

A Historical Exploration of Liao Chengzhi's Youth View: Origination and Connotation

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Abstract

Mr. Liao Chengzhi held high expectations for youth, recognizing the historical importance of their role in national development. He believed that progressive young people should lead their era, remain steadfast in their ideals and convictions, and assume the responsibility of national revitalization. To achieve this goal, he encouraged youth to align their personal growth with the nation's progress, demonstrating loyalty and commitment to the country's future. Liao urged both Chinese and overseas Chinese youth to cultivate strong patriotism, promote unity among ethnic groups, and adopt a global and inclusive outlook. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of continuous learning and knowledge renewal to meet the demands of the times. Through these principles, Liao Chengzhi's perspective on youth holds substantial theoretical and practical significance.

Key words: Liao Chengzhi; Youth view; Historical exploration; Connotation and significance

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Liao Chengzhi, the son of Liao Zhongkai and He Xiangning—pioneers in China's democratic revolution—

played a pivotal role in youth work and political leadership after the founding of New China. He was appointed as the first chairman of the All-China Youth Federation and served as secretary of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the China New-Democratic Youth League, working closely under the guidance of Premier Zhou Enlai. In addition to his youth-focused roles, Liao held influential posts such as Vice Minister in the CPC's United Front Work Department and the International Relations Department. He also served as the founding president of Huaqiao University for 23 years, further underscoring his commitment to education and youth development. Throughout the periods of democratic revolution and socialist construction, Liao developed deep expertise in youth work, shaping a distinctive outlook that profoundly influenced Chinese youth. Although his work in overseas Chinese affairs and United Front efforts has been extensively analyzed in academic circles, there remains a notable gap in systematic research on his perspective regarding youth. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by tracing the historical context of Liao Chengzhi's views on youth, analyzing the deeper meaning behind his ideas, and examining their relevance and significance in contemporary society.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIAO CHENGZHI'S VIEW OF YOUTH

The "youth perspective" refers to a comprehensive understanding of young people, encompassing their characteristics, behaviors, thoughts, and values. It evaluates the role and status of youth in various spheres, such as society, culture, economy, and politics. This perspective not only focuses on individual development but also considers the contributions of youth to social change and progress. The formation of a youth perspective is shaped by numerous factors, including historical

context, cultural traditions, social environment, and the educational system. Liao Chengzhi's views on youth are deeply intertwined with his own life experiences. Born in 1908 in Okubo, Tokyo, Japan, he was the son of prominent democratic revolutionaries, Liao Zhongkai and He Xiangning. His name, “承志 Chengzhi,” reflected their hope that he would continue their revolutionary legacy. Growing up, Liao accompanied his parents in supporting Dr. Sun Yat-sen's cause, traveling across Japan, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and other regions. In 1928, Liao joined the Communist Party of China, embracing himself with Marxism and supporting the Communist Party during the modern Chinese democratic revolution. His ideological commitment deepened as he participated in key historical events, including the Agrarian Revolutionary War and the Long March with the Red Army. Liao also played a crucial role in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation. He witnessed the founding of New China and contributed to the establishment of the socialist system. Throughout his life journey, Liao Chengzhi's concept of youth evolved in phases, reflecting his personal growth, ideological development, and commitment to the revolutionary cause.

In the early stages of Liao Chengzhi's youth perspective, its enduring spiritual foundation was shaped by the relentless pursuit and struggles of modern Chinese revolutionaries, particularly Sun Yat-sen, and his parents Liao Zhongkai and He Xiangning. Liao and He first encountered Sun Yat-sen in 1903 while studying in Tokyo, Japan, where their son, Liao Chengzhi, was born in 1908. Inspired by Sun's ideals, the Liao family became deeply involved in the democratic revolution, forming a close bond with Sun Yat-sen's family as they worked together to save the nation from crisis. This strong familial connection led Liao Chengzhi to affectionately refer to Sun Yat-sen as “叔公 (granduncle)” and Soong Ching-ling as “叔婆 (grandaunt)” in everyday life. Liao Chengzhi later recalled, “I had many in-depth exchanges with Sun Yat-sen. My father was his closest comrade-in-arms.” He was profoundly influenced by Sun's revolutionary spirit, acknowledging that Sun “embodied an unwavering commitment to the revolutionary cause”. (Biography Editor's Office, Vol.1, 1990, p.2) This early exposure to revolutionary ideals would profoundly shape Liao Chengzhi's perspective on youth and their role in national development.

