

RENEWING THE PEOPLE

Anyone familiar with the Neo-Confucian curriculum ubiquitous in premodern East Asia would recognize that Liang's title draws upon the key expression "renewing the people" in Zhu Xi's formulation of the Three Main Guidelines (*san gangling*) in the *Great Learning*, first in order of his Four Books. Liang thereby establishes his own doctrine squarely in relation to the dominant philosophy of education in traditional China, but he invests it with a new meaning. For Zhu Xi, *xinmin* meant renewing the people through universal self-cultivation, as the basis of the whole social, political, and cultural order. Individual self-renewal would transform "the people" (*min*) and lift them up from an illiterate, undisciplined, inarticulate mass. Thus Zhu's key slogan: "Self-cultivation for the governance of men" (*xiuji zhiren*).

Here Liang's sense of "a people" is of a "nation" informed by the Western (and Japanese) sense of nationalism: "a" people as a nation (not just "the people" as commoners) would become an organic group with a consciousness of its own identity, actively participating in the determination of its national destiny in a world of many contending peoples. To this end he sees a need for corporate organization, an educational system and communication media, bridging the gap between educated elite and illiterate masses. This involves not just individual self-understanding and self-cultivation but one's own group learning from other peoples and their cultures.

Since the appearance of mankind on earth, thousands of countries have existed on the earth. Of these, however, only about a hundred still occupy a place on the map of the five continents. And among these hundred-odd countries there are only four or five great powers that are strong enough to dominate the world and to conquer nature. All countries have the same sun and moon, all have mountains and rivers, and all consist of people with feet and skulls; but some countries rise while others fall, and some become strong while others are weak. Why? Some attribute it to geographical advantages. But geographically, America today is the same as America in ancient times; why then do only the Anglo-Saxons enjoy the glory? Similarly, ancient Rome was the same as Rome today; why then have the Latin people declined in fame? Some attribute it to certain heroes. But Macedonia once had Alexander, and yet today it is no longer seen; Mongolia once had Chinggis Khan, and yet today it can hardly maintain its existence. Ah! I know the reason. A state is formed by the assembling of people. The relationship of a nation to its people resembles that of the body to its four limbs, five viscera, muscles, veins, and corpuscles. It has never happened that the four limbs could be cut off, the five viscera wasted away, the muscles and veins injured, the corpuscles dried up, and yet the body still live. Similarly, it has never happened that a people could be foolish, timid, disorganized, and confused and yet the nation still stand. Therefore, if we wish the body to live for a long time, we must understand the methods of hygiene. If we wish the nation to be secure, rich, and honored, we must discuss the way for "renewing the people." [13:36b]

The Meaning of "Renewing the People"

The term *renewing the people* does not mean that our people must give up entirely what is old in order to follow others. There are two meanings of *renewing*. One is to improve what is original in the people and so renew it; the other is to adopt what is originally lacking in the people and so make a new people. Without both of these, there will be no success. . . .

When a nation can stand up in the world its citizens must have a unique character. From morality and laws to customs, habits, literature, and the arts, these all possess a certain unique spirit. Then the ancestors pass them down and their descendants receive them. The group becomes unified and a nation

is formed. This is truly the wellspring of nationalism. Our people have been established as a nation on the Asian continent for several thousand years, and we must have some special characteristics that are grand, noble, and perfect, and distinctly different from those of other races. We should preserve these characteristics and not let them be lost. What is called preserving, however, is not simply to let them exist and grow by themselves and then blithely say, "I am preserving them, I am preserving them." It is like a tree: unless some new buds come out every year, its withering away may soon be expected. Or like a well: unless there is always some new spring bubbling, its exhaustion is not far away. [12:40a]

Is it enough merely to develop what we already have? No, it is not. The world of today is not the world of yesterday. In ancient times, we Chinese were people of villages instead of citizens. This is not because we were unable to form a citizenry but due to circumstances. Since China majestically used to be the predominant power in the East, surrounded as we were by small barbarian groups and lacking any contact with other large states, we Chinese generally considered our state to encompass the whole world. All the messages we received, all that influenced our minds, all the instructions of our sages, and all that our ancestors passed down qualified us to be individuals on our own, family members, members of localities and clans, and members of the world. But they did not qualify us to be citizens of a state. Although the qualifications of citizenship are not necessarily much superior to these other characteristics, in an age of struggle among nations for the survival of the fittest while the weak perish, if the qualities of citizens are wanting, then the nation cannot stand up independently between Heaven and earth.

If we wish to make our nation strong, we must investigate extensively the methods followed by other nations in becoming independent. We should select their superior points and appropriate them to make up for our own shortcomings. Now with regard to politics, academic learning, and technology, our critics know how to take the superior points of others to make up for our own weakness; but they do not know that the people's virtue, the people's wisdom, and the people's vitality are the great basis of politics, academic learning, and techniques. If they do not take the former but adopt the latter, neglect the roots but tend the branches, it will be no different from seeing the luxuriant growth of another tree and wishing to graft its branches onto our withered trunk, or seeing the bubbling flow of another well and wishing to draw its water to fill our dry well. Thus, how to adopt and make up for what we originally lacked so that our people may be renewed should be deeply and carefully considered. [12:40b]

All phenomena in the world are governed by no more than two principles: the conservative and the progressive. Those who are applying these two principles are inclined either to the one or to the other. Sometimes the two arise simultaneously and conflict with each other; sometimes the two exist simultaneously and compromise with each other. No one can exist if he is inclined

only to one. Where there is conflict, there must be compromise. Conflict is the forerunner of compromise.

