with practical actions to practice the Confucian philosophy of serving the world.

5.1 Handling Disaster Relief Affairs to Benefit the Villagers

In 1892, the Guanzhong region suffered from natural disasters, resulting in a poor autumn harvest and serious difficulties in people's lives. Xianyang County Magistrate Chen Danshu is bedridden due to illness and cannot attend to matters. Li Yongqing, the governor of Shaanxi, recommended Liu Guyu to the county magistrate Lin Zihé to preside over disaster relief affairs. Liu Guyu, who received the invitation, led the students and nephew to analyze and summarize the disaster relief practices over the years. He determined the work procedure of verifying the information of disaster victims first, and then determining the level of relief. After more than 20 days of investigation, Liu Guyu gained knowledge of the Xianyang disaster and reported it truthfully. With the support of Li Yongqing and Lin Zihé, the yamen approved relief food and alleviated the suffering of the people caused by the disaster. After the disaster relief, Liu Guyu skillfully solved the problem that the strong received more food and the weak had no congee to eat in the congee factory, which provided basic living security for the victims to fight the disaster and survive the winter. It is worth mentioning that during the disaster relief period, Liu Guyu abstained from eating alcohol and meat at the relief office. His students strictly followed the teacher's instructions, did not follow the secular world, and refused all meals. Teachers and students jointly won the trust of officials, gentry, and villagers. So much so that Li Yongqing "praised Xianyang for doing the best job in disaster relief, and ordered all the affected counties in Shaanxi to learn from the experience of Xianyang." [12]^{P89} Liu Guyu also established a charity warehouse to help disaster victims overcome difficulties. At that time, the Xianyang warehouse was poorly managed and had already existed in name only. Liu Guyu was hired by the Shaanxi Governor Tao Mozhi to organize the warehouse. After multiple persuasions, most of the lent wheat was retrieved, and the warehouse resumed operations. The headquarters of the social warehouse was located in Tiange Village. Every year, the warehouse lends wheat, which was collected in the same year with a profit of two liters per dou. In case of famine, interest was waived.

5.2 Establishing a Newspaper to Spread New Ideas

During the late Qing Dynasty, newspapers, as a new media, were a major means of disseminating ideas. Liu Guyu actively spread new ideas through methods such as founding newspapers and publishing books. He founded the "Shi Wu Zhai Sui Lu", which was one of the pioneers of modern newspapers in Shaanxi. The various social trends and Western practical learning introduced in the "Shi Wu Zhai Sui Lu" have broadened the horizons of Shaanxi people, promoted the development of industry, agriculture, and education in Shaanxi, and also awakened the crisis awareness of the local people. "Under the influence of Liu Guyu, the development of modern journalism in Shaanxi presented a unique Shaanxi style." [16]^{P210} As an integral part of the national news industry, along with the introduction of Western academic books during the same period, led to the rapid initiation of social change in Shaanxi during the late Qing Dynasty, accelerating the transformation of modern society in Shaanxi. Liu Guyu also spread new ideas to the public through setting up lectures and holding lectures. He combined Guan Xue (the Confucian school founded by Zhang Zai) with practical application, proposing the concept of "studying things to serve the country", emphasizing practice and national responsibility. This ideology provided spiritual impetus for the ideological liberation and modernization transformation in the northwest region during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China.

6. CONCLUSION

As a traditional intellectual of the late Qing Dynasty, Liu Guyu, with his pragmatic attitude and courageous spirit of exploration, carried out practical explorations in politics, economy, education, social governance, and other aspects through concrete actions. "He moved from old learning (traditional practical learning) to new learning, and himself became an enlightener of technology and politics, using his ideas to guide the northwest region towards a new era and step out of the long Middle Ages." [1]^{P278} Kang Youwei referred to Liu Guyu as a "senior scholar in the world and a leader". Liang Qichao praised Liu Guyu as the "master of Guanxue". [6]^{P6} Although his ideas and practices were limited by the historical conditions and self-awareness at that time, their historical significance and practical value are still worthy of further research and reflection by

future generations. In the process of social transformation in contemporary China, it is necessary to learn the essence of Liu Guyu's thought and practical experience, and promote the comprehensive progress and development of society with a more open, inclusive and innovative attitude.

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