From an early age, Liao Chengzhi accompanied his parents in their support of Sun Yat-sen and dedicated himself to China's democratic revolution, both within the country and abroad. As Liao recalled, “I knew from a young age that my father was committed to the cause of patriotism.” (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.2) In 1905, Liao's parents became core members of the China Tongmeng Association. Reflecting on his father's

work, Liao stated, “After my father returned to China at the age of 16, he spent most of his time traveling, actively engaging in revolutionary activities, and rarely settled in one place for more than six years.” (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.1) As influential left-wing figures within the Kuomintang (KMT), Liao Zhongkai and He Xiangning devoted their lives to advancing the cause of China's democratic revolution.

The assassination of Liao Zhongkai on August 20, 1925, marked a turning point for Liao Chengzhi. It heightened his dissatisfaction with the KMT right-wing faction, whom he believed were undermining the United Front, sabotaging KMT cooperation, and promoting authoritarian politics. In response to this, Liao Chengzhi resolved to continue his father's legacy by dedicating himself to the democratic revolution for national independence and liberation. He affirmed, “I have always held my father in high esteem, and I vow to do my utmost to carry on his legacy.” (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.5)

Liao Chengzhi's educational experiences in both Japan and China played a key role in shaping his perspective on youth. Following Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary coup in Shanghai on April 12, 1927, Liao became deeply disillusioned with the KMT. This disappointment led him to announce his withdrawal from the Party. In June of the same year, he left Guangzhou for Japan to enroll at Waseda University to further his studies. During his time in Japan, Liao became involved with the “社会科学研究会 (Social Science Research Society)”, an organization run by the Tokyo Special Branch of the CPC, where he was introduced to radical revolutionary ideas through Zheng Hanxian. However, in 1928, Liao was expelled from Japan for advocating these ideas. His time abroad was marked not only by ideological shifts but also by personal struggles, including the pain of losing loved ones. These hardships made him keenly aware of the gap between his revolutionary ideals and the harsh realities of the world. Despite the challenges, Liao expressed that “this period of adversity only strengthened his resolve to seek the power of the Party and to push for revolutionary progress.” (Biography Editor's Office, Vol.2, 1990, p.434) In August 1928, he officially joined the CPC in Shanghai. Reflecting on his situation in a letter to Qu Qiubai, Liao stated, “You've suggested I make use of my late father's reputation, but that idea has pretty much fallen apart. First, the situation prevents me from acting openly; and second, I'm just tired of this empty title.” (Biography Editor's Office, Vol.2, 1990, p.701) This illustrates how Liao independently pursued and solidified his life ideals and aspirations after undergoing the profound transformation of his thoughts. Through repeated ideological reflection, he embraced Marxism and began advocating for Marxism and the ideas of the CPC.

During the democratic revolution and the Anti-Japanese

War, Liao Chengzhi's youth perspective developed through the challenges of revolutionary struggle. He remained committed to Marxism, exemplifying the resilient optimism of China's progressive youth and a strong sense of responsibility for the nation's future. In 1933, he left Shanghai for the Sichuan-Shaanxi Soviet Area and joined the Long March the following year. Before departing, he wrote to Liu Yazi, expressing his determination not to live for himself, but to shoulder the historical responsibility for people's happiness. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.703) This reflected his willingness to sacrifice for justice and the future of the country at a critical moment. When tensions between the KMT and the Communist Party resurfaced, Liao was captured by the KMT authorities in May 1942. In a letter to Zhou Enlai, he reaffirmed his loyalty to the Communist Party, declaring, "I hope you believe that I never betrayed our Party's glorious tradition, not even until my death. ... Long live the Communist Party of China!" (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.721) While imprisoned at the Taihe Majiazhou concentration camp in Jiangxi Province, he sent a letter to his mother He Xiangning, expressing his refusal to surrender: "If necessary, I would rather die than surrender. If my newborn son survives, please name him '继英', as I hope he will carry on our heroic cause." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.720) Liao's unwavering commitment to revolutionary ideals, his courage in the face of hardship, and his dedication to the cause left a profound impact, inspiring future generations to continue the struggle.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Liao Chengzhi's perspective on youth evolved and became more refined. During this time, Western academia was exploring the idea that both individuals and institutions were crucial political forces in Western societies. In China, as the central institutions were still being developed, the influence of leading figures was particularly significant. (Frankel, 1963) In 1953, Liao served as chairman of the All-China Youth Federation and the secretary of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the China New-Democratic Youth League. He placed great emphasis on the development of young people and held high hopes for them, urging Chinese youth to remain loyal to the motherland, actively contribute to socialist modernization, safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strive for national honor. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.163)