Those who excel at making compromises become a great people, such as the Anglo-Saxons, who, in a manner of speaking, make their way with one foot on the ground and one foot going forward, or who hold fast to things with one hand and pick up things with another. Thus, what I mean by “renewing the people” does not refer to those who are infatuated with Western ways and, in order to keep company with others, throw away our morals, learning, and customs of several thousand years’ standing. Nor does it refer to those who stick to old paper and say that merely embracing the morals, learning, and customs of these thousands of years will be sufficient to enable us to stand upon the great earth. [12:41a]

On Public Morality

The main deficiency in our citizens is their lack of public morality. “Public morality” simply refers to that which allows people to form groups and nations. Humans are the species of animal who can best establish themselves through this morality (as the Western philosopher Aristotle noted). . . .

Among our people there is not one who looks on national affairs as if they were his own affairs. The significance of public morality has not dawned on us. Examining into it, however, we realize that the original basis for morality lies in its serving the interests of the group. As groups differ in their degree of barbarism or civilization, so do their appropriate morals vary. All of them, however, aim at consolidating, improving, and developing the group. . . . In ancient times some barbarians considered it moral to practice sharing of women or to treat slaves as if they were not human beings. And modern philosophers do not call it immoral because under the particular situation at the time that was the proper thing to do in the interests of the group. Thus morality is founded on the interests of the group. If it is against this principle, even the perfect good can become an accursed evil. Public morality is therefore the basis of all morals. What is beneficial to the group is good; what is detrimental to the interests of the group is bad. This principle applies to all places and to all ages.

As to the external features of morality, they vary according to the degree of progress in each group. As groups differ in barbarism or civilization, so do their public interests and their morals. Morality cannot remain absolutely unchanged. It is not something that could be put into a fixed formula by the ancients several thousand years ago, to be followed by all generations to come. Hence, we who live in the present group should observe the main trends of the world, study what will suit our nation, and create a new morality in order to solidify, benefit, and develop our group. We should not impose upon ourselves a limit and refrain from going into what our sages had not prescribed. Search

for public morality and there will appear a new morality, there will appear “a people renewed.” [12:47a–b]

On Progress

Generally, those who talk about a “renewal” may be divided into two groups. The lower group consists of those who pick up others’ trite expressions and assume a bold look in order to climb up the official hierarchy. Their Western learning is stale stuff, their diplomacy relies on bribes, and their travels are moving in the dark. These people, of course, are not worth mentioning. The higher group consists of those who are worried about the situation and try hard to develop the nation and to promote well-being. But when asked about their methods, they would begin with diplomacy, training of troops, purchase of arms, and manufacture of instruments; then they would proceed to commerce, mining, and railways; and finally they would come, as they did recently, to officers’ training, police, and education. Are these not the most important and necessary things for modern civilized nations? Yes. But can we attain the level of modern civilization and place our nation in an invincible position by adopting a little of this and that, or taking a small step now and then? I know we cannot. [13:32b]

Let me illustrate this by commerce. Economic competition is one of the big problems of the world today. It is the method whereby the powers attempt to conquer us. It is also the method whereby we should fight for our existence. The importance of improving our foreign trade has been recognized by all. But in order to promote foreign trade, it is necessary to protect the rights of our domestic trade and industry, and in order to protect these rights, it is necessary to issue a set of commercial laws. Commercial laws, however, cannot stand by themselves, and so it is necessary to complement them with other laws. A law that is not carried out is tantamount to no law; it is therefore necessary to define the powers of the judiciary. Bad legislation is worse than no legislation, and so it is necessary to decide where the legislative power should belong. If those who violate the law are not punished, laws will become void as soon as they are proclaimed; therefore, the duties of the judiciary must be defined. When all these are carried to the logical conclusion, it will be seen that foreign trade cannot be promoted without a constitution, a parliament, and a responsible government. Those who talk about foreign trade today blithely say, “I am promoting it, I am promoting it,” and nothing more. I do not know how they are going to promote it. The above is one illustration, but it is true with all other cases. Thus I know why the so-called new methods nowadays are ineffectual. Why? Because without destruction there can be no construction. . . . What, then, is the way to effect our salvation and to achieve progress? The answer is that we must shatter at a blow the despotic and confused governmental system

of some thousands of years; we must sweep away the corrupt and sycophantic learning of these thousands of years. [13:33a–b]

[*Xinmin shuo*, in *Yinbing shi wenji* 12:36b, 40a–b, 41a, 47a–b; 13:32b–33b — CT]