Liao Chengzhi's concept of youth is distinctive, especially in the context of overseas Chinese youth education, where his ideas played a pivotal role in shaping the field. Alongside his mother He Xiangning, he was instrumental in establishing key educational institutions, including the Beijing Secondary School for Returned Overseas Chinese Students (the predecessor of Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College), Huaqiao

University, and the re-established Jinan University. These institutions were designed to help overseas Chinese students quickly acquire proficiency in the Chinese language and understand national conditions, thereby preparing them to meet the academic and professional needs of the future. Liao served as the first president of Huaqiao University for 23 years. Meanwhile, overseas Chinese communities across China also established schools to implement educational initiatives and unite and educate overseas Chinese young people. These efforts contributed significantly to the talent development of a new generation for the socialist modernization of New China and acted as a vital bridge for communication between China and the wider world. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.227)

2. THE CONNOTATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF LIAO CHENGZHI'S VIEW OF YOUTH

Liao Chengzhi's view of youth has rich connotations. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

First of all, Liao Chengzhi emphasized that progressive youth must take the lead in the times, courageously engage with history, and steadfastly pursue their ideals and beliefs through action. In 1929, while participating in the seafarers' movement in Hamburg, Germany, he wrote to Qu Qiubai, critically reflecting on the cautious and passive stance of the Communist revolutionary youth in Europe. He urged them to adopt a more critical and proactive approach in response to the challenges of the time. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.694) After embracing Marxism as his guiding ideology, Liao dedicated himself to expanding its influence among progressive youth. While in Germany, he became deeply concerned with the ideological conditions of Chinese seafarers, and through discussions with those working on British ships, he learned of their profound dissatisfaction with their economic situation. From this, he concluded that China needed industrial development, which could only be achieved by establishing strong governance. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.701) Liao Chengzhi recognized the necessity of strengthening both domestic and international connections in the promotion of Marxist theory. He proposed establishing the Red-Light News Agency in Berlin to facilitate communication with China and to serve as a channel for relaying important messages. Liao was keenly aware of the urgent need for Chinese seafarers abroad to change their situation and believed that Marxist theory could provide the ideological foundation for their actions. He worked diligently to promote Marxist study and to organize revolutionary movements among seafarers. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.696) In 1929, Liao Chengzhi led a successful strike among Chinese seafarers in Hamburg, later serving as secretary

of the International Seafarers' Club in the city. Through this, he helped unite overseas Chinese youth, encouraging them to adopt Marxist ideals and actively participate in the broader revolutionary movement.

Second, Chinese youth should embody the spirit of collective responsibility for the nation's rise and fall, recognizing their historical duty to resist foreign aggression and contribute to China's revitalization. With the full-scale War of Resistance against Japan underway, Liao Chengzhi underscored that "every descendant of the Chinese nation, regardless of gender or age, bore the sacred mission of defending the motherland. Everything we do should focus on supporting the war effort." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.716.) In Shanghai, which was under enemy occupation, he expressed his determination to continue resisting Japan: "Although I worry about your safety, for the good of the country, I hope you remain strong and resolute in the struggle." The war was a national endeavor requiring the mobilization of all people, and he was firmly convinced that the survival of the Chinese nation depended on collective resolve: "They needed to endure hardship, overcome despair, and fight to the last drop of blood for the country's future." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.716) He was confident that if the progressive youth united in this cause, they would ultimately achieve victory in the war. "Let us face this challenge courageously, and celebrate our eventual victory together under the banner of national triumph." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.717) He also expressed concerns regarding the KMT's approach to the second phase of cooperation against Japan, while praising his mother, He Xiangning, for her leadership in advocating unity with the left wing of the KMT to strengthen the anti-Japanese resistance: "I have heard that you've been very busy. □ This is good because it is essential for the Chinese nation." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.707) He also urged his mother to unite more supporters of cooperation: "Given the current situation, we still need to work hard to recreate the circumstances of the 13th year of the Republic of China. I hope you can bring together more people who support cooperation and move forward together, as this is what our nation urgently needs." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.710) Moreover, Liao encouraged his mother and sister to help his wife Jing Puchun adopt progressive ideas during the war: "Please advise Jing to focus on studying politics and progressive thoughts..." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.710) These letters reflect his deep belief in the crucial role that both his family and the youth played in the nation's struggle for survival and the revitalization of China during this critical period.

Third, Chinese youth should align their aspirations with the overarching goals of national development, fostering a strong sense of loyalty and dedication to the

country's future. Liao Chengzhi once highlighted that true commitment requires following the example of Paul Korchagin—dedicating oneself fully to the Party's cause and the well-being of the people, without consideration for personal gain or loss, until the very end of one's life. This selflessness represents a fundamental virtue. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.171.) After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Liao placed high expectations on the youth, recognizing their role as both vanguards and exemplars. This was a continuation of the legacy of the May Fourth Movement and the contributions of youth during the War of Liberation, where they excelled in military, political, and cultural spheres. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.162) Liao hoped that Chinese youth would inherit and further the glorious traditions established during these periods, playing an active role in the construction of New China across various sectors. Moreover, he emphasized that youth should embody the spirit of hard work, simplicity, and perseverance, maintaining a positive and unwavering attitude as they contribute to the country's socialist modernization. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.162)

Fourth, young Chinese and returned overseas Chinese should cultivate a strong sense of patriotism while embracing a global vision that fosters unity and progress among all nations. From 1951 to 1958, Liao Chengzhi served as Vice Minister of the International Liaison Department of the CPC Central Committee, where he played a key role in strengthening people-to-people exchanges between China and Japan, helping to establish semi-official relations between the two countries. Liao strongly advocated for the equality of all people, emphasizing the importance of independence, freedom, and equality, while promoting mutual respect and cooperation among different ethnic groups worldwide. (Han, 1990, pp.421-422) He encouraged Chinese youth to broaden their perspectives, focusing not only on the future of their homeland but also actively participating in global revolutionary, liberation, peace, and democracy movements. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.163) His vision seamlessly combined patriotism with internationalism, aiming to ensure that all nations benefit from global development and work together toward the creation of a peaceful, prosperous, and interconnected world.

Fifth, Chinese youth should dedicate themselves to continuous learning in order to constantly update their knowledge and adapt to the demands of the times. They should place significant emphasis on ideological and political education. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Liao Chengzhi underscored that all patriotic youth must understand and embrace the principles of new democracy, which is central to the nation's development. In addition to ideological and

political education, young people should also focus on mastering professional skills and developing a spirit of craftsmanship in their respective fields. He further stressed that youth should take personal responsibility for the advancement of a prosperous and strong New China, diligently studying scientific, cultural, and technological knowledge to become leaders in various sectors. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.161) Moreover, Chinese youth should inherit the resilient work ethic from the democratic revolution and the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. In a letter to his daughter, Liao reminded her that "the Long March was achieved through enduring hardships and sacrifices" and educated her, "Having grown up in an era of prosperity, you must remain vigilant and never forget your roots. A life of ease can lead to complacency and harm others." (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.2, p.756)

Sixth, strengthening the patriotic education of overseas Chinese youth is a core component of United Front work. Since modern times, overseas Chinese have been deeply connected with the development of the Chinese nation. In various professional fields, they have participated in movements against dictatorship and support of democracy and peace, thereby contributing to the advancement of the modern democratic revolution, both directly and indirectly. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.159) After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese people became the masters of their own country, which greatly motivated patriotic overseas Chinese to return to China for study and contribute to the nation's development. (Peterson, 1987, p.62) Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, overseas Chinese educators have dedicated themselves to promoting the new culture, expanding revolutionary influence, and uniting young students in support of the motherland. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.228) In this context, it is crucial to strengthen unity among overseas Chinese youth and build the broadest possible united front. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.219)¹ Many overseas Chinese youth have witnessed China's social transformation and the shift from the old to the new. Many of them have been active participants in the socialist construction of New China, contributing to the country's economic and social development. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, pp.239-249.)

¹ The historical experience of the Chinese Revolution underscores the pivotal role of young intellectuals and students in the broader youth movement. However, their potential can only be fully realized through integration with workers and peasants. A strong youth united front must be rooted in the participation of young workers, peasants, and revolutionary intellectuals. At the same time, it is essential to extend solidarity to youth from diverse groups, including ethnic minorities, the national bourgeoisie, urban petty bourgeoisie, religious communities, and technical professionals. In particular, targeted efforts should be made to strengthen connections with youth in ethnic minority regions, fostering greater interaction and mutual understanding among young people across different communities.

As overseas Chinese students grow up in multicultural environments, it is particularly important to strengthen their critical thinking, help them make informed decisions, and cultivate a strong sense of patriotism. The goal of this education is to enhance their scientific and cultural literacy, nurture their patriotic values, and guide them to become steadfast supporters of New China, with the aspiration that future generations will remain committed to the realization of communist ideals. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.181, & Vol. 2, p.823)

In summary, Mr. Liao Chengzhi encouraged young people to cultivate patriotism, self-improvement, and a spirit of innovation while remaining attentive to the well-being of the Chinese people. He highlighted that the ideals, responsibility, and actions of youth are critical to the nation's future, emphasizing the importance of aligning personal development with national needs. Liao advocated for the pursuit of lofty ideals, practical skills, and a commitment to innovation, urging young people to actively contribute to national progress. He also placed great importance on moral character and cultural literacy, seeing these as essential for youth to effectively serve both the country and its people.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY VALUE OF LIAO CHENGZHI'S VIEW OF YOUTH

Liao Chengzhi's perspective on youth is both profound in content and far-reaching in impact. It enhances the understanding of youth work by building on and advancing the CPC's Marxist approach to youth development.

First of all, he underscores the necessity of the CPC's leadership over the youth movement. Throughout the stages of democratic revolution, socialist construction, and the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, Chinese youth have consistently served as a leading and driving force. Their trust in the CPC is steadfast, and they have continually followed its guidance, striving for the well-being of the Chinese people under Party leadership. Historical experience since the CPC's founding in 1921 shows that only by adhering to the CPC's leadership can the Chinese youth movement set goals aligned with the progress of the times and maintain a correct political direction. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.218)

Second, it is crucial to deepen young people's understanding of Marxist theory and enhance their professional skills. By cultivating their political awareness, moral integrity, and professional expertise, young people can make meaningful contributions to the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Additionally, they should maintain close ties with the masses and dedicate themselves to serving

the people. To meet the evolving needs of China, it is essential to nurture young talents aligned with these goals by guiding them to set personal objectives consistent with national progress, offering education tailored to their unique qualities, and fostering an environment conducive to their growth. This approach will effectively inspire their innovation and commitment. (Biography Editor's Office, 1990, Vol.1, p.217)

Third, it is essential to integrate a historical perspective with the current realities facing young people. Youth development requires active engagement in society, supported by clear goals, a conducive educational environment, and a strong sense of social responsibility. In today's context, understanding and nurturing young people should be approached with a historical, developmental, and relational perspective, linking their growth closely to societal needs. On the other hand, young individuals should cultivate a deep understanding of historical progress and align their values with the development of the country, the nation, and society. Through the sustained efforts of successive generations, young people will play a vital role in realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation in the new era.

Fourth, Chinese youth should align with global development trends by cultivating a global outlook and an inclusive mindset. They should actively engage in promoting global prosperity, development, and harmonious coexistence. This involves drawing on the achievements of other advanced cultures while sharing the essence of Chinese culture. Emphasis should be placed on effective communication strategies to transform potential cultural conflicts into mutual respect and tolerance, thereby contributing to China's peaceful rise and the building of "a global community with a shared future".

In the new era, Liao Chengzhi's outlook on youth offers both significant theoretical value and practical guidance. Building on Marx's recognition of youth as a pivotal force for social change, Liao's perspective emphasizes the crucial role of young people in advancing social progress. He views youth as the future and hope of the nation, underscoring their responsibility in driving the modernization of socialism and contributing to the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. He places strong importance on education and training, advocating for a comprehensive approach that shapes young people's worldviews and values while fostering their innovative spirit and practical skills. As both the driving force and primary beneficiaries of the Chinese Dream, youth hold a central place in history and society. It is essential to recognize their unique characteristics in the new era, affirm their value, and inspire them to uphold their mission in contributing to national rejuvenation. Liao's perspective thus provides essential theoretical and practical insights for contemporary youth studies and youth development.